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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 24, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

COVID-19 MANDATES

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and consistent with the current policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Concerning Air Services”, done at Leipzig on May 18.

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PETITIONS

AGE VERIFICATION SOFTWARE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a number of petitions this morning.

The first petition comes from Canadians across the country who are concerned about the ease of access to sexually explicit material for young persons.

The petitioners are concerned about the significant proportion of sexually explicit material available online. It is extremely degrading and not suitable for young people. They are very concerned that porn companies are not doing anything to ensure that young people are not getting access to this material. They also note that Parliament recognized the harm of the increase to the accessibility to sexually explicit material online for young persons in a report back in 2017. They say that online age verification technology is increasingly getting sophisticated and less intrusive and that it can be done without invading privacy.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada and this Parliament to adopt Bill S-210 with due haste.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the continued COVID-19 restrictions and mandates that continue to be in place. They note that they are, at this point, suspended.

The petitioners call for an abolition of the vaccine passport requirements for all Canadian citizens and permanent residents taking domestic flights. They note the comments from the WestJet chief medical officer, who noted that, particularly on aircraft, there had not been any known cases of COVID-19 transmission. They have also noted that Canada was one of the last countries to suspend these restrictions. They call for the full removal of these restrictions and mandates.

SOUND MODERATORS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition is from Canadians across the country who are concerned about the damaging noise levels that come from the repeated use of firearms.

The petitioners note that Canada is the only G6 nation in the world that bans health and safety products, particularly sound moderators, which is the only health and safety mechanism that is illegal in Canada. They confirm that the *Canada v Bedford* said that Canadians should be able to take reasonable steps to improve personal safety in hazardous situations. They note that in most of Europe it is mandatory to use sound moderators on firearms; that sound moderators facilitate less friction between animal husbandry and sports shooters; that it is better for hunting companions, pets and those kinds of things; and that hearing damage significantly reduces quality of life and public health, which costs taxpayers millions of dollars annually.

The petitioners therefore call on the Canadian government to take a stand and remove the prohibition on sound moderators from the Criminal Code and allow the legal acquisition and possession of the use of sound moderators on firearms by all legally licenced firearms owners in Canada. They call on the provinces and territories to amend their legislation around this as well.

Government Orders

● (1005)

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the final petition I will present today is from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about coercion, intimidation and other forms of pressure used to force physicians, health care workers and health care institutions to become parties to assisted suicide or euthanasia either directly or through effective referral. This is a violation of people's fundamental rights of freedom of conscience.

The petitioners note that the Canadian Medical Association confirms there are over 24,000 physicians across the country who are willing to perform MAID and therefore there would be no need to force physicians who are not interested in performing MAID to comply with it. They also note that section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects freedom of conscience.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada and this Parliament to enshrine in the Criminal Code protection of conscience rights for physicians and health care workers to ensure they are not coerced or intimidated into performing euthanasia or assisted suicide.

● (1010)

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I am tabling a petition on health care.

Many of the constituents of Winnipeg North want the House of Commons, in particular the Prime Minister, in fact, all members from different political parties, to recognize the importance of Canada's Health Act. They emphasize the five principles: public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability and accessibility.

The petitioners emphasize that there is a role for the national government to play on issues such as mental health, cancer care, long-term care and how important it is for national health standards.

It is with pleasure that I table this petition.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of 74 British Columbians, who add their names to the thousands upon thousands of Canadians who have already petitioned the House of Commons and the government. They are asking for a green new deal for Canada.

The petitioners say that Canadians are living through unprecedented catastrophic climate events. We certainly have seen this in British Columbia with the heat dome and the atmospheric rivers. They also say that our society is suffering from worsening socio-economic inequalities. They are talking about indigenous peoples' frontline and vulnerable communities that are being disproportionately affected, resulting in increased risks to their health and well-being.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Motion No. 1, a made-in-Canada green new deal, a motion I brought forward in Parliament on behalf of the NDP. It is an initiative that calls on Canada to take bold action to confront the challenge that is represented by climate change by ending fossil fuel subsidies, closing off short tax havens, supporting workers impacted by the transition and creating well-paying unionized jobs in the shift to a clean and renewable energy economy.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from November 23 consideration of the motion that Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other Acts (COVID-19 response and other measures), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is such a pleasure to speak to legislation. Once again, the government is providing very progressive legislation that will make a real difference in our judicial system.

I very much would like to emphasize just how important it is to take a look at Canada as a society and how we are envied around the world. One of the reasons for that is because we understand the importance of judicial independence. There is the political realm and the judicial realm, the rule of law. Canada is recognized for this around the world and is held in fairly high esteem. In fact, many jurisdictions around the world look to the Canada system. Whether it is our Constitution, Charter of Rights or how our judicial system is so successful in providing the public confidence, they are really second to no other.

I would like to refer to my father. Many years ago, after he was unable to go to work due to personal disabilities, he took a great deal of time, and made it a hobby, to go to the courts to listen to the proceedings. He virtually was there on a full-time basis. As a result, his confidence in the system grew to a point where he had a wonderful relationship with a number of judges and attorneys both on the Crown side and the defence side. He had a very good understanding.

I use that as an example because I believe that if people had a good assessment of what takes place in our judicial system, it would add to public confidence.

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Personally, as a chair of a youth justice committee for many years, I had the privilege of working on the balance, the community needs and desires and the need for some form of consequence or disposition that was fair to all sides, including victims and the perpetrators. Through that experience, I gained a deeper respect for our judicial system and the importance of it being independent of politics.

Let us fast-forward to the pandemic. We have heard the Prime Minister, many of my Liberal colleagues and members on all sides of the House recognize that things occurred during the pandemic from which we all can learn. A good example of that is Zoom. Three-and-a-half years ago, I did not even know Zoom existed, and now it is a major part of my life. We can look at the House of Commons' hybrid system. Now members of Parliament from British Columbia, as an example, who are serving their constituents in their ridings, can speak on the floor of the House of Commons.

Why is that relevant to this legislation? Because this legislation, in essence, is about that. We are looking for ways to improve our judicial system. During the pandemic, certain aspects of our judicial system incorporated a more virtual contribution to the delivery of justice. That is the essence of what this bill would do.

It is important to recognize that accessibility, efficiency and effectiveness are three fundamental pillars of justice. We need to strive for that. We in government have been doing that from day one, with a number of substantial pieces of legislation to make our judicial system that much better and stronger. We have seen over the last couple of years, that the courts desire this. When I say "courts", I mean it in the broader sense of the word, all the different stakeholders at play, whether it is victims, perpetrators, lawyers, court clerks, sheriffs, everyone involved. I suspect we would find universal acceptance on the need for modernization. That is the essence of Bill S-4.

Bill S-4 proposes a range of reforms that would make court proceedings more flexible, while protecting the rights of all participants. It would enable presentations of different forms to be done by video conference. As we look at the whole issue of modernization and how things have changed through time, we all have an obligation to look at ways to support our courts and our judicial system, and it is not unique.

In fact, members will recall Rona Ambrose's private member's bill that had recommendations that we, as legislators, felt would be in the best interest of our judicial system to ensure there was an educational component on sexual violence. After the former leader of the Conservative Party brought forward the legislation, we could not get it passed through the private members' system. The government very quickly then took the initiative and made it happen, and there was unanimous support for it.

Yesterday, during the debate on Bill S-4, we started to see the same thing. Members of the Conservative Party, the Bloc Party, the NDP and Green Party indicated support for it. It seems that once again we have achieved unanimous support for progressive legislation that will help us modernize our court system.

This has been around for a while and there is no reason why we could not see it go to committee and listen to the stakeholders. I

know a great number of stakeholders have been waiting to see this legislation advance, and hopefully we will do that.

• (1015)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we agree. We do not know why the government has taken so long to retable this bill, which was first introduced in the last Parliament, especially given the circumstances. We know there is a huge backlog in Canada's justice system. It is not a new issue.

As a means of addressing court backlogs, why did the government oppose recommendation 1 of the 2017 report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights "Access to Justice Part 2: Legal Aid", which called on the federal government to remove the legal aid funds currently included in the Canada social transfer in favour of a specific earmarked civil legal aid fund for provinces, administered under the Department of Justice Canada legal aid program?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member asked two questions and I will provide some detail on both.

Regarding legal aid and the financing of legal aid, we need to recognize that there are jurisdictional responsibilities at both the federal and the provincial level. In terms of legal aid, there is an obligation for the federal government to work with the different provincial jurisdictions. I do not know if that answer will satisfy the member, but that is the reality. There is a sense of obligation to work with the different provincial entities, and I just do not know the more detailed background work that has been done on that.

Regarding Bill S-4 and its predecessor as a piece of government legislation, the original legislation came out through the House of Commons. One of the ways we can ensure we get it passed is to have support, and the Senate has been fantastic in ensuring that we can have the legislation before us today. Hopefully we will be able to get it through even more quickly.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite cannot say that I never agree with him. In general, I agree with him on Bill S-4.

That being said, there are problems that this bill does not resolve. The bill does, however, make it possible to revert back to the standard, usual, traditional way of doing things in the event of connection issues.

The fact remains that there are many judicial vacancies and that the Parole Board of Canada has internal issues.

When will these problems be fixed? When will the government ensure that the judges who are appointed are not appointed for partisan reasons?

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: First of all, Madam Speaker, I can assure the member that judges today who are appointed are not appointed on a political basis. There is a process that has been in place, and the government is very careful in terms of the manner in which judicial judges are appointed.

I believe one of the changes was put in place back in 2015, when the Prime Minister was elected and instructed with the Minister of Justice at the time. I see that as a very strong positive. In fact, with respect to the judicial appointments and judges who have been appointed to the different chambers, there is a better cross-section and reflection of what our society looks like.

I would suggest that the government of the day has done a first-class job in terms of judicial appointments. I am anticipating that we will continue to see that, as we are very aware of the importance of ensuring that, as much as possible, we are getting justice as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government is the one that has been improving Internet coverage since 2015. That has never been seen before in Canada.

Today, we can modernize the systems and make them accessible. Today, we can move forward with technologies that we could not even talk about in 2015.

What is more, we made a commitment to connect nearly 98% of the population by 2026. That is like tomorrow morning in politics.

I would like my colleague to tell us how important it is to pass Bill S-4.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my colleague and friend has been a very strong advocate for rural connections with the Internet. In talking to him prior to standing and addressing the legislation, he talked about how the Province of Quebec was able to utilize what we are suggesting. We know, in many ways, Quebec leads the country on many different progressive issues, and it is one of the reasons, for us as a national caucus, to always keep a close eye on what our Quebec members of Parliament are saying.

We recognize that through time things change. Technology and the Internet have had such a profound impact on society. They are second probably to very few other things, if any, in the way that society has evolved. We have seen the Internet interplay with everyone in Canada. Today it is an essential service, and it would be wrong for us not to look at ways we can use that technology to modernize, whether it is our judicial system, the House of Commons or anything else.

• (1025)

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech, and he mentioned the need for urgency in passing this particular piece of legislation. There was a previous version of this legislation, Bill C-23, that was introduced back in 2021. As the member knows about the procedures and how this

place works, when there is an election it wipes clean the slate of all the bills that are currently on the Order Paper.

The member is concerned about urgency. Did the member express his concern to the Prime Minister before he called the snap election in 2021 and wiped this bill completely off the radar?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there are a number of factors that have to be calculated into a call of a federal election, such as the opposition's behaviour in playing obstruction and not allowing anything to pass. Canadians should not be fooled to believe that the Conservative Party was even going to be prepared to allow that legislation to pass.

We will have to wait to see what takes place with Bill S-4. I am suggesting that we once again have unanimous support. It would appear that every member of the House of Commons is going to be supporting the legislation. Hopefully, the Conservatives will allow this legislation to pass without time allocation, but only time will prevail. We will find out.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, though the intervention by the parliamentary secretary was very interesting, that member does take occasions to speak to a lot of legislation at length. While I hear that he is concerned that members of the opposition want to speak to the legislation, that member just offered a 20-minute stream-of-consciousness experiment for Canadians to follow.

If he is so eager to have this legislation pass, why would he not have shortened his remarks for the benefit of all concerned?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, in order to be able to facilitate additional debate time so that the member opposite would be able to speak, the government has offered the opposition the opportunity to sit until midnight. If the opposition does feel that it would like to have more debate on this legislation, I would invite its members to approach the government House leader and say that they have *x* number of members who would like to speak, and maybe we could sit until midnight.

Many Canadians from coast to coast to coast work past 6:30. I would suggest that the Conservative Party acknowledge that fact and be prepared to debate late into the evening. If there are more people who would like to be able to speak to legislation, which is virtually unanimous, we will find that I can be exceptionally accommodating to ensure some form of discussion. Whether it is here at second reading, at the committee stage or ultimately at third reading, there are plenty of opportunities for members to be able to speak. There is a good number of stakeholders out there who are anxious to see the legislation ultimately pass.

If everyone is supporting it, then why not allow the legislation to go forward? At the very least, we can have Canadians provide their direct input during the committee stage.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to be able to rise today to join in the debate on Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts.

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As has been mentioned during the course of this debate, we have heard the government speak about the urgency of the passage of this legislation, but some of the measures in here, certainly, were required long before the COVID pandemic. There are others that raise some concerns about justice, particularly when it comes to respect for victims of crime. I will include victims and their families in that.

In Bill S-4 the consent of the offender is mentioned 10 times. Let us contrast that. How many times does Bill S-4 mention the consent of a victim, the consent of a victim's family in proceeding by way other than an in-person meeting? The answer, not surprisingly, is zero. Not once does this bill mention the consent of the victim or their family, all the while speaking about the consent of an offender.

I would love to say I am surprised, or that maybe there is something we are missing here, but the fact is that this is in line with the overall agenda of the government when it comes to our criminal justice system.

We only have to look at the bills that have come before the House. We only have to look at the selective response to certain Supreme Court of Canada decisions to realize that this is a government that does not put the rights of victims first.

To use an example, we saw yesterday, in the public safety committee, a grand expansion of the law when it comes to going after law-abiding citizens, duck hunters, hunters, our constituents, all of our collective constituents who are law-abiding firearms owners. They do this in the name of combatting crime. We are targeting non-criminals in an effort to combat crime.

If we speak to the experts, if we speak to police, if we speak to big-city mayors, they will tell us that the source of illegal firearms, the source of firearms being used by gangs, is our border, our porous border, and the illegal importation of firearms.

Knowing that the illegal trafficking and importation of firearms is the cause of the firearms being on the street, that law-abiding citizens are not the cause, it would lead us to a logical conclusion that we should target that illegal importation, in direct contrast to what the government is doing in Bill C-22, which is targeting duck hunters, farmers and sports shooters, people who are not criminals and people who are not a threat.

What are we doing about the real threat? What are we doing about the importers, the traffickers?

There is another bill that was just passed through the Senate, Bill C-5. What that bill does is say that if someone has trafficked in a firearm, has used a firearm in the commission of an offence or in extortion, or if someone has fired a firearm with intent, they no longer, as the case has been for years, have to serve time in jail. They can go back onto the street. They can go back into the community where they committed the offence.

Where did this law come from that said a person has to serve time in jail if they commit these offences? Did it come from the previous Conservative government?

The government would love us to believe that this tough-on-crime measure came from the previous Conservative government, but if we bother to look at the facts and the evidence, the evidence

says all of those mandatory penalties were in place since the 1970s, since the time of the Prime Minister's father being prime minister. Some of them were introduced when the Prime Minister's father was both prime minister and justice minister.

The Liberals love to say these are unconstitutional mandatory penalties.

• (1030)

What does the Supreme Court have to say about this? There was a recent case from just a couple of weeks ago involving a mandatory penalty for drug trafficking, and the Supreme Court considered that and considered the seriousness in our communities of the crisis, whether it is fentanyl, cocaine or heroin.

The government of the day was a Conservative government, and I am proud to say, in an effort to combat those crimes, we said that if someone were going to traffic, produce or import these serious drugs, they were going to have to serve actual time in jail. The current government has said, in Bill C-5, that it does not believe that, and it believes those people should be able to be back on the street.

What did the Supreme Court of Canada say? The Supreme Court of Canada upheld those provisions. It said they are constitutional and that the seriousness of these offences, when weighed with Parliament's legislative prerogative, means that Parliament was entitled, and that it was indeed constitutional, to have brought in that measure that says if someone imports, traffics or produces cocaine, fentanyl or heroin, they are going to go to jail and be taken off the street.

Does being soft on crime work? We have heard it called "hug a thug", "soft on crime" or "a revolving door justice system", in which, if someone commits a crime, there are no consequences and they go back on the street. Does that approach work? Why do we not look at the evidence? The evidence was just released this week, not by the Conservative Party but by Statistics Canada. The evidence says that the homicide rate in Canada has increased for three consecutive years.

The homicide rate in Canada is at the highest rate it has been since 2005. Why is 2005 significant? That was the last year of the previous Liberal government. The Conservative government came to power in 2006, and we had an agenda to straighten out our justice system, to respect victims, to put victims at the forefront and to say to serious offenders, "recidivist".

What is a recidivist? A recidivist is someone who commits a crime; gets caught; gets tried in a court of law; gets sentenced, whether to jail time or house arrest; goes back on the street and does the same thing again and again. That is recidivism. The courts have said, and we have said, that we have to focus on criminals, and we did that.

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Over the last seven years we have seen a Liberal government. The percentage I am about to say should shock all of us in the room and should shock all Canadians. The violent crime rate in Canada, since 2015, has increased 32%. That is not acceptable. That is in our rural communities—

Hon. Rick Perkins: What happened in 2015?

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, I should remind members that 2015 is the year the Liberal government was elected.

Being soft on crime does not work. In our rural communities, in our suburbs, in our big cities and across this country, we are seeing people who are victimizing. Whether it is property crime, serious violent crime or sexual offences, we are seeing people who should be approached in a tougher manner being let back out onto the street to commit the same offences, and it has resulted in a 32% increase in violent crime.

This is not me saying that; this is Statistics Canada. It produces statistics on these things. That is evidence, and we should take evidence into account when we look at what works and what does not. I feel, and I know my Conservative colleagues feel, that one of our top priorities as members of Parliament should be the protection of innocent Canadians, the protection of families in our communities and the protection of our communities.

Does that mean we do not think offenders should get the help they need and those struggling with addiction should get the help they need? Of course they should, but we are not doing our communities any favours, and we are not doing offenders any favours, by having zero consequence for serious offences.

● (1035)

Bill S-4 mentions the consent of the offender 10 times. In my own riding, we have a serious story from years ago. A young woman, who was 16 years old, was working in her father's grocery store and was murdered by an offender. The offender received a life sentence.

The victim's father became an advocate for victims of crime. I met with him many times. He was a councillor in one of our communities. He spoke passionately about ways governments could support victims of crime. When we were in government, we acted on some of his recommendations and recommendations from other victims of crime.

His family would travel to Quebec for parole hearings to support the loved one who lost her life all those years ago in the eighties. They would go every two years to these parole hearings. There were times when they would have driven 10 hours, and the offender would cancel the parole hearing. The family would have to go back home not having had the parole hearing. They had many recommendations.

This same case was in the news within the last month when Correctional Service Canada, without notifying the family, said that individual was on the loose and it did not know where they were. Every two years, this family has been there in person trying to keep the individual behind bars where they belong. Obviously that caused great concern for this family. The offender is now back in custody but is still eligible for parole hearings every other year.

Those parole hearings, in person or virtual, continue to revictimize families. That is one of the principal reasons one of the pieces of legislation I am most proud of in my career as a parliamentarian, which we brought forward as a Conservative government, was respect for each individual victim's life in the case of mass murderers.

In Canada, when someone gets a life sentence, some people mistakenly think that a mass murderer or someone who commits first-degree murder is going to be behind bars for the rest of their life. We hear "life sentence" and think they will be in for life, but that is not how it works.

After 25 years, parole eligibility begins. An individual is eligible to be released after 25 years. Let us talk about what that means in the case of a mass murderer, like the individual who took the life of Tim Bosma. His widow, Sharlene, appeared at our justice committee recently to speak about victims of crime.

This is someone who has been through unimaginable pain. She eloquently spoke about her efforts and about the one solace she took. The mass murderer, this individual, was convicted of killing not only her husband, Tim, but also two other people. He had taken three lives. The only solace she took in this whole process was knowing her daughter would never have to attend a parole hearing.

The offender received a 75-year parole ineligibility period thanks to Conservative legislation that allowed consecutive periods of parole ineligibility. This means not just 25 years, but if someone takes three lives, it is 75 years. Before this a family would have to go through the very difficult process of ripping off that band-aid and having to relive the worst events of their life. That was the one solace she took.

As members in the House know, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down those provisions. This affects the individual who took the life of Tim Bosma and the individual who took the lives of three RCMP officers in Moncton, New Brunswick.

● (1040)

I remember that day very well. We were gathered here. We were in the lobby and watching this unfold. Three lives were taken, with a 75-year parole ineligibility period.

Because of the Supreme Court of Canada's decision just a couple of weeks ago, all of those individuals are now eligible for parole after 25 years. Does this mean they are going to be on the streets in under 25 years because they have already been serving their sentences? No, not necessarily. Maybe they will; maybe they will not. However, what this definitely means is that all of these families, including Sharlene Bosma's young daughter, are going to some day have to attend a parole hearing, look at the offender and argue why that individual, who took the life of their loved one, should have to stay behind bars.

Why am I speaking about these things? It is because victims have to be at the centre of all legislation, including Bill S-4. When I see a bill that mentions the consent of the offender 10 times and mentions the consent of the victim zero times, it raises concern for me.

Some of what is in Bill S-4 is necessary. It allows for virtual measures where appropriate, allows police officers to apply for and obtain warrants using telecommunications and conduct fingerprinting of the accused at a later date should fingerprints not previously have been taken, expands the power of courts to make case management rules, expands the ability of the accused and offenders to appear remotely by audioconference and video conference in certain circumstances, allows for the participation of prospective jurors in the jury selection process by video conference if deemed appropriate and allows for the use of electronic or automated means to select jurors rather than the current practice of having the clerk of the court draw names from a box.

Some of these measures make sense. That is why, overall, the Conservatives are supporting Bill S-4. However, there are a couple of things we are looking for. One is a recognition of the role of the victims.

The justice committee is completing a study on victims of crime. There was a Conservative motion asking that we study the impact of the justice system and how we can better serve victims of crime. I spoke already to some of the testimony we heard about how the justice system is stacked toward the offenders. Victims' families are in the dark. Victims are in the dark. These are victims of all kinds of crimes, whether it be property crime or violent crime. Individuals who have had a loved one taken from them are in the dark about the system.

The supports are not there as they should be, so when victims see a bill that mentions the consent of the accused 10 times and mentions victims zero times, it leads them to conclude once again that they are the afterthought in a piece of legislation. That perpetuates a justice system that is out of balance and does not put victims first. One of the things we are looking for is a refocus in this legislation on victims, their rights and making sure that nothing is done in this process that undermines the ability of a victim to feel a sense of engagement and justice to the extent they wish to in the process.

We have heard from other speakers about the urgency of this legislation. The Liberals have been in power for seven years. If we listen to them with respect to this legislation, they say these measures were called for and needed pre-COVID. To be very clear, the justice system was already severely delayed before COVID. Of course, COVID made it worse. I mentioned this in a question to a

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previous speaker. The Prime Minister reset the clock on this bill when he called an unnecessary and ironically COVID-related election, and here we are today debating this bill.

As Conservatives, we are going to continue to focus on the rights of victims and on making sure we have a justice system that takes serious crimes seriously and protects the interests of victims every step of the way.

● (1045)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, by the sounds of it, the member continues to add to the unanimous sense that the legislation will in fact be supported by everyone inside the chamber.

My question for the member is related to the idea that through time, things change and there is a need for modernization. I made reference to victims consistently throughout many of my comments. I have spoken about the importance of allowing and enabling victims to be present in different formats.

Would the member not at the very least concur that in supporting the legislation, we are recognizing the importance of having technology and its modernization within our judicial system?

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, we recognize that we must continually be looking for improvements to our system, but we also have to be steadfast in our concern about victims in our justice system. I will continue to bring that forward for this bill, for other government legislation, for private members' bills that we move forward and in response to the Supreme Court decisions that I made reference to.

We need to make sure victims are a focus, and what we are looking for in this particular legislation is a reference to victims. We want to hear from victims to make sure their interests are looked after.

● (1050)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his speech, my colleague talked about the system being out of balance and provided some solutions for putting victims first.

The Barreau du Québec recommends reviewing this legislation in its entirety instead of making piecemeal reforms. It suggests that we start by thinking about an immediate reform that is predictable, realistic, responsible and coherent.

What does my colleague think about that? Does he think that if we immediately launched a true, complete and in-depth reform, that might restore some balance to the system?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is quite correct. I mentioned in my remarks that the evidence is coming in. Sometimes we do not know what we do not know, but now we know. We know that violent crime is up 32%. We know that the homicide rate in Canada has increased every year for the last three years and is at the highest level it has been since 2005. That would lead any logical person to conclude that what is happening right now is not working.

That is why I made reference to our need to refocus our justice system and realign it to protect communities, protect victims and support their families. We need to end this practice of a revolving door that puts offenders, without treatment and any acknowledgement that they have improved, right back on the streets to reoffend. That system is not working.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, the member for Fundy Royal spent much of his time not actually talking about Bill S-4. I am not sure if he read the whole bill, but he talked about consent and how it is mentioned in numbers. The bill does provide options for legal counsel. With the consent of the prosecutor and consent of the accused, in proceedings, the accused can appear through a lawyer so that there is not only a reliance on the accused being in court.

Having said that, I know that the member represents a riding that is rural. Does he agree that Canadians living in rural and remote communities, especially given the size of Nunavut, should have the same access to the technology needed for serving a jury summons so that victims whose justice is delayed will actually get the justice they deserve through this bill?

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, the hon. member raises a great point. I know that in her riding, as in my riding of Fundy Royal, Internet connectivity is an issue. We have all seen this over the last couple of years on Zoom, where someone's image is frozen or they are unable to participate from where they are. That is a concern with this bill as well.

We are putting in place a tool, but the resources for victims and their families are not there in some cases to allow them to participate and use that tool. I have examples of that in my own riding. An individual attempting to participate in a parole hearing remotely does not have the equipment to do that. That is a resource issue. This is something we are raising with the government to make sure that tools are provided and that all Canadians have access to them, and not just those in urban centres but those in rural areas as well.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was listening to the great speech here, and my question is about timing. We have Canadians who have been waiting to access justice for too long, and now the Liberals, after so many years in government, have moved on this. It is unfair to expect families waiting for justice to wait until 2022, or the late stages of 2022, to access justice.

I would like the member to expand a bit on the view of these individuals and what it is like to be waiting that long to get justice.

● (1055)

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has hit on a great point. We have all heard the expression “justice delayed is justice denied”, and in our country currently, under the Jordan principle, justice delayed can result in a case being completely thrown out. The Supreme Court has ruled that if a case is taking too long, charges have to be dropped against an offender.

That is why I call into question the government's narrative on the urgency of this. This bill, as I mentioned in my speech, was introduced originally as Bill C-23 a couple of years ago. What happened in the intervening time? An unnecessary election reset the clock, and here we are today studying Bill S-4.

The Conservatives support Bill S-4. There are some necessary improvements in there, but we need to maintain our focus on supporting victims and their families.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, much of my hon. colleague's speech related to some other legislation that we have dealt with lately, and I fail to see anything in this bill that would meet the general narrative of his speech related to being tough on crime or soft on crime. This is, as I read it, and please inform me if I have mistaken the bill, entirely about how to use modern technology, including video conferencing and telecommunications methods, which have come up in the criminal justice system as a result of the pandemic.

I totally agree with him that there was an unnecessary election. I totally agree with him that this could have been passed earlier. However, I fail to see anything controversial here. Perhaps he can find something in this bill that actually relates to the rights of victims.

Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, we are supporting Bill S-4, but there are concerns about access. The hon. member mentions access to virtual opportunities for victims and offenders. Well, as mentioned in a previous question, not all Canadians have that access right now. Not all Canadians would have the ability to connect from where they are in their communities to a virtual parole hearing or a virtual jury selection procedure.

We need to maintain a focus on improving our justice system, and technology can play an important role in that. However, we always have to have victims at the forefront. I have mentioned to the hon. member the lack of an acknowledgement of victims in other Liberal government legislation, and we continue to see that here. Even in my own riding, individuals are unable to access virtual opportunities because they do not have the capability to do that in a rural community.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Avalon.

I am pleased to be here today to take part in the debate on Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts regarding the COVID-19 response and other measures. This relates to the changes made during COVID-19.

Bill S-4 proposes changes to the Criminal Code and other acts to correct procedural problems that criminal courts faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. We used some good examples to draft the bill we are debating today.

From the outset, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which carried out an in-depth study of Bill S-4 last spring. After it heard from more than 20 witnesses and reviewed a large number of documents in a very short amount of time, the bill passed third reading stage in the Senate on June 21, 2022.

The Senate adopted two amendments. The first requires the Minister of Justice to initiate an independent review on the use of remote proceedings in criminal justice matters no later than three years after the day on which the act receives royal assent, and that he report to each house of Parliament no later than five years after the day on which a review is initiated. The second requires a parliamentary review at the start of the fifth year after the day on which the act receives royal assent. These amendments are valid, and they will help ensure an effective review of the use of remote proceedings and other provisions of the act.

The reforms provided for in Bill S-4 include the following proposals: clarify and expand the availability of remote appearances for certain criminal proceedings; provide for the participation of prospective jurors by video conference in certain circumstances; expand the power of courts to deal with administrative matters related to extrajudicial procedures for accused not represented by counsel; and improve the fingerprinting system.

In my speech, I will focus on how these specific proposals will make the criminal justice system more efficient and improve access to justice across Canada, while alleviating some of the intense pressure on courts to deal with delays and backlogs in the system.

One of the main ways Bill S-4 will make the system more efficient is by making the act clearer with respect to the court's discretion to allow the use of technology in all criminal proceedings involving preliminary inquiries, trials, pleas and sentencing.

The safeguards in the bill requiring consent and the factors that courts will have to take into account in exercising their discretion are key to understanding how the law regarding remote appearances will be clarified and enhanced. Their purpose is to help courts allow the use of technology only where appropriate, while ensuring that the accused's rights and freedoms are protected at all times.

The reforms provided for in Bill S-4 will also make it possible to use technology in the jury selection process. With the parties' con-

sent, the court will be able to allow or require prospective jurors to participate in the jury selection process by video conference instead of in person at the courthouse. A prospective juror is a person who is summoned to court to take part in the jury selection process. This will improve access to the justice system for ordinary people who are legally required to take part in the jury selection process, but who may not be able to go to the courthouse in person because of certain obstacles.

• (1100)

For instance, they may not be able to take a full day off work, or they may not have access to public transit or amenities in certain regions. They may also simply be unable to find parking downtown, where courthouses are located. This bill could solve a number of mobility issues. Other obstacles may include health problems, a lack of child care or even bad weather, similar to what we have seen recently.

A more flexible jury selection process will also help increase jury participation and diversity, which is essential to keeping our criminal justice system running smoothly. Since the jury selection process can often involve hundreds of people gathering in person at the courthouse at the same time, the use of technology could also ensure that the proceedings do not need to be adjourned because of health risks or other difficulties before the trial even begins. It could prevent jury trials from having to be postponed or suspended, which frequently happened during the pandemic because of physical distancing requirements.

In a way, we are taking advantage of what happened during the pandemic to improve the system, while bearing in mind that, when we came to power in 2015, Internet service was unreliable, or at least less reliable than it is today. Today we can say that we have invested significantly in Internet coverage. By 2026, 98% of Canadians will have Internet access. This means that today, we can think about improving the system to better meet needs in remote regions. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Rural Economic Development, I have visited and travelled through many regions, and I can attest to the fact that we need to provide more services for rural and remote regions.

The amendments to this bill respecting jury selection include safeguards. The accused and the prosecutor will have to consent to an order allowing or requiring prospective jurors to participate by video conference. In addition, the court will have to determine whether such an order is appropriate, taking into account circumstances like the privacy and security of the prospective jurors and the challenges they face when it comes to in-person participation, as well as the accused's right to a fair and public hearing.

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What is important to remember is that the use of technology is optional and at the judge's discretion. It is not compulsory. It will help courts ensure the effective and efficient administration of justice. The proposed reforms will also better equip the courts to continue to operate during difficult times, whether because of a pandemic, which we experienced, a flood, which I experienced twice in my riding since 2015, or any other situation that could have an adverse impact on physical access to courthouses in the future.

Although these reforms can be put to greater use in the management of exceptional and urgent situations, they are not limited to such circumstances. They will apply on an ongoing basis so as to make sure our courts continue to offer technology use options in the years to come. In addition to improving the Criminal Code regime governing the use of technology, other reforms in this bill will improve access to justice and the efficiency of our criminal courts. For example, Bill S-4 will expand the power of courts to make case management rules permitting court personnel to deal with administrative matters related to extrajudicial proceedings for accused not represented by counsel.

We need to act and support this bill.

• (1105)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will repeat a question that seemed important to the Quebec bar association, which made a few recommendations concerning Bill S-4. Some of them were accepted, which is good.

In the House, we studied Bill C-75 to amend the Criminal Code and the Youth Criminal Justice Act. We also studied Bill C-5 to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Now we are studying Bill S-4, and the Quebec bar association made what we think is a very wise recommendation about this bill. Rather than make changes piecemeal, would it not be time for an overall reform that includes all of these changes? It is a question of consistency.

Does my colleague agree?

• (1110)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, my colleague across the aisle asks an excellent question.

She listed bills that are part of the reform of the judicial system, but she forgot Bill C-23, which was introduced last year and is a precursor of Bill S-4, the bill we are studying today. It is fair to say that there have been changes since the last legislature.

All of this is thanks to the consultations we conducted with major stakeholders, including the provinces and territories, which took part in the decision-making process and helped us amend the former bill and come up with Bill S-4. It is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are aware that one of the reasons for the delays in the judicial system is the time that it takes for the government to appoint judges.

Does the hon. member have any ideas about how the House can legislate so as to ensure that the Minister of Justice appoints judges in a more timely manner?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Our criminal justice system is complex. Obviously, appointing judges is a necessary step, but we also need to put juries together. It is also important to employ the people who work for the prosecution to advance proceedings that are under way.

Today we are taking a step forward to improve the system. We are implementing a bill that will improve the system and facilitate judges' work thanks to technologies such as the Internet and video conferencing. How many times have judges shown up for a session that had to be postponed because of one of the factors I mentioned in my speech, such as illness, transportation, family obligations and child care concerns? Proceedings have been postponed for all of these reasons.

Right now, it is important to make judges' work easier. After that, we will review and assess to determine whether that actually improved the system. This bill will make judges' work easier. It will help the judges who are now on the bench to be more effective.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary spoke to the importance of the bill, but this is a COVID-related bill. It was born out of the need for remote access and digital means, and as a result of delays in processing times because of COVID, but the passage of this bill was itself delayed because of an unnecessary election call during COVID.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary raised those concerns with the Prime Minister when delaying this bill that he has identified as being very important.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, there is never a good or bad time to introduce a bill.

There have already been amendments to the bill introduced last year. We worked with the Senate committee, the provinces and the territories, legal experts and people who offered recommendations. Starting last year, we made improvements to the bill and we made sure that Bill S-4 was up to date and ready to be introduced.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand in this place to represent the constituents of Avalon. I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide an overview of some of the key areas of reform proposed in Bill S-4, an act that would amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and make related amendments to other acts.

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Bill S-4 would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of criminal proceedings by giving courts more flexibility and clarity in response to the particular challenges that arose in the pandemic. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the remote appearance provisions in the Criminal Code had just been reformed through a former bill, Bill C-75, in 2019. Those amendments had been informed by the 2013 report of the Steering Committee on Justice Efficiencies and Access to the Justice System, entitled “Report on the Use of Technology in the Criminal Justice System”, as well as consultations with provincial and territorial governments.

Bill S-4 continues to build on those reforms, taking into account new calls for reform by those working in the criminal justice system during the pandemic and courts' experiences with the increased use of technology that occurred as a result.

My remarks today will focus on the necessity of the proposed amendments relating to remote proceedings, which represent a continuation of existing legal practices here in Canada.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, criminal court proceedings were presumptively held in person. Remote appearances were permitted under the Criminal Code but were very much the exception. There were provisions in the Criminal Code to allow people to attend some proceedings by way of audio or visual connection, but since they were not routinely used, legal clarification or guidance was needed.

The pandemic had an abrupt and immediate effect on the operation of courts, as courts across Canada shut down for periods of time and had to figure out how to operate without in-person attendance or with very limited in-person attendance. To cope with the pandemic and maintain the administration of justice, including maintaining access to the courts, courts around the country pivoted away from in-person appearances and held numerous hearings and matters in a virtual space.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced changes to how courts operate. Unrestricted in-person appearances were no longer permitted, and initially courts were forced to adjourn the majority of appearances, ranging from pleas to trials. This created a backlog of cases in the court system that still needed to be heard, regardless of the circumstances of the pandemic. In many cases, having participants appear by video conference when possible allowed court operations to resume.

However, even with courts adapting and modernizing to address the challenges they faced during the pandemic, many remain unable to operate at their prepandemic capacity. Indeed, the median length of time for an adult case to resolve in criminal court increased when compared with prepandemic levels. Further complicating matters was the fact that the number of adult criminal court cases that exceeded the presumptive time limits set out by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Jordan* had increased significantly since the onset of the pandemic.

Bill S-4 targets changes to the Criminal Code that would give courts increased flexibility in how they hold criminal proceedings and how they issue orders such as search warrants and production orders in the context of an investigation. These changes are needed to address the ongoing pressures on the criminal court system

brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic and enhance access to justice for all Canadians, now and in the future. A key impact of these provisions would be a more efficient justice system that is equipped to serve Canadians and address the backlog of cases caused by the pandemic.

Allowing and continuing remote appearances is not just about responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote appearances would provide greater flexibility for courts to continue proceedings when it is not possible to do so in person for other reasons, such as natural disasters. During its study of the bill, the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs heard witness testimony about the closure of the Calgary courthouse during the floods of 2013. Due to the natural disaster, the court was forced to close proceedings for a period of time. Matters could not be heard and were adjourned.

● (1115)

The changes proposed in Bill S-4 make clear that certain proceedings can move ahead by audio or visual conference, even when in-person attendance is not possible or safe, allowing courts to operate as efficiently as possible in the interest of all participants in the criminal justice system.

While there has been acceptance of proceedings occurring by way of audio or video conference, the reforms included in Bill S-4 do not seek to make this the norm or default. Indeed, as before, the principle set out in the Criminal Code will continue to be: “Except as otherwise provided... a person who appears at, participates in or presides at a proceeding shall do so in person.” This principle would not change. Rather than upending the legal system, the bill would continue to allow the flexibility of proceedings in a manner that makes sense in the circumstances, with appropriate safeguards built in.

When considering whether to authorize remote proceedings, courts will be obligated to consider the impact on the safety of the participants, while supporting greater access to justice moving forward, including for those living in remote communities. Courts would also be required to ensure that decisions to authorize remote appearances are exercised in accordance with the charter, including the right of an accused person to make full answer and defence, and to have a fair and public hearing.

While Bill S-4 would clarify and expand when remote appearances are possible, it would not be the first to introduce these concepts into the Criminal Code. At committee, there were some concerns expressed over a judge's ability to assess the credibility of witnesses and accused persons during remote proceedings, as well as the importance of protecting an accused person's ability to face their accuser.

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While these are important considerations the court must turn its mind to in each case, they are not unique to the provisions Bill S-4 would amend. Indeed, courts have found that seeing a complainant or witness face to face is not fundamental to our system of justice, and the Criminal Code has permitted remote attendance by witnesses for more than 20 years.

Subsection 800(2.1) has authorized summary conviction trials by video for in-custody accused since 1997. Sections 714.1 and 714.2 have permitted appearances by witnesses by video conference since 1999. Bill C-75, which was passed by this House in 2019, modernized and facilitated some appearances by audio and video conference of all persons involved in criminal cases, including judges, under certain circumstances.

Rather than overhauling criminal procedure, Bill S-4 would continue to permit proceedings by remote appearance. The bill would pick up where Bill C-75 left off, in light of the experience that was gained and the questions that arose with use of technology in the criminal courts during the pandemic. Bill S-4 would make practical and necessary amendments to the Criminal Code. These amendments would facilitate efficient operation of the criminal courts and have a direct impact on people who need or want to access the criminal justice system. The bill is not intended to make remote trials and hearings the norm, but rather would give the courts the flexibility to proceed in this manner when it is appropriate under the circumstances and where the technology exists.

These are limited but necessary reforms that have been developed in consultation with the provinces and territories and take into consideration the views of stakeholders. I am confident the bill and the proposed reforms would improve efficiencies in our criminal justice system while still providing careful oversight by the courts to ensure that the rights of accused persons and offenders are protected with the use of technology.

For these reasons, I urge all members to support Bill S-4.

• (1120)

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, much of my hon. colleague's speech dealt with aspects of the bill that, as has been earlier indicated, the Conservatives will support. What he did not address was the balance, or more properly the imbalance, between attention to victims and attention to perpetrators. I believe he comes from a riding similar to mine that is more rural in aspect, certainly with large rural areas, and my phone is blowing up this morning with what has gone with the most recent attempt of the government to further inhibit the rights of legal firearms owners.

I am wondering if the member could comment as to why the government seems to err on the side of perpetrators and target law-abiding firearms owners as opposed to really going after the criminals in our society.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind members to make sure their questions are pertinent to the matter before the House. I will see if the hon. member feels the question is pertinent and chooses to answer.

The hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Madam Speaker, I do not think we are showing favouritism to one side or the other. From my perspective, victims should have every opportunity to appear by video conference or in person, if they want to face the perpetrator in any particular case.

I hope everybody will support this going forward. When the bill goes to committee, maybe some amendments could be made to enhance it and make sure that is the case for anyone who has a problem with the courts or the decisions being made today.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois does agree that this is a good bill, although it does not address all the issues. No one will be surprised to hear that we will be supporting it.

However, we can all agree that the bill does not resolve all the problems with the Criminal Code. There is something wrong with the Criminal Code. Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, that want to work in Afghanistan to help the people there cannot do so because they could be prosecuted, given that the Taliban are on the Criminal Code's list of terrorist organizations. They cannot deal with the Taliban because they could be charged under the Criminal Code. The government could have changed that, but it did not.

I would like to know whether my hon. colleague would agree to amend the Criminal Code so that our NGOs could do their work in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken McDonald: Madam Speaker, I certainly would support that amendment to make sure everybody could have an opportunity to appear as a witness or take part in any court proceeding. I do not think people should be limited by not being able to appear on their own behalf or on behalf of others.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, there is a fundamental principle that justice delayed is justice denied. We have heard all the various ways in which our legal system is falling apart with backlogs. This bill addresses one administrative part, but I think about those who are awaiting trial in custody, being held on remand, and the great delay in the government's bringing this legislation back.

In particular, as a means of addressing court backlogs, why did the government oppose recommendation 1 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights 2017 report on access to justice? Legal aid called on the government to remove legal aid funding currently included in the Canada social transfers in favour of a specific earmarked civil legal aid fund for provinces, to be administered under the Department of Justice.

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Mr. Ken McDonald: Madam Speaker, I am not quite familiar with that provision. I will certainly look at it to see exactly what it says, but I am sure there was a valid reason for not removing it from one part of the judicial system when it comes to witnesses appearing or adjudicating and not being put in some other section.

Sometimes we can bog ourselves down in paperwork if we move things around. If it is not broken or if it is still working, why destroy it and put in something that we do not know is going to work?

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an honour to join in the important debates and discussions that take place in the House and to be able to discuss the wide variety of issues, both directly and indirectly, addressed through Bill S-4.

I will be streaming this speech live on Facebook, where I will endeavour to not only address some of the very important aspects of Bill S-4 but also endeavour to take feedback and comments from those who are watching on Facebook. My Facebook handle is “@dckurek”. I look forward to addressing some of the comments and concerns that constituents bring forward.

Bill S-4 would codify some of the dynamics that existed during the course of COVID. These are things like video appearances and certain technical and administrative challenges associated with the circumstances around offices being closed, for example, the fact that the fingerprinting could be a delayed process and a whole host of administrative concerns.

I would highlight and encourage those watching live on Facebook to share their stories as well about some of the dynamics associated with rural crime. Access to justice is something that is not unique to rural Canadians. This did not start in 2020 with COVID, and it certainly has not repaired itself as we have seen life get back normal.

My constituency, for example, as many who are watching from there will know, is about five hours from corner to corner, and it is hours to the nearest courthouse. In many cases, the response time of law enforcement to very serious crimes is measured in hours or even sometimes in days. It is an important context in which we see this soft-on-crime approach.

I happen to agree with a statement that was made the other day by one of my Conservative colleagues that this is a hug-a-thug approach. It is really unfortunate, because we are seeing that my constituents are facing the consequences of that soft-on-crime approach by not seeing our justice system as a system that serves justice. In fact, the most common statements that I receive from constituents are that we do not have a justice system, and that it is simply a poor excuse for a legal system.

I certainly see the Liberal record over the past seven years as being one that piles on failure after failure, whether it be Bill C-5, which would eliminate a whole host of sentences for very serious crimes, or the justice minister, with an astounding level of ignorance and arrogance, who simply says that we will leave it up to the judges. I have more examples than I could fit in days of debate about where the justice system does not actually bring about the punishments that should certainly fit the crime, and we are seeing a massive erosion of trust in the system.

I see, specifically, a member from the government who seems to be participating in my Facebook live. I thank him for his viewership and amplification of the sound, common-sense Conservative message that certainly resonates with Canadians.

I would note something that I think is especially relevant. There is an astounding level of ignorance displayed by the Liberals, and this was highlighted just the other day. The rule of law, to them, seems to be this plaything. I would like to read a text message sent from the Minister of Public Safety that was revealed at the Emergencies Act inquiry commission. The parliamentary secretary who just commented on my feed should maybe pay attention to this. It says:

...you need to get the police to move....

And the CAF if necessary....

Too many people are being seriously adversely impacted by what is an occupation. I am getting out as soon as I can. People are looking to us/you for leadership. And not stupid people. People like Carney, Cath, my team.

● (1130)

The reply goes on to say, “How many tanks are you asking for...I just wanna ask [the Minister of National Defence] how many we've got on hand.”

The response from Canada's Minister of Public Safety was, “I reckon one will do.”

That is astounding, and I would suggest disgusting, that the Liberals would suggest that pulling out tanks to bring to the streets of our capital city would, in any universe, be an acceptable practice. We see how—

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On a point of relevance, I know the Conservatives love to defend the convoy, but we are not talking about the illegal occupation of Ottawa or the Emergencies Act. We are talking about Bill S-4. I wonder if the hon. member could get back to talking about the bill.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order as well. It is interesting that the Liberals are intent on pivoting away from their many failures not only on access to justice—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that the debate is on Bill S-4. I also want to remind members and make sure that, although there is a bit of latitude during members' speeches, their speeches should be relevant to the bill that is before the House. I am sure the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot will bring it back to the bill itself.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

We see how the Liberal government is refusing access to justice for Canadians.

Bill S-4 has some practical steps to ensure that my constituents would see a small step forward to be able to access the court system through things like video conference and whatnot. However, this is in the context of the larger trend where we have the Liberals more concerned about tanks on our streets than ensuring that Canadians have justice.

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Somebody watching made the comment that we need time that fits the crime. We have a justice system, as is being highlighted by some of those who are commenting, where instead of prioritizing the rights of victims, in some cases those who have seen absolutely devastating crimes, including sexual assault or a firearm being discharged with intent, the Liberals are eliminating sentences.

My constituents have made it very clear. The Liberals like to say that somehow we do not support justice or whatever the case is. There is one party in the House that stands up for victims, and that is the Conservative Party. That is increasingly clear, as we see the Liberals demand that somehow a soft-on-crime approach is a good way to stand up for victims of crime. That could not be further from the truth. We see a backlog within the court system that is leaving serious crimes without even seeing their day in court.

Imagine a victim, such as a senior in my constituency who came to me with respect to being held up at gunpoint. This was with an illegal gun, and it was not by a law-abiding firearms owner. That individual skipped bail, and in less than four hours they were back on the street. There were threats made against RCMP officers in my constituency, and we saw that within less than a day somebody who had threatened the life of an RCMP officer was back out on the street. This has a very significant correlation to the way that we have access to justice in this country.

I would suggest that the Liberals pay close attention, because there are many victims. These are not traditional Conservative supporters. I am not talking about just the folks I represent in rural Alberta. I am talking about folks from Liberal ridings who in some cases have reached out to Conservatives and said they are frustrated with that Liberal approach.

Somebody in the comments asked when the Prime Minister is going to resign. Certainly, I would have a whole host of constituents who would be very interested in finding the answer to that question.

Here is another example. Somebody on Facebook highlighted that the government spends more time persecuting law-abiding firearms owners than it does those who perpetrate serious crimes, including serious gun crimes. The hypocrisy that is demonstrated in that on a daily basis has contributed to that erosion of trust that is taking place within our system. This is something that I hope that the Liberals listen to very closely.

An erosion of trust is something that is very difficult to earn back. That is not something that is simply a platitude, a campaign-platform promise or whatever the case is. It takes time, it takes effort and it takes a demonstration. I have said this before in this place and I will say it again: If the Liberals are good at one thing it is politics, but when it comes to actually governing they fail each and every time.

In fact, I find it very interesting that, whether it be on the issues directly related to Bill S-4, which has a lot to do with access to the justice system and that sort of thing or the host of other concerns that MPs in this place hear on a regular basis, we see that over the past seven years the—

• (1135)

Mr. Han Dong: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the member, during his remarks, mentioned that he is live broadcasting his debate. I wonder what the rules are around taking videos or live broadcasting through Facebook while we are debating. I do not know. I just want to ask about it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to indicate that the hon. member is actually bringing a point of order on something that the hon. member may have said, but I do not know if that was done in the House. If it was done in the House, then I would remind members that they are not to do any of those types of recordings while in the House.

On the same point of order, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

• (1140)

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, this is not something I do regularly, but I rise to support the hon. member from the Conservative caucus. I am watching the livestream here. It is pretty clear it is being re-streamed from CPAC. I commend him on his innovation.

I had wondered if he was doing it from his phone and whether the livestream would be going up his nose, catching his chin or something of that nature, but that is not the case. It is well streamed, and I support the member for using technology to bring his residents into the chamber.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): On that point, if the livestream from whatever platform he is using, like ParlVU, is public, the hon. member is free to do that as long as he is not filming in the House. If the member is virtual, he is not able to livestream what is happening virtually.

Does the hon. member for Edmonton Manning have anything to add to that point of order?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, I want to point out one thing. This bill is not a controversial bill by any stretch. We are all in agreement about the importance of putting this bill back—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That has nothing to do with the point of order.

Can the hon. member get to the point of order?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, the government members should be more receptive to what we are saying on this side and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is a point of debate.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, let me take this opportunity to highlight that I find it really ironic that the so-called progressives in this place would be opposed, with the exception of the member from the NDP. I am certainly endeavouring to make this place more accessible to the people, using something like social media to ensure that could be the case. I find it very interesting that the members from the Liberal Party seem to be concerned that Canadians would know what is going on in this place. I will do everything I can to expose the Liberal management of government, whether it is its legislative agenda or whatever the case.

Government Orders

I happen to know a constituent who works with victims of crime a lot, and her name is Michelle Hauser. She just commented on this video, saying nobody feels safe. That encompasses much of the concern that many of my constituents are facing when it comes to the status of justice here in Canada. Law enforcement response times in rural communities are not only measured in hours but sometimes in days, and I am not talking about a minor infraction, that somebody jaywalked across a gravel road. I am talking about major crimes, robberies, assaults, things like that. Access to justice is fundamental to a modern, functioning democracy, and we see that being taken away.

The Liberals delayed for more than a year the appointment of the victims ombudsman. I am pleased there was an appointment made as it was absolutely necessary, but we see the soft-on-crime approach, where the public safety minister is more worried about bringing tanks to the streets of our capital city to shut down protesters the Liberals disagree with than ensuring that regular Canadians have access to the fundamental principles of justice, which I would hope every member of this place supports.

We see the necessity of law enforcement having the tools required to gather the evidence, to make sure there is time within our court system, so people can have their day in court, both for those accused of crimes and also to ensure victims have everything required so they can see justice done. If justice is not done, that erodes the confidence Canadians need to have, not just in the legal system proper but in every facet of government. If Canadians cannot feel safe in their own homes, that fundamentally erodes one of the very basic principles of what makes western democracy.

I speak with law enforcement often, whether it is the Mounties in my constituency who drive up and down the many thousands of kilometres in my riding or the Camrose Police Service, which does great work, and many of the officers do fantastic service to the community.

Some have come to me confidentially and said it is overwhelming for them. They will, in some cases, spend late nights burning the midnight oil after a long day of patrol or gathering information on investigations, and all of these sorts of things, yet when the case goes before a judge, it is simply tossed. Imagine how somebody in law enforcement would feel after spending days putting together a case, only to have it tossed out and the criminal back on the streets victimizing again. These are very serious things. I cannot emphasize that enough.

The revolving door of the justice system is a real concern. It is one thing for the system to ensure that those who are brought within it, having been accused of a crime, are not unnecessarily held up or anything like that. However, when those who have multiple arrest warrants are arrested again for something that may be unrelated or in another jurisdiction, and then all of a sudden they are back out on the streets again, we are talking about access to justice. For the many victims, the consequence is that their victimizers are once again out on the streets.

● (1145)

A comment from Lynn says, “No one should be above the law.”

I agree. No one should. That is a message the Prime Minister should take seriously. No one should be above the law, not one person, whether it is each and every one of the 338 of us in this place, or every single Canadian. The rule of law is at the very foundation of who we are as a democratic society. To see an erosion of that is absolutely devastating.

A question is asked by Shawna about how we address parole issues. It is a huge concern.

We occasionally hear the stories that grab a headline about some horrific crime that has been committed and that criminal who has been found guilty of that crime. Then there is a public outpouring that keeps that person behind bars, yet we see continually from the government a pursuit of an agenda that would lessen the ability to keep some of those serious criminals behind bars. That is relevant because it is victims who ultimately suffer.

We need to figure out a path forward so that serious sexual predators in the country face the consequences of their crimes.

That is essential for the safety of our society in general. Although it did not happen in my constituency, there is a very clear example. A young woman and her baby were killed. Her partner is from my constituency, so it hits really close to home. They were living next door to a sexual predator. They were murdered. It was a failure of the justice system.

Access to justice is fundamental and key. We are seeing it is being increasingly denied to Canadians.

I take that point about losing faith in the RCMP institution. There has been political interference in the largest mass shooting in Canadian history. The commissioner of the RCMP was facing political pressure from a minister to further the Liberals' political agenda.

We talk about access to justice. When we have the top brass of Canada's national law enforcement organization facing political pressure—

● (1150)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know the hon. member is reading comments off Facebook, but we should be focused on the bill, which is Bill S-4. It does not deal with the RCMP, or the brass or whatever his constituents are thinking. It is nice he is responding to that, but he needs to be relevant and he needs to speak to the bill before us.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have been listening as well and I want to remind the hon. member that he should be speaking to the bill itself. I would remind him of that.

The hon. member for Fundy Royal.

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Hon. Rob Moore: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I notice that some of the members across the way are repeatedly interrupting my hon. colleague's speech. I want to remind them that there is an all-party agreement to have this debate collapse, but if they continue with the interruptions, that is going to have to be revisited—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): This is not really a point of order. I think if the hon. member has an issue with that, he should take it to his House leader and his whip.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, on the same point, it is a little disappointing that the Conservative critic is suggesting that we do not following the Standing Orders and if the Conservatives are permitted not to follow the Standing Orders, the debate should collapse, but in the absence of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind members that points of order have to be used judiciously as well. I ruled on the point of order that the hon. member for Fundy Royal put forward.

I want to remind members that they are to ensure that they are speaking about the bill that is before the House. I understand that there is some latitude, but the hon. member is actually going over that as well.

I want to remind the hon. member to stick to the debate on Bill S-4.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I am happy to respond to that. When it comes to the administration of justice within my constituency, the RCMP members, the hard-working men and women who wear the Serge, are the ones facing the consequences of Liberal mismanagement. The reason it has such a close correlation to Bill S-4 before the House is because it is fundamentally associated with access to justice.

I talk about many of these things, and made it very clear in Facebook Live, and I have been happy to endeavour to expand Canadians' access to this place, as is fundamental. Democracy is not simply about election day, but each and every day in between. It certainly has been an interesting experiment. I found it interesting, but very disappointing, that members specifically of the Liberal Party would hate any attempt to be progressive in the ability of Canadians to access our democracy.

The rule of law is fundamental to a modern functioning democracy, and we are seeing an erosion of that. We need to prioritize access to justice in every way possible. In some ways that has to do with ensuring there are video conference options and that administrative details can be sorted out so there are no unnecessary delays.

Our Criminal Code was written by Prime Minister John Sparrow back in the 1800s, although it has been updated significantly since then over the course of our country's history. We need to ensure it is updated to ultimately ensure that Canadians have access to justice, that victims are protected and that those who commit crimes face the time that is due them.

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was watching on Facebook, and I guess I understand why the hon. member was dog

whistling to the convoy crowd. There were a number of comments on there, which he does not seem to be correcting, including that the Prime Minister should be arrested, so on and so forth. It is disappointing to see the hon. member play to the lowest common denominator.

However, I did ask a question in that forum, and I would like to give him an opportunity to answer. He and his colleagues talk about U.S.-style laws. In the United States, especially in the southern United States, could he give us an example of the types of laws he wants, laws that have actually made those communities safer?

• (1155)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, it is interesting how that member seems to suggest that the opinions of many Canadian do not matter. However, I will specifically address the question.

This is the reality. That member and many members of the Liberal Party are attempting to paint Conservatives as somehow being something that very clearly we are not, We are standing up for and with victims of serious crime. In fact, a bill brought forward by a Conservative MP from the Maritimes in the last Parliament was passed to ensure there would be a strategy to address recidivism. Those members are trying to compare what we are doing in standing up for victims to Trump. The biggest comparison to Trump in this place is the Prime Minister, who has more ethical violations than he can count. The Conservatives have and will continue to stand up for victims. That is what Canadians expect in this place.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot on his speech and on taking the initiative to stream it live on his Facebook page. I had a look, and I thought that was a good idea. I also found it interesting that other House of Commons colleagues commented on my colleague's Facebook page.

Anyway, he talked about how he thinks sentences should be tougher, especially for more serious crimes. I visited the Drummond Institution in my region, a medium-security penitentiary that is proud of its successful approaches to supporting inmates' rehabilitation, even when they have committed violent crimes. Personally, what I think we should be looking at is the parole system, which may have too many gaps and shortcomings.

I would really like to know what data my colleague and his fellow Conservatives are using to support their assertion that a tougher stance on criminal penalties is more effective than the current approach, which is based on reintegration.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question, although it feeds into the false premise that somehow we are asking for stiffer penalties. It is the Minister of Justice who often suggests they should raise the maximum penalty that is allowable for serious crimes. However, I have yet to hear the Minister of Justice acknowledge the number of times the maximum penalty is brought forward on any offence.

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I am proud to represent many correctional officers in my constituency. There is an institution in Drumheller. In fact, I speak often with members of Correctional Services Canada who are incredibly frustrated about some of the ways that, even in prisons, the rights of serious criminals are prioritized over the rights of the well-being of correctional officers.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Alberta did not speak an awful lot about the bill at hand. There was not an awful lot there on Bill S-4, so I certainly hope later on today, as I do my speech, I am afforded the same leniency to expand upon thoughts.

One thing he did talk about was the attack on an RCMP officer, and I think everyone in the House finds it incredibly appalling to hear that. From my perspective as an Albertan, I remember last year when the RCMP officers in Coutts were threatened with illegal guns and with crime.

I wonder why the member has such a different perspective on what should have been done in that situation. Why the Emergencies Act should not have been enacted? Why we should not have done everything we could to protect those RCMP officers? Why the different perspective for what should be done to protect RCMP officers in his community?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, we have before us a member who, by the very premise of her question, is suggesting that somehow the rights of Canadians should be something that depends on the respect of the Prime Minister's Office. If somebody breaks the law, there should be a penalty for it, whether it is somebody I support with respect to the protest movement or not. The rights of Canadians should not be something that is negotiable at the whim of a Prime Minister, who seems to have no concerns with anything other than his political fortune.

That member should be very careful when she talks so flippantly about how the rights of Canadians matter, because those who break the law should face the penalty. I do not know why that is so controversial for the member from Edmonton. Further to that, we need to ensure, when it comes to the administration of justice in our country, that it is done fairly, so the very real concerns of Canadians are not dismissed at the whim of ideologues who happen to sit in the front benches.

• (1200)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there should always be an appropriate consequence for a crime that is committed, but I want to shy away from that and refer to the fact that Bill S-4 is really about the partial modernization in which our judicial system would be able to incorporate video conferencing or video taping to assist the system. We learned that through the pandemic. Could the member reaffirm, which I understand to be the case, that the Conservative Party will be supporting the legislation and getting the important feedback on it once it goes to committee?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, as I very specifically highlighted within my speech, there is absolutely that need to the administration of justice, specifically when it comes to things like

video conferencing and teleconferencing, and the inclusion of some of what seems like small administrative matters like fingerprinting.

I live in a rural constituency. It takes hours for the RCMP to respond. In some cases, I have constituents who live more than 100 kilometres from their nearest police detachment, in most cases RCMP. Therefore, access to justice is absolutely key and fundamental, and some of the small administrative changes that are being proposed in the bill are things I think most Canadians would suggest are common sense.

However, I want to highlight that the member said that serious crimes deserve the punishment. I would suggest that member take his message to his justice minister, because that is the opposite of what that Liberal Party is bringing forward with respect to policy.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the hon. member speak at length about the fundamental rights of Canadians, yet when it comes to people who are held on remand, who are charged but not yet convicted, would the hon. member not agree that improving the administration of justice to allow those people to have their day in court would also help protect their rights? I would like the member to even go a bit further, perhaps, and reflect on the notion that even when convicted, people in our country still maintain their civil rights?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, again, rights should not be negotiable, certainly at the whim of a Prime Minister who seems to suggest they are.

The member made an interesting point. I certainly hear his frustration that when people are arrested for a serious crime, they are simply back out on the streets, sometimes a few hours later. In many cases, not just a handful of cases but through the personal testimony given to law enforcement officers, it revictimizes people once again.

We need a system that works. We need a system that ensures the presumption of innocence, so that people who have been alleged to have committed a crime have their day in court to ensure that all barriers are removed and that it can be done in a timely manner. As has been said, justice delayed is certainly not justice served.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Outremont.

I am pleased to speak to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts. Bill S-4 addresses issues that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light regarding the ways in which criminal trials are conducted in this country. It also builds on past government initiatives, including Bill C-75, which came into force in 2019 and made significant progress in modernizing our criminal justice system, including by facilitating the appearance of accused persons, lawyers and judges by audioconference or video conference throughout the criminal justice process. Bill C-75 also enacted Criminal Code amendments to improve the jury selection process.

Government Orders

Bill S-4's amendments support the increased use of technology in criminal courts across Canada, including in the following areas: remote appearances for accused persons and offenders, remote participation of prospective jurors and the use of technology in a jury selection process. My remarks today will focus on the amendments relating to the use of technology during the jury selection process.

As many members know, a jury is a group of randomly selected citizens who act as the fact-finders in criminal trials, replacing the judge in this role when accused persons exercise their subsection 11(f) charter right to a jury trial after being charged with certain offences. It is the civic duty of all Canadians over the age of 18 to serve on a jury if selected. Jurors make critical contributions to the criminal justice system in Canada, and the Supreme Court of Canada has held that a jury reflects the common sense, values and conscience of the community.

Subsection 11(d) of the charter also guarantees an accused person an independent, impartial and representative jury. The Criminal Code sets out the procedural rules regulating jury trials and jury selection and includes safeguards that reflect this charter right.

The jury selection process is a hearing held for the purposes of selecting qualified members to form the jury. Typically, persons referred to as prospective jurors are identified and summoned in accordance with provincial or territorial laws, and directed to attend at a specified courthouse or other location at a specified date and time in order to partake in a jury selection process. Being summoned for jury duty does not necessarily mean that a person will be asked to serve on the jury. However, compliance with the summons is mandatory, and people may only be excused from jury duty for certain reasons, including where it would cause personal hardship for them to serve.

The COVID-19 pandemic and public health requirements for physical distancing posed significant challenges for the jury selection process since it sometimes involves several hundred people being physically present in the same location at the same time. Bill S-4's amendments provide courts with the flexibility to hold jury selection processes with prospective jurors appearing by video conference rather than in person. These amendments aim to not only address the challenges caused by the pandemic, but also optimize the jury selection process beyond the pandemic and moving forward.

Importantly, a key aspect of Bill S-4 will be increased efficiency of the justice system, facilitated by the use of technology. The amendments enable a court to allow or require prospective jurors to participate by video conference so long as the court considers it appropriate and the accused person and Crown prosecutor consent to the jury selection process occurring this way.

Where a court allows a prospective juror to participate by video conference, it would be that individual's choice whether they want to participate in person or remotely. Where the court requires prospective jurors to participate in a jury selection process by video conference, it will need to approve a location that is equipped with the technological infrastructure for them to participate by those means, such as a community centre or a courtroom set up with the requisite equipment.

• (1205)

If the court does not approve such a location, it will only be able to permit prospective jurors to participate by video conference from another location, such their home or office, if they choose to participate that way. However, in this case, the court will also need to provide the option for prospective jurors to participate in the jury selection process in person.

These amendments aim to maintain the representativeness of the jury selection process in two ways.

First, they facilitate the participation of persons in the jury selection process by reducing the burdens and barriers of attending in person. Although participating by video conference from home or the office would not eliminate the need to take time off work, it would likely lessen the time commitment required compared to commuting to the courthouse and waiting sometimes several hours for the process to commence. This can facilitate the participation of prospective jurors living in rural or remote areas by minimizing travel time and costs, and help those who need to find child care or who hold precarious employment by reducing the time required for child care or the time they need to take off work. These changes would both reduce the burden for individual jurors and enhance the efficiency of the overall system.

Second, the changes would ensure that persons who do not have access to adequate video conferencing technology or who have a limited understanding of the technology will continue to be able to participate in the jury selection process and ultimately form part of the trial's jury.

Our government recognizes that there is a digital divide in Canada and that many Canadians, particularly those in rural and remote areas, do not have adequate access to a high-speed and stable Internet connection. Although the government is committed to closing the divide, the amendments would ensure that at least a properly equipped location or an option to appear in person will always be available to prospective jurors to ensure participation by as many Canadians as possible.

The bill's amendments to the jury selection process also include important safeguards. As mentioned previously, prior to permitting or acquiring prospective jurors to participate by video conference, both the accused person and the prosecutor will need to consent to such an order being made. Also, the court will need to determine that making such an order is appropriate by considering listed factors, including the challenges related to the in-person participation of prospective jurors, their privacy and security, and the accused person's right to a fair and public hearing.

Government Orders

I would also like to take a moment to touch on the related proposals that would permit the use of electronic or automated means to randomly select prospective jurors during the jury selection process. The current process is both time- and resource-intensive, as it requires a large number of physical cards with juror identification information on them to be manually created for each prospective juror and then manually drawn as well. This amendment would provide courts with the option of a more efficient and less resource-draining process. Along with the amendments previously discussed, it also aims to optimize the jury selection process beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

I believe this bill helps transform and modernize our criminal justice system while ensuring respect for all persons involved in the criminal court process, including accused persons and prospective jurors. A more efficient justice system will benefit all Canadians, and I ask that all members of the House support the passage of this bill as quickly as possible.

• (1210)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech. We sit on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates together.

My colleague knows that the backlog in Canada's justice system is not a new issue. The government has known that the system has needed an overhaul since before the Liberals first took office after the previous Harper government. I am wondering why they took almost a full year before bringing this legislation back. It is essentially a carbon copy of a bill first introduced in the last Parliament.

The member knows that I live in a remote, rural community, and it takes me 11 hours to get here. There are 31 communities in my riding. What specific steps will the government take to ensure that Canadians who live in remote and rural communities, where Internet connections are less stable, receive equitable access to Internet to participate in a jury summons remotely, just as urban Canadians do where he lives?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, I respect very much the work of my hon. colleague. We sit together at the OGGO committee, and I really enjoy working with him and collaborating on projects.

Bill S-4 would take concrete steps to make the Canadian justice system more participatory. It would remove many barriers. It would allow more rural, northern and remote communities to access and participate in Canada's justice system. It would allow more Canadians with disabilities to participate, for example, in the jury selection process. It would also allow a lot of parents, the moms and dads who face barriers in terms of child care, to participate in the Canadian justice system.

I can tell the member about our government's record and the historic investments in expanding broadband to rural and remote communities across Canada. We have put record amounts of funding through the universal broadband fund. These are exactly the types of measures and concrete steps we are putting forward to make sure that Canadians from coast to coast to coast, in urban areas and rural and remote areas, are able to fully participate in the life of our country, and that includes the Canadian justice system.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed my hon. colleague's speech.

As everyone knows, we will be voting in favour of this bill. That said, I get the impression that anytime we talk about Canada's Criminal Code, we are always putting out fires instead of taking in-depth action. It is a bit like modernizing the Income Tax Act, which we have been talking about for several years. Modernizing the Criminal Code and the rules governing the overall operation of the Canadian justice system requires a deep reflection and comprehensive review. Society is changing. We know more about such things as mental illness, prevention and rehabilitation, especially in Quebec.

We will vote in favour of the bill, but rather than always dealing with the Criminal Code in piecemeal fashion, should we not do a comprehensive review of the whole act and modernize it once and for all, for the good of our constituents? What does my colleague think?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the stated support for this important bill.

Certainly, this is about modernizing Canada's justice system. It is one step, but it is a concrete step. I know that my colleague would appreciate the fact that Bill S-4 was informed by dialogue between the federal government and the provinces and territories. Bill S-4 is a product of the Action Committee on Court Operations in Response to COVID-19, which was chaired by the justice minister and the chief justice. Collaboration and consultation are at the heart of this bill, and it is just one piece of the fuller modernization of the Canadian criminal justice system.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member was elected in 2019, when I think the bill was introduced, I am wondering whether he discussed it with his leader at the time and said that in order to get the bill passed, he should not call an unnecessary election, since it was such a priority.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, this is a concrete step the government is taking in consultation with our provincial and territorial partners and other stakeholders. It is an important step to modernize Canada's justice system to make it more efficient and more participatory. I certainly appreciate the fact that it looks like all members of the House will be supporting this critically important bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts at second reading today.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Bill S-4 would reform the Criminal Code and related acts in order to modernize the criminal justice system here in Canada. The bill seeks to provide courts with greater flexibility in the manner in which they conduct their business, while respecting the rights of all participants in our justice system. As a former litigator, I understand and truly believe in the importance of doing this. While I will detail some of the specific measures included in the bill in my speech today, I would like to take a moment to speak more broadly about why modernizing our justice system is so critical, particularly at this time.

Let us take, for example, gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is on the rise. Frontline organizations saw increases in gender-based violence of about 20% during the pandemic. Domestic violence, in particular, is on the rise. We are at the beginning of our 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. Access to justice is a critical piece of solving this puzzle. We have seen backlogs in the courts due to the pandemic. We have seen increases in the demand for our justice system and, in particular, for the time of our judges. Therefore, freeing up resources and ensuring that judges are available in the courts in order to do the work that Canadians need them to do is of fundamental importance in respect of gender-based violence and all forms of violence in this country. Bill S-4 would go a long way toward ensuring that our justice system is not only modernized but is in fact streamlined, and that additional resources are available for litigants who require them.

I will now speak more specifically to the telewarrant-related amendments of Bill S-4, which have been well received by many witnesses. Witnesses noted that these new provisions would simplify the warrant application process, improve access to judicial services and, very importantly, save police resources.

- (1220)

[Translation]

Under the current Criminal Code provisions on telewarrants, peace officers can apply for and obtain only certain investigative warrants by telephone or other means of telecommunication. The telewarrant regime was enacted in the Criminal Code in 1985, so it is time to reform that system.

It is important to remember that the telewarrant regime was established to provide law enforcement with greater access to judges for the purpose of obtaining search warrants. It was established to make it easier to meet some of the challenges associated with policing in a country so vast that the nearest courthouse can easily be 1,000 kilometres away.

The telewarrant provisions have been amended only occasionally since they were first enacted. For instance, they were amended in 1994 to allow for an applicant to request a search warrant by a means of telecommunication capable of rendering the communication in written form. The purpose at the time was to accommodate new forms of written communication, including the fax machine.

During the pandemic, the courts were able to rely on new technologies to reduce the health risks to those involved in the judicial system. This experience demonstrated the important role that technology can play in addressing challenges in the criminal justice sys-

tem. Accordingly, the expansion of the telewarrant process would provide greater flexibility in how the courts and police can meet the requirements for obtaining investigative tools without having an impact on judicial protections that apply to the issuance of search warrants and other judicial authorizations.

Judges and justices of the peace will continue to rule on these matters in the manner they deem to be most appropriate. With this approach, we are modernizing our judicial system to make justice more efficient and freeing up time and resources for our judges and law enforcement.

Let us talk again about gender-based violence. We know that it is growing at a very alarming rate, and that access to justice is fundamental for women. We are embarking on the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence and we must make the necessary changes to our justice system to ensure better access to justice for all. That is fundamental.

[English]

The amendments to the telewarrant process address the following issues. First, the current telewarrant regime is available for only some warrants and investigative orders under the Criminal Code, such as a general warrant or a warrant to obtain blood samples in impaired driving cases. However, the telewarrant regime cannot be used for many common judicial authorizations sought by law enforcement, such as warrants to seize firearms, warrants for trafficking devices and orders to produce data.

In addition, at the present time, telewarrants, as opposed to warrants obtained by personal attendance, may be issued only in respect of indictable offences, and telewarrant applications may be made only to specially designated justices. Furthermore, while public officers responsible for enforcing federal statutes may apply for Criminal Code search warrants and other judicial authorizations, they can do so only by applying in person.

- (1225)

[Translation]

Given the limited scope of the telewarrant process, police officers spend countless hours on the road and waiting outside the office of the justice of the peace at the courthouse to get warrants that cannot currently be requested by a means of telecommunication.

Bill S-4 replaces the current provisions on telewarrants with a simplified, standardized process that will apply to a wide variety of search warrants, orders and investigative authorizations, while maintaining the protective measures for the issuance of judicial authorizations.

*Government Orders**[English]*

One key element of this new process is that where the search warrant application is submitted by means of a telecommunication that produces a writing, for example, an email, a peace officer will no longer be required to meet the existing precondition that is in place right now, that it has to be impracticable to appear in person.

The current in-person search warrant application process often involves hand delivery of applications by police officers at the courthouse, without even an interaction with a judge. By removing the impracticable appearance in person requirement, search warrant applications submitted in written form will be treated in the exact same way, whether they are submitted electronically or in person.

However, the police officer's ability to make an oral application for a search warrant by phone, for example, will be maintained in situations in which it is impracticable to present the application electronically, for example, where the officer is in a remote location with no Internet access. These changes to the current law on accessing telewarrant regimes promote the use of written applications as a standard approach to be followed by law enforcement when applying for their authorizations.

[Translation]

In closing, making it possible to obtain a wider variety of search warrants and other judicial authorizations through technological means will make the criminal justice system more effective by reducing the number of cases where law enforcement is required to obtain those judicial authorizations in person and to physically submit requests for search warrants.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech on Bill S-4, among other things.

My colleague spoke at length about the justice system, and I think it is important that we have a strong one. In that regard, there is something that Quebec has been calling for for years but that my colleague did not mention in her speech, nor did I see it in Bill S-4, which is before us today. I am talking about the whole issue of judicial appointments. Why is it that Quebec judges are appointed by the federal government?

I think it would make sense for Quebec to choose the judges who will be ruling on cases involving Quebecers. I wonder if her government is open to agreeing to this long-standing request of Quebec's. Is there any chance that might happen one day?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, but he obviously did not read Bill S-4. That is not what we are debating in the House today.

I would be happy to discuss that with him further. I understand very well the issue he raised. However, since it is not part of the bill we are discussing today, I think we should stick to the current topic of debate.

• (1230)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to work with the hon. member across the way. I put this question to another member of the Liberal caucus in their

response to this, but the member could not answer it. I know this member is a learned lawyer with a lot of experience. She spoke at length about how providing resources and materials to the justice system helps access the process of justice.

As a means of addressing the court backlogs, why did the government oppose recommendation 1 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which called on the federal government to remove legal aid funds currently included in the Canada social transfer in favour of a specific earmarked civil legal aid fund for provinces administered under the Department of Justice Canada legal aid program?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I do not sit on the committee in which that debate took place. I would be happy to take cognizance of the evidence that was before the committee. Like any good lawyer, I will not opine on an issue without having all the facts before me. I certainly appreciate the member's work on the Emergencies Act committee and look forward to continuing the conversation with him.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today's technology enables us to do things that used to be much harder to do. My colleague mentioned this in her speech, particularly with regard to court delays.

Does my colleague believe that this bill makes sufficient improvements to ensure that fewer cases are thrown out because of the Jordan decision?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, more needs to be done. I agree with my colleague. The question is whether the bill does enough. I think more could be done. As mentioned earlier, Bill S-4 was introduced in the previous Parliament, and we are receiving it from the other place.

I believe it will improve access to justice and ease the burden on judges, which is good. Is that the end of the story? The answer is no. More needs to be done.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the same question I asked the previous member from the government, who did not seem to be able to answer the question. This member was also a member of the government in the last Parliament, when a similar bill was introduced, but the Prime Minister called an unnecessary and early election.

If the bill was such a priority for the government, did the member, as a member of the government then, raise the issue that an election should not be called while we had this kind of legislation pending?

Government Orders

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question to the best of my ability. In my opinion, that election was important. It was a question that was put to Canadians, and Canadians went to the ballot. When Parliament is dissolved, there are always bills before the House that unfortunately do not get passed due to the fact that an election is called. The fact that this bill has returned in this session and could potentially move quickly with the co-operation of all members of the House, is something I feel is important. If all members of the House agree on the importance of this legislation, I am not sure why we cannot move swiftly in order to pass it.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak to Bill S-4. I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac. We are looking forward to hearing his comments as well.

As we all know, the goal of this bill is to increase the efficiency, the effectiveness and the accessibility of the criminal justice system in response to the challenges that we had with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed to the enormous backlog that we have in the criminal justice system today.

The Conservatives have been raising concerns about delays and potential for criminals to simply walk free due to the Supreme Court's decision on Jordan. That decision said that no more than 18 months could pass between laying a charge and the end of a trial case in provincial courts or 30 months for cases in superior courts. We have seen a number of cases throughout Canada, provincially, certainly exceeding the 18 months over the last couple of years.

In the interest of serving justice, why would we not implement all the modern tools and resources at our disposal today to maximize productivity?

The resources being considered include amending the process for peace officers to apply and obtain a warrant using telecommunication rather than appear in person and expanding the ability to conduct fingerprinting of the accused at a later date, in exceptional circumstances, should fingerprinting not previously have been taken. The justice would have the discretion to determine what would be considered necessary in these circumstances.

Also being considered is expanding the power of courts to make case management rules permitting court personnel to deal with administrative matters for accused who are not presented by counsel. We currently have a case in Saskatoon to which this certainly applies. Currently, this only applies to those represented by counsel.

Also being considered is expanding the ability for the accused and offenders to appear remotely by audio conference or even video conference in certain circumstances and the allowing of the participation of prospective jurors in the jury selection process by video conference if deemed appropriate and if the prosecutor and the accused consent, as well as using electronic and automatic means to select jurors.

Some of these modernizations are beneficial from both a safety and a financial perspective. For example, participating virtually would cut down on the transportation time and the cost and the resources needed to transport and protect the accused.

As we know, transportation costs are skyrocketing, it seems like every day. We all know that. It is not an insignificant consideration, considering the price of diesel and gas, especially in remote and northern communities.

The federal ombudsman for victims of crime has also raised a number of concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the justice system, which must be carefully weighed in the consideration of Bill S-4.

The ombudsman pointed out that accessing justice in remote areas of the country, where bandwidth and Internet access remain an issue, could have a negative impact on the delivery of justice. We would not want to see that.

She also flagged the issue of ensuring that jurors remain anonymous and the potential to compromise their privacy with facial recognition software. For some victims and their families, it is an important part of their healing process to see the accused and the offenders in person or by video conference. In these situations, the use of a telephone would certainly deprive them of this opportunity.

The needs of the victim must, and I repeat, must always be weighed when considering an amendment to the Criminal Code.

● (1235)

Access to the Internet for rural Canadians has been a long issue in our country. The current government has promised for years to improve access to the Internet, and we know that this is a big issue in rural Saskatchewan, where I live, and certainly in remote and northern spots in Canada. It is blotchy at best, as it cuts in and out, and it has been an issue for the last seven years that the government has been in office.

Not everyone has access to the Internet. We saw this during COVID where schools tried to participate in classrooms and some did not even have access to a computer. There are issues with the Internet, which is a concern for prospective jurors to appear by video conference during the jury selection.

A jury summons, as we all know, is a very serious responsibility. However, I think many Canadians simply cannot take time off, particularly if one is a small business owner. It is near impossible for many to be compensated properly. As we all know, time is money and for the majority in our country, the two are certainly hard to fit in when someone does open that letter up and has been selected for jury duty.

Government Orders

Our legal system, without question, and we have talked about it for the last two days in this place, needs to improve. Bill S-4 aims to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and accessibility of the criminal justice system in response to the challenges that we have heard of over the last two years with the pandemic. The bill would also clarify and somewhat broaden the circumstances under which accused individuals, the offenders and others involved in criminal proceedings, may appear by audio conference or video conference.

I want to step back and have members think about the horrible incident we had at the James Smith reserve in my province of Saskatchewan, where, unfortunately, 11 people lost their lives over a warrant that had been out for months for Myles Sanderson.

If members recall, Sanderson became one of the worst mass murderers in Canadian history. That day was September 4. Sanderson murdered 11 and injured 18 others during an early morning killing spree. In total, when Sanderson did die, he had been charged with 125 crimes. James Smith is a small community, roughly about 1,900, in northeast Saskatchewan. Therefore, when we see tragedies like this occur, we often have to ask ourselves if we could have prevented this. The warning signals were there for months, if not years.

• (1240)

It is not a coincidence that, since 2015, the violent crime rate in Canada has gone up 32%. This is a staggering statistic that for which the government must answer.

The community of James Smith is now left to pick up the pieces of this senseless act. The community has been victimized. Victims should be given at least as much consideration as offenders, but in Bill S-4, they are not even mentioned once. This soft-on-crime agenda by the Liberal government is not serving justice in our country.

The bill follows other pre-pandemic efforts to modernize the criminal justice system and reduce the delays in court proceedings. Delays in the criminal justice were already a serious issue before the pandemic. The measures contained in Bill S-4 would both modernize and make it more efficient, hopefully, for certain aspects of the delivery of justice.

Several family members have come forward in recent weeks with traumatic stories from the James Smith Cree Nation tragedy. Their stories are a crucial part in the healing process in the delivery of justice on that reserve. These are people we must be mindful of when crafting, carefully, this legislation. If we get the bill right, it will balance the need to improve efficiency with the rights of the people it serves, and always consider the victims and their families as a cornerstone of any justice legislation.

• (1245)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-4 takes into consideration the idea of technology and the experiences we had during the pandemic. The judicial system sees the benefits of having video conferencing and incorporating that. It is legislation that has been around for quite a while now. It even predates the last federal election.

I understand the Conservatives will be supporting the legislation, and they have taken the opportunity to add additional comments. The additional comments leave the impression that the Conservatives are tough on crime and that they think about the victims. They can say what they like but it is important to recognize that I believe all parties in the chamber understand and have a great deal of sympathy and empathy for victims. We have a judicial system to protect the interests of all Canadians. It is something of which we can be proud.

Does the member not feel that given the very nature of the support of the legislation that we can all get behind it? It is important to recognize technology and the advancements of it.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I brought up the victims, because they are not mentioned in Bill S-4. The tragedy in James Smith Cree Nation in Saskatchewan happened on September 4. Now we are at the end of November. Many families and relatives have been victimized more than ever over the last three months. We have not spoken to that.

Every day, the Saskatoon Star Phoenix or other news organizations in Saskatchewan talk about the healing process. It might take months, if not years, if ever to forget what happened when Myles Sanderson took the lives of 11 people.

There is no question that we need to modernize the justice system. If we had the time, we probably should modernize the House of Commons. We get stuck in our ways over the years and the decades, but this is one thing on which we can all agree. The justice system needs to end the backlog and get people in front of the courts sooner rather than later.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, approximately 80% of communication is non-verbal. An individual can say something and their face and movements will convey something different. Although video conferencing allows people to see each other, part of the message is lost because of the framing, lighting or other factors. Conversely, the message can also be amplified for the same and other reasons. It can lead to misinterpretation, both in the case of jury selection or the reaction of suspects.

I would like to know if, in cases such as the ones I described, my colleague could provide some solutions to avoid judicial mistakes being made because of the misinterpretation of non-verbal clues.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a very good point. Today, we are on screens. Sometimes when they zoom in, someone is fidgeting. We do not see that.

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I think of the court case and jury selection in a very controversial court case about Colton Boushie in North Battleford, Saskatchewan a few years ago. There was a lot of finger pointing and questions about who was on the jury and who had been declined. We will have to work through this. There is no perfect answer. The member is right. We often see in the House of Commons that the video or the sound is not as good.

There will be challenges, certainly, going forward when we do video conferencing or even audio conferencing.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my sympathies to my colleague for the horrific events that happened in Saskatchewan, his province, and the James Smith Cree Nation. I think all Canadians have been horrified by that.

He spoke a lot about the failures of the Liberal government to deal with crime and policing adequately. I probably do not agree how that should happen, but I think we can both agree that the Liberals can and must do much more to make our judicial system and our policing system strong.

The member was very critical of the Liberal government. I wonder if he sees his Conservative government in Saskatchewan as also having some obligations with regard to that joint jurisdiction of policing and justice.

• (1250)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I think all provincial jurisdictions are looking at justice right now. Whether in Saskatchewan or the member's province of Alberta, these are questions that are being spoken about every day. Whether in Regina or Edmonton, there are changes that have to be made, and provincial governments are looking at this, just as we are in Ottawa.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise here today to speak in the House about Bill S-4. We have been spending some time reviewing the attributes of the bill and the importance of making sure we address the backlog issue in the criminal justice system and the ways we can better expedite that. This is obviously in relation to the aftermath and effects of COVID-19 and the ever-increasing backlogs. One way of addressing them is to make sure that the technology available and disposable to us is utilized effectively to help address issues where possible.

That is why overall in principle we support the bill. There may be some friendly amendments we want to see passed through the process of the bill working its way through the House, but the need to address the challenges and the backlogs in the criminal justice system should be paramount.

There is a rising frustration with the backlog issue and people who are facing delays in justice. There is an expression for this: Justice delayed is ultimately justice denied. We need to do whatever we can as parliamentarians to effectively address that backlog and make sure that justice is delivered fairly, equitably and expeditiously.

In preparation for my remarks today, I could not help but think of an old country song. I think it is a folk song. I will not sing it today, as all members would leave here very quickly, but it is an old song they may recognize:

There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza,
There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza, a hole.

Then she says:

So fix it dear Henry, dear Henry, dear Henry,
So fix it dear Henry, dear Henry, fix it.

Then he goes through all of the excuses about straw and needing an axe, which will not work because it is dull. Then she says to use a rock and sharpen the axe. Well, he cannot find a rock. Then she says they will get water and fix that.

They go back and forth, and the bottom line is that the excuses kept coming for not addressing the hole in the bucket. He kept offering up reasons as to why it could not be fixed. The hole never got addressed, but the excuses kept being offered. Well, I stand in the House today to say that there is a hole in the justice bucket, dear Speaker, dear Speaker, and we need to address the hole.

It is not just the backlogs, so today I want to address the bigger issue, which is stopping the revolving door into and out of our prison system.

We cannot address the backlog issue without discussing the bigger picture. How do we make sure that those who have committed crimes, served their time, paid their debt to society and returned back to their communities do not re-enter the judicial system, clog it up again and create more backlogs? The best way to do that is to address the hole in the bucket, as it were, and make sure we are addressing the rates of recidivism and how we can collectively get those rates down.

The best way we can do that is through effective partnerships. Yes, government has a role. Yes, the judicial system has a role. However, so do some tremendous organizations and groups in our country, across the nation, that help make sure we address the root causes of the hole in the individual's bucket.

How do we do that? It is not just by reaching across the aisle here to get good legislation passed, which is important and one step, and making sure that bills are improved upon and made the best they can be to address backlogs. It is also by looking at the best practices around the world, not just here at home within our country, where there are some great practices having great results that need to be looked at. Let us look across the world for systems and programs that are having a tremendous effect in reducing the overall rates of recidivism.

This is a passion for me. In the last Parliament, I had the privilege of seeing my private member's bill, Bill C-228, pass and become a law thanks to the overwhelming support of members on both sides of the aisle. I am very thankful for that and had good input on that bill from various parties. We saw it come out of the Senate unanimously and it became a law in June 2021. That bill was for addressing recidivism and making sure we do what we can to bring those rates down and stop the revolving door into and out of our prison system.

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At the time, just a year and a half ago, when I proposed the bill and the bill went through, the rates of recidivism in this country were close to 25%. That means that up to 25% of people who served their time and got out of federal prison were ending up back in the criminal justice system within two years.

• (1255)

That is a tragic statistic, but what is even more tragic is that those stats have gotten worse in the last 18 months. I can tell members that right now it is nearly a third, or close to 33%. According to the latest StatsCan statistics on the Department of Justice website, over 30% of adult offenders are finding themselves reconvicted. Talk about a hole in the bucket. We have a massive hole in the bucket in the criminal justice system in Canada that needs to be addressed.

Some would say we have to do “this”, and it is going to be the ultimate answer, or we could do “that”, and it is going to be the ultimate answer. I think it is going to take different types of approaches to get the balance right to correct this problem.

There is a punitive role in criminal justice. There absolutely has to be adequate punishment for severity of crimes, absolutely. If someone does a crime, time has to be served, and we must make sure they pay their debt to society, especially for heinous and violent crimes. That is absolutely critical, and we advocate for that on this side of the House.

However, we also need to recognize that there is a role for restorative justice. It is a role for those who come alongside and are complementary on the back end to make sure that those who have committed a crime, once they have done their time, are not only getting help while they are serving their time. Perhaps this is done with new and innovative programs, like what is being proposed by my hon. colleague from Kelowna—Lake Country with her recent private member's bill to address addictions while people are incarcerated. It would be a great step in the right direction to start some of that good programming while they are on the inside.

Let us also make sure that when they get on the outside, we are partnering with effective organizations that are doing tremendous work. Then, once people are released from the prison system, they can find a place to go where they can get their education completed, get 12-step programming, get life skills development and get job opportunities and placements. Often when people come out of the criminal justice system, it is hard for them to find meaningful employment because they have a criminal record.

How can we effectively work together with other organizations to find solutions, not only at the front end while they are incarcerated but also once they have been released?

What would go a long way in addressing the backlogs in the criminal justice system is reducing crime overall. We need to deter crime with a punitive approach to make sure that if someone does criminal activity, there is a consequence. However, there also needs to be a restorative approach that makes sure that if someone has messed up and made a mistake, we have supports that can bring them the help they need to make sure they do not go back to a life of crime. I think this two-pronged approach is going to help address the proverbial hole in the bucket that needs to be addressed.

I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to address this today and to be in the House. I cannot help but think of all those who are serving in the field, volunteering and helping to make a difference in keeping people from going back to a criminal lifestyle. I pay tribute to them today. I thank the volunteer organizations, non-profit organizations, chaplains and others who are doing the hard work, the necessary work, the work of coming alongside the wounded in our society to make sure they are getting the help they need. Let us help our communities as a whole, help victims and make sure that those who perpetrate crimes do not reoffend and that they help others in need.

With that, I conclude my remarks today, and I thank the House for the opportunity to address this. Let us do all we can to fix the hole in the justice bucket.

• (1300)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I echo my friend's final sentiments with respect to those who work in the system, especially the chaplains. I was able to meet with many prison chaplains this week.

I want to get to the bill. The substance of the bill is to modernize our court system. Can the member highlight the top three things in the bill that could help make the system more efficient?

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I commend my hon. colleague for meeting with the chaplains this week. I think that is important. The role the chaplains play in the system is critical. Often, it does not get nearly the appropriate acknowledgement it should, so I thank him for doing that.

What I like about the bill is that it addresses the backlog issue and uses technology to try to make sure that people in remote areas or rural areas, who would not have normal access or could not get in easily, are able to be part of the process and help streamline it. It is so important that when we are considering any bill to do with criminal justice and justice reform, we address the rural component.

We have a rise in rural crime, and there seems to be a disproportionality in the level of response between those who live in urban centres and those who live in rural areas and small towns, like where I come from. It is important that we get techniques and technology in place to help address those kinds of issues.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is the classic tough on crime approach being promoted once again. I agree in principle. We have to stand up and violent criminals have to serve their sentence or at least enough of their sentence for it to fit the crime.

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Nonetheless, there are many other factors to consider. Every inmate in the Canadian prison system costs \$110,000 or \$120,000 a year. We have to keep that in mind. We also need to bear in mind that the longer the sentence, the less chance there is of rehabilitation.

When inmates are identified as having potential for reintegration, society is much better off investing in that inmate's reintegration and rehabilitation. Obviously, if the inmate wants nothing to do with that, then he can serve his full sentence. I have no problem with that.

I think the problem has much more to do with the laxness and gaps in the parole system, as well as the pressure on the Parole Board of Canada to release inmates before they fully serve the sentence they were given for their crime.

I would like to know what data my colleague is using to claim that it would be more effective, when it comes to reintegration and public safety, to have tougher sentences for crime, as he mentions.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if my hon. colleague heard my address, but I feel like I spent quite a bit of time talking about the absolute necessity of the two-pronged approach. We certainly need what we call tough-on-crime measures and want the punishment to meet the crime for heinous crimes that have major consequences on victims of those crimes. People out there must understand that we do not take crime lightly. There are consequences for violent, heinous crimes and there has to be a punishment for them.

At the same time, we need to be working hard on the restorative side and putting in place effective partnerships with organizations that are having tremendous effects in dealing with the root causes of some of these crimes. Whether it is for addictions or other social ailments, we need effective partnerships that can work on the inside when people are serving sentences and on the outside when they get out.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words from the member. I think we were all enlightened and enthralled by what he had to say. It is certainly a topic that has captured the interest of many Canadians. Hopefully, given that magnitude, I can take some lessons from him and one day live up to that bar.

He spoke about rural crime. That is something my communities have been facing for quite some time now. A number of pieces of legislation passed by the government have created problems, and police and prosecutors in my area are raising a flag about them. I am wondering if the member can expand a bit more on that topic.

• (1305)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed hon. colleague. He always has questions that are astute and astounding, and I am forever thankful for that.

I will say this. The issue of rising crime in rural communities needs to become a priority and a priority fast. The numbers are staggering. We are finding that remote and rural areas are having a harder and harder time getting access to law enforcement, and our

law enforcement resources in the rural and remote areas are stretched to their limits.

We need greater investment in the area of law enforcement. We also need to make sure there are consequences for the actions and crimes of those who live in rural areas. Let us make sure the people in those rural areas know that the government has their backs. We are going to be at their side and do everything we can to empower them to defend their property and stand up for their rights.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton Strathcona.

I am pleased today to have an opportunity to speak to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts on the COVID-19 response and other measures. This bill would increase our justice system's efficiency and ensure that all Canadians have equal access.

The COVID-19 pandemic altered our everyday lives, including necessitating new ways of accessing the criminal justice system. The solutions invented to accommodate our circumstances proved efficient and should be used going forward to optimize the ways in which criminal trials are conducted in Canada. This bill's proposed amendments support the increased use of technology in criminal courts across Canada. This has a variety of applications, such as the use of technology in the jury selection process, remote participation of prospective jurors and remote appearances for accused persons and offenders.

I want to focus first on the amendments relating to the jury selection process. The amendments would enable a court to allow or require prospective jurors to participate by video conference so long as the court considers it appropriate and the accused person and Crown prosecutor consent to the jury selection process occurring this way. When a court allows prospective jurors to participate by video conference, it will be an individual's choice whether they want to participate in person or remotely.

Importantly, Bill S-4 accompanies the government's efforts to increase remote Internet access across our country and close the digital divide. However, while we work toward efficient Canada-wide Internet access, there are measures in place to help individuals who may not have optimal connection. When the court requires prospective jurors to participate in the jury selection process by video conference, it would need to approve a location equipped with the technological infrastructure for them to participate by those means, such as a community centre or courtroom set up with the requisite equipment.

If the court does not approve such a location, it will only be able to permit prospective jurors to participate by video conference from other locations, such their homes or offices, if they choose to participate that way. However, in this case, the court would also need to provide the option for prospective jurors to participate in the jury selection process in person.

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These amendments would help our jury system represent the face of Canada. Increased representativeness would be ensured by first reducing the barrier of attending in person. Prospective jurors living in rural or remote areas would enjoy minimized travel time and costs, and those who need to find child care or who hold precarious employment would experience reduced time required to find alternative child care or time needed off work. It would also reduce emissions, I will add.

Second, the changes would ensure that persons who do not have access to adequate video conferencing technology, or who have limited understanding of the technology itself, would continue to be able to participate in the jury selection process and ultimately form part of the trial jury. These are critical measures to bridge discrepancies in Internet access while we work to shore up connection across Canada, including in my home province of New Brunswick.

In addition to improving the Criminal Code regime governing the use of technology, other reforms in this bill would improve access to justice and efficiencies in our criminal courts. For example, Bill S-4 would expand the power of courts to make case management rules to allow court personnel to deal directly with unrepresented accused persons on administrative matters for out-of-court proceedings. Currently this is only permitted if the accused person is represented by counsel. This may represent a relatively small change to the Criminal Code, but I believe it would go a long way to improving access to justice for unrepresented accused persons.

It is very important to note that these uses of technology are optional and subject to the judge's discretion, as opposed to being mandatory. I want to stress this point. These measures would assist courts in continuing to deliver justice in an effective and efficient way. The proposed reforms would also better equip courts with the tools to keep things moving during challenging times, because of a pandemic, a flood or any other situation that could hinder physical access to the courts in the future. While these reforms may be relied on in a more significant way in managing exceptional and emergency circumstances, they would not be limited to such circumstances. They would apply on a permanent basis to ensure that the options to use technology continue to be available to our courts for years to come.

Another important element of increased efficiency in this bill pertains to digital fingerprinting. Bill S-4 would amend the Criminal Code to allow a court to issue a summons for fingerprinting if an accused was previously required to appear but such identification was not completed for exceptional reasons. In addition, courts would be able to make an order for the fingerprinting of an accused person being released on bail. These reforms would facilitate the efficient collection of fingerprints, which is critical for the smooth functioning of our court system. When courts operate efficiently, more Canadians access justice and our country is better off.

The expanded telewarrant system is also critical. Expanding the possibility of obtaining a greater number of search warrants and other judicial authorizations by means of telecommunication would contribute to efficiency gains in the criminal justice system by reducing the need for in-person attendance and physical delivery of search warrant applications by law enforcement. Indeed courts have found that seeing a complainant or witness face to face is not fun-

damental to our system of justice, and the Criminal Code has permitted remote attendance by witnesses for more than 20 years.

• (1310)

Subsection 800(2.1) has, since 1997, authorized summary conviction trials by video for accused persons in custody. Sections 714.1 and 714.2 have permitted appearances by witnesses by video conference since 1999.

Bill C-75, which was passed by the House in 2019, modernized and facilitated some appearances by audio or video conferences of all persons involved in criminal cases, including judges, under certain circumstances.

Rather than overhauling criminal procedure, Bill S-4 continues to permit proceedings by remote appearance. This bill picks up where Bill C-75 left off, in light of the experience gained and the questions that arose with the use of technology in the criminal courts during the pandemic.

I would like to personalize this for a bit, if I may. Before I joined the House, my work was centred on supporting youth at risk in the education system. From time to time, students would find themselves interacting with the justice system. I had the opportunity to help them navigate these public institutions, understand their rights, and when the circumstances permitted, to also pursue justice. I remember a particularly frustrating time in which unnecessary delays prolonged the personal suffering of a survivor of sexual assault, adding to their trauma. I remember the anger and frustration this evoked and the feelings of helplessness for all involved.

Canadians deserve a justice system that is accessible, efficient and effective, and that provides true access to justice for all. The pandemic has taught us that technology can be used to help make the justice system work better for all people who come in contact with it. Bill S-4 proposes a range of reforms that will make court proceedings more flexible while protecting the rights of participants.

The reforms proposed in Bill S-4 flow from the important work of the action committee on court operations in response to COVID-19, co-chaired by the Minister of Justice and Chief Justice Richard Wagner. They are also informed by important contributions from the provinces and territories, as well as other justice system stakeholders. With Bill S-4, we have the opportunity to improve our justice system by making those good ideas permanent.

Government Orders

Bill S-4 is an example of how we can improve the legal system, but there are other ways we can also discuss pushing things forward. I would like to mention restorative justice, which is an approach that seeks to repair harm by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm to communicate about it and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime.

It will invest in programs for first nations and indigenous courts as well, creating more pathways for healing by including indigenous knowledge and traditions, restorative justice practices and elders in the court process.

It will reform how sexual assault cases are prosecuted in Canada through a feminist equality lens.

It will ensure that everyone, regardless of income level, should be able to use the remedies that Canadian laws and the Canadian legal system provide.

It focuses on a system truly built on preventing youth crime by addressing its underlying causes, responding to the needs of young persons, and providing guidance and support.

Without continuing our work on multiple fronts, we cannot claim that there will be true justice for anyone who is involved in legal proceedings. Bill S-4 is part of the solution, and we need to continue to build on it to restore confidence in our legal system.

In 2022, the national justice survey revealed that 49% of Canadians are not confident the Canadian criminal justice system is fair to all people, and that 39% think it is not accessible to all. These numbers are incredibly alarming, and Bill S-4 is a step in the right direction.

In conclusion, Bill S-4's measures are both practical and necessary. They would assist the provinces and territories, which are responsible for the criminal administration of justice, by giving criminal courts additional tools to tackle delays. They would also benefit everyday court users. For these reasons, I urge everyone in the House to support Bill S-4.

• (1315)

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will pay tribute to my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac, because I am going to quote a statistic shortly.

As has been signalled, Conservatives support the measures that go to modernizing our system, decreasing the backlogs and speeding up justice. However, we are concerned about the lack of focus on victims. As my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac illustrated, recidivism is up 25%. In the earlier intervention we heard that violent crime is up 32%.

Why is this happening when all of us have it in our best interest to reduce recidivism and violent crime?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to reiterate the great work of the member for Tobique—Mactaquac, a fellow New Brunswicker.

It is an issue that should concern us all. We certainly do not want reoffenders to come back into our justice system. We want to make sure that while they are there we can work on whatever needs they

might be dealing with. We know that many who are incarcerated in federal institutions are experiencing mental health issues and high rates of substance abuse and alcoholism. It is a multi-faceted issue and it is going to take a multi-faceted approach. I really believe that is what government is trying to do with this bill as well. I think improving access through video conferencing and telecommunications will also help victims.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention this afternoon was very interesting. I was particularly struck by her personalized experience with youth incarceration, and she did speak about how we need to do much more to ensure indigenous people, BIPOC people and young people are not disproportionately represented within our judicial system. I am wondering what very specific steps she thinks would be next in line for the government to take.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned a bit about restorative justice circles. This is something we are seeing used a lot in community, and I would love to see this applied more broadly, for more Canadians to access this indigenous lens, this approach. Again, it is to go toward healing, which is something that really needs to be added into this conversation.

The use of elders as well in the courtroom is really important. We see the use of the Gladue principles that have been put in place in court systems to allow judges to use that discretion and take into consideration someone's background and the trauma they might have experienced that led them to interact with the justice system. These are all really concrete pieces.

I would also like to highlight Bill C-5. I know it is a bit controversial for some members on the opposite side, but we need to address the discrimination our justice system has perpetrated upon indigenous Canadians and members of racialized communities. Reducing those mandatory minimums and using a judge's discretion is critically important, and it is going to ensure justice for all.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Fredericton, New Brunswick, for sharing her experience working with youth at risk. It is such an important field for addressing these concerns on the front end and making sure we are doing all we can to keep as many as possible from entering the criminal justice system.

Government Orders

Also, I would love to hear the hon. member's comments and reflection on the critical importance of effective partnerships with non-profit, faith-based organizations and indigenous communities on addressing the issue of recidivism and putting in place programs. This applies not only on the inside while people are completing their sentences but also on the back end when they are being released into the community and how we can most effectively work together with them. I would appreciate her comments.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, it is about applying a trauma-informed lens, so those discussions could happen while someone is incarcerated, in hopes that it would set them on the right path once they are on the outside and rejoining society after they have paid their debt. I mentioned some of the staggering statistics. The Mental Health Commission of Canada, and this is from 2020, said that 73% of men and 79% of women who are federally incarcerated have some kind of mental health issue as well. These are things we absolutely need to use as a lens when we are discussing these kinds of issues and reforms in the justice system, particularly when it comes to youth, which is of course a very deep passion of mine.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a deep honour that I am allowed to stand in this place and represent the incredible people of Edmonton Strathcona, and particularly to speak about Bill S-4.

Bill S-4 is all about increasing access to justice. It would make sure that all Canadians have the equal right or the equal access to our judicial system. It would remove barriers to justice and do all of the things that everyone in the House will and can support.

I am very happy to see this legislation. I commend the government for bringing this legislation forward. It makes sense. Our judicial system has been neglected. We have not modernized our judicial system to keep up with the times, to stay current and to be as accessible as it could be.

This would make part of our judicial system better. It would increase the use of technology in appropriate ways. It would include increasing audio and video conferencing options, which will vastly improve the ability of people in remote or northern communities to access justice. As I have said, it will modernize our system, and this is an important thing that we need to do as legislators. As parliamentarians, our role is to continuously look at how we can improve our judicial system, how we can make it more accessible and make it better for all Canadians.

The hope is that it would fundamentally fix the backlogs in our system. There were backlogs that we saw during COVID and that we saw even before COVID. The backlogs have meant that justice has been denied. As many have said before me today in the House, justice delayed is justice denied.

I am happy that the government brought this forward, and the New Democrats will be supporting it. However, I have some serious concerns about why it took the government so long to bring it back. It was something that was put before us in the last Parliament. An unnecessary election was called and therefore it died on the Order Paper. The election was in September 2021, so it has been 14 months since that time, and we have not seen this legislation before

now. While I am commending the government for bringing it forward, I would have liked to see this come sooner.

When I look at this legislation, I have to reflect on what more could be done. We have seen some real challenges and questions, both at a provincial level and a federal level, in terms of appointing judges, making sure that judges are adequately appointed and making sure that questions around how judges are appointed are transparent and Canadians can trust that.

One area that is very important to me is the failure to support legal aid properly. This is both a federal and a provincial jurisdiction. As a member of Parliament who represents the citizens of Alberta, I have to say that Alberta is in crisis right now with our legal aid system.

I will read from an article in *The Globe and Mail* that was published earlier this year by Deborah Hatch, who is the director of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers and the past president of the Criminal Trial Lawyers' Association of Alberta. She said, "For as long as the provincial government resists increasing legal aid funding in a substantial and immediate way, individuals in the justice system, and ultimately our democracy, will suffer." It is quite shocking that, ultimately, our democracy will suffer.

It is clear to me that in recent years, with the failures to appoint judges and with the failures to fully support our legal aid system, in fact, Albertans have had less access to legal services. Albertans' access and ability to interact with our legal services have been reduced. While it is happening in Alberta, and it is a provincial jurisdiction, it is something that all parliamentarians must be watching and be deeply concerned with.

The Canadian Bar Association wrote last month that without adequately funded legal aid, our justice system will continue to deteriorate.

The Alberta Crown Attorneys' Association said, "lawyers in the defence bar who represent the accused through legal aid deserve fair and competitive compensation". However, that is not happening right now in Alberta.

• (1320)

One interesting statistic, when I look at legal aid, that I find fascinating, is in this quote: "Independent research has shown that \$2.25-million is saved for every \$1-million injected into legal aid". Therefore, for every \$1 million that we spend on legal aid, we save two and a half million dollars. Even my very fiscally minded Conservative friends can surely see that this would be a very compelling argument.

Government Orders

I have other concerns with what is happening in Alberta as well. We have a new premier, Danielle Smith, who is proposing a sovereignty act—

• (1325)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. If the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona has an ambition to run provincially and to have a role there, her speech today is not related, by any chance, to the subject of Bill S-4.

I would really appreciate it, Mr. Speaker, if you would point that out to the member.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for that intervention. We do allow a lot of leeway in members' speeches. I know that we are specifically speaking to Bill S-4 and I hope that everybody will keep their comments to that.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that in past Parliaments, when, for example, Rachel Notley was the premier of the Province of Alberta, there were an awful lot of attacks on Rachel Notley. I think it is reasonable when we are talking about justice and about Albertans' access to justice, because Bill S-4 is ultimately about Albertans' and Canadians' access to justice, that I am able to talk about the particular circumstances that my constituents are encountering with regard to access to justice.

When several of my colleagues from the Conservative Party have talked about gun laws and a number of different things during their speeches, I did give them the benefit of the doubt so that they will return that favour when I have the opportunity to speak.

I hope that they will recognize that leeway for me as well, because what I want to talk about next is something that is deeply concerning to me in Alberta as well. It is how our current premier has talked about using the Alberta Human Rights Act to include vaccination status.

Again, I have this quote, and it is from a lawyer, so I certainly hope that my Conservative colleagues can see the link. Lorian Hardcastle, who is the associate professor in the faculty of law at the University of Calgary, said, "vaccination choice is not the same as codifying rights around gender, sexual orientation, race or religion." I also have some very deep concerns that the access to justice for Albertans is being—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am respectfully asking you to really point out to the member that this speech is about Bill S-4, and she must stick to the subject.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

Sometimes I think that my Conservative colleagues live in an alternate reality. We have been sitting in the House and listening to them go on and on about absolutely everything except for this bill. Now we have the hon. member from across the way trying to bring forth a fulsome presentation from the NDP side, and we have these people clutching their pearls.

Could we please allow the hon. member to finish her speech without interruption? That is another thing that they were going on

about, and talking about the threats of pulling out and making this thing go all the way to the end.

Let us just try to keep the hypocrisy in the House to a minimum.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean is rising on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, this is helping us. It demonstrates that we truly have no business being here, in this Parliament, and that Quebec must really become its own country.

I genuinely want to follow up on my honourable colleague's speech and say that I would like it if everyone could stop interrupting, even if it does give us additional ammunition to ensure that we no longer have to sit here and can instead sit in the National Assembly of Quebec, in an independent country.

The Deputy Speaker: I thought the energy was a little low during the last few interventions.

[*English*]

It is good to get it out of everybody's systems.

The member for South Shore—St. Margarets is rising on the same point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Mr. Speaker, I would just point out that the hon. member for Hamilton Centre was complaining about interrupting as he interrupted.

The Deputy Speaker: Do we have it all out of our systems now?

We are speaking to Bill S-4. Let us try to keep to that.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

• (1330)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, what an entertaining time we are having in the House this afternoon.

My colleague from the Bloc Québécois has given me a great opportunity to speak to another issue. I am very proud to be Albertan, of course, but very proud to be a Canadian as well. One of the concerns I have with judicial access for Albertans is around the current Premier of Alberta, Danielle Smith, and her desire to bring in a sovereignty act. A sovereignty act, she has said, means that she will not follow the laws of the land. Therefore, I do have some concerns with that lack of judicial access for Albertans.

I will conclude by saying I support what is in this bill. This bill is long overdue. It should have been brought forward much sooner. We should have been able to debate this in the House much sooner. I hope the government will move this along very fast. We have the support of all parties in the House. I hope the government will consider all those ways that the federal government must fight for our judicial system to have better access and to be accessible for all Canadians, including all Albertans.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, interestingly enough, many of the changes to the legislation we are talking about today originate in the different provinces. There has been a great deal of consultation with provinces around ensuring that we modernize our system. That is something really important to recognize.

It is about building confidence. It is about ensuring Canadians feel that we are keeping up with the times. With technology advancements come opportunities for us to ensure a better, more solid and confident justice system.

Could my colleague provide her thoughts on why it is so important that we continue to look at advances in society from a technological point of view, and how those advances can be beneficial to our judicial system?

Our system is something that I would suggest is looked at around the world as one of the best systems. Other countries come to take a look at Canada's system because of how good it has been.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a lot of insight into that, to be perfectly honest. When I look at our judicial system and look at those who need to interact with our judicial system and with all of the technologies we can use safely, effectively and appropriately, it makes a lot of sense for us to explore. It does make sense for us to try to find ways to, as members of other parties have said, prevent people from entering the judicial system.

If there are technologies we can use, and if there are modernizations we can make, then we have an obligation to do that. There are always downsides to technologies. There are always things we hear about, such as detriments that happen to society with technologies from time to time, but there are also great benefits. It is incumbent on us to take those and benefit from them.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too wish to touch on the technology aspect of Bill S-4. With technology, obviously the Internet is a very important component of that. I know in northern Ontario and across many parts of the country, Internet access is unaffordable, is unattainable and is not reliable for many individuals.

The Liberal government has been in power for seven years, and it has made many bold promises on improving Internet access with very few results in my region and many other rural and remote regions across the country. I wonder if the member opposite has any comments on what the government should be doing to ensure Internet access is stronger across the country.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I represent an urban riding, but as only one of two New Democrats who represent the province of Alberta. I also feel that I often need to think about the needs of progressive voters across Alberta, so I look at these things such as access in remote and rural areas.

I agree with him that what the government has done is made us promises to make Internet available, and to make broadband available, and it has not delivered on that. It has not delivered on that across the country.

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If Bill S-4 is a tool we are going to use to improve our justice system, but we have not yet put in place the infrastructure to allow that tool to be accessed equally by all Canadians, that is a massive problem. The government must do more to reduce costs and make things more accessible for all Canadians in all areas of our country.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech, particularly when she mentioned the importance of reviewing how judges are appointed and avoiding any partisan lists.

Part of what I understand about this bill is that it is designed to avoid or reduce delays. There have been delays that have resulted in major cases being dismissed because of the Jordan decision. Again, it is nice to harness technology, but if there are not enough judges to hear cases, the issues stemming from the Jordan decision will continue.

I am wondering if my colleague has any suggestions for the government so that we do not see a repeat of issues that have occurred in the past as a result of the lack of judges.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, that is a massive problem. We see this across the country. I know that in Alberta this is a big problem. When judges are not being appointed fast enough and we do not have enough judges in place, that interferes with justice for Canadians. We have seen it happening multiple times. We have seen cases having to be cancelled, because there was not that judicial leadership.

The government needs to have a better and more transparent process in place. Another piece of this is that the public does not believe our judges are appointed in a fair, transparent and non-partisan way, so we need to make sure that is happening at both the federal and provincial levels and that we are ensuring we have the adequate level of judges available to make sure our judicial system can continue to run.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the cheering crowd behind me who will make my speech a lot more interesting than it would be otherwise.

I rise today to speak to Bill S-4 and the improvements that we hope it will make to the justice system through telecommunications and technology.

When I prepare a speech, I always seek inspiration by looking at what other intelligent people have already said on the subject. In this case, I referred to what Judge Pierre Dalphond had to say. I know him more as a judge than as a senator. He said that necessity is the mother of all invention. That is how I wanted to open my speech.

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I am, or was, a lawyer in life. I was a civil lawyer. That being said, there are commonalities among all types of practices. I would like to talk about some of the things I experienced as a lawyer where these measures would have made things much more effective. COVID-19 helped to resolve some problems.

About five years ago, a partner and I tried to set up an online divorce service for people who wanted to proceed with mediation amicably but lived some distance apart. Affidavits needed to be signed in order to complete the files. We contacted Quebec's justice minister, but we did not manage to obtain permission for the oaths to be done via video conference. We tried Quebec's Register of Commissioners for Oaths and were told that it was not under their jurisdiction but instead fell to Quebec City. In short, we ended up giving up because it was far too complicated.

Every cloud has a silver lining, though. One of the first things that happened when COVID-19 hit was that virtual swearing-in was allowed. That also prevented a gaggle of lawyers from showing up at court in the morning to set a date. Sometimes they would travel from Montreal to Saint-Jérôme, wait an hour and a half in the hall, spend five minutes in front of a judge, set a date, return home and send legal aid a bill for \$80, end of story.

When COVID-19 hit, a solution was found to the problem of too many people showing up at the courthouse in a pandemic, and we figured out how to do everything virtually within a reasonable period of time. I do hope that Bill S-4 will have that kind of positive impact on the way courts operate.

Here is another example from the civilian side of things, the Tribunal administratif du logement, which updated its operations a few years ago. Now all cases are digitized, because sometimes remote hearings had to be held and it was better not to move physical case files, which tended to get lost on the way from one tribunal to another. Video conferencing made the tribunal as a whole more technologically advanced, and that made things easier for lawyers, who had access to their case files online.

We hope that Bill S-4 will have a positive impact and, more importantly, that we can avoid bad ideas masquerading as good ones. I am going to raise a few of these points.

The bill changes two main types of things. First, it clarifies and expands the rules for remote appearances and seeks to increase the use of technology in the jury selection process. It also expands the telewarrant system under the Criminal Code, allowing a wider variety of search warrants, authorizations and orders, for example, to be obtained through telecommunications.

The main areas amended by Bill S-4 relate to juries. The bill would allow for the use of electronic or other automated means for the purposes of jury selection. It would provide for the participation, in certain circumstances, of prospective jurors in the jury selection process by video conference. This would be only in certain circumstances, with the consent and at the discretion of the court.

It would avoid certain problems. For example, when I would arrive at the courthouse in the morning and see a crowd in the entrance hall, everyone knew that jury selection was taking place. It would avoid bringing together between 100 and 500 people in the same place during a pandemic.

It would also avoid situations where the first 10 jurors to be interviewed can be hand-picked. Another advantage is that it would not result in all potential jurors being in one place together, discussing amongst themselves and giving advice to one another on how to avoid jury duty, because people can be quite creative when they do not want to serve on a jury.

There is something else that Bill S-4 amends: It expands the opportunities for remote appearances by audio conference or video conference in certain circumstances for accused individuals and offenders. I will come back to this and the potential pitfalls. It would also expand the powers of the courts to establish case management rules that permit court personnel to deal with administrative matters for unrepresented accused persons.

• (1340)

Currently, only in cases where an accused is represented by counsel is it possible to communicate with a judge by video conference to deal with routine issues, which can be done much more quickly by video conference. If this measure were also applied to accused persons who are not represented by counsel, then court officials could be used instead of taking up hearing rooms and a judge's time, which could be better spent. This could potentially increase efficiency.

The bill would also permit courts to order fingerprinting, for identification purposes, at the interim release stage or any other stage of the process to avoid delays if fingerprints could not previously have been taken for exceptional reasons. For example, during the arrest, an accused—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I am sorry to interrupt the member for Saint-Jean. There was a problem with the audio, but it is fixed now.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean has 14 minutes left to finish her speech.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I was talking about identification processes and fingerprinting. This bill would allow it to be done at any point in the process because, in certain situations, there is not always an opportunity to do it at the time of the arrest. During the pandemic, it became clear that it is difficult to hold someone's thumb to take their fingerprint while standing a metre away.

Finally, some of the telewarrant provisions would also be replaced, to further expand the type of warrant that could be issued by telecommunication. This does not change the legal threshold for issuing the warrant. It does not change the criteria for granting warrants. It simply frees up judges and police officers who would otherwise have to meet in person to discuss whether issuing a warrant is appropriate.

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There is, however, perhaps a downside to this. Since everything would happen in writing and the arguments would be sent along with an affidavit to the judge, who would then issue the telewarrant, it prevents the judge from being able to ask a police officer questions to get a little more clarification on whether issuing a warrant is appropriate. There are still some pitfalls.

There have already been discussions about this bill. Given that it originated in the Senate, the various stakeholders have submitted their recommendations. The Barreau du Québec has been working hard on this. I would like to come back to one aspect in particular, and that is the part concerning appearances by video conference.

The Barreau du Québec made some recommendations. The bill will clarify, for accused persons, the availability of remote appearances by video conference at preliminary inquiries and trials for indictable offences or offences punishable on summary conviction, including when testimony is heard, but not when evidence is presented before a jury.

Therefore, a jury trial will always take place in person, but there will be exceptions for non-jury proceedings. I would remind members that, in certain cases, video conferencing can hide certain mannerisms or amplify certain facial expressions that could be misinterpreted by a judge or lawyer and alter their perception of an individual's body language during a hearing.

It is also harder to gauge what is happening between the parties when we are not in close proximity to them. For example, if a lawyer passes their client a note, it is not possible to kick someone under the table to indicate that it would be best to keep silent in that moment. This has an impact on our ability to fully understand what is happening at a hearing.

I want to give another example from my practice. When I was working in international family law and dealing with child kidnapping cases, I had to question witnesses in France in a context where we had to make sure that they were always alone in the hearing room to avoid witness contamination. I questioned the first witness, but when I asked him to go and get the other witness because it was her turn to testify, he just pulled his wife into view. She was beside him and had heard the whole thing. There can be concerns about witness contamination, and we can assume that we will not be exempt from that risk if we proceed with Bill S-4.

This is a serious issue. For example, what happens if this kind of irregularity occurs during a trial? Would the trial have to be scrapped? Would the whole thing have to start over? That would mean wasting even more time than if all the witnesses had been there in person from the start. This is something we have to consider.

Here is another issue. People can testify via video conference with the parties' consent and the court's authorization. What happens if an accused becomes aware along the way that their constitutional rights have been violated by the fact that they made that choice, so they decide to switch? Does the whole process have to start over? Does a new hearing date have to be set if the accused is participating remotely? Efficiency can suffer because of that too, and I think that should be one of the factors we consider in our study of this issue.

Another aspect that the Barreau du Québec suggests studying is the long-term repercussions of Bill S-4. We are still in "COVID mode", and we still need to respond to COVID-19, but Bill S-4 will change courtroom proceedings in the long term, even after the pandemic is over. The other problem is that, rather than making remote proceedings the exception, Bill S-4 makes them the norm. That will fundamentally change the face of our justice system.

This could affect the attorney-client relationship. What impact will this have on the lawyer's professional responsibility in recommending, for example, that the client choose to testify remotely? This question will have to be studied.

• (1345)

We will also need to examine the open court issue. Trials are supposed to be public in almost every case. If they are held by video conference, the average person will not have access to them. I am thinking of my colleague from Drummond because I remember how, at one time, seniors used to go and watch hearings at the courthouse and make bets on the outcome, just to pass the time. I cannot help but think of those people, who will be losing an interesting source of entertainment if the courts start operating only by video conference.

The use of video conferencing might also compromise the right to a fair trial. We spoke about non-verbal communication and how it is important in assessing witnesses' credibility. This approach may impact that.

Another issue is that this could create a disparity between large urban centres and the regions. There might be a tendency to think that, since it is easier for people who live far away to do things by video conference, then we should favour that approach for them. In big urban centres, it does not cost witnesses and parties as much to travel, so their court proceedings would always be held in person. That would create a two-tiered justice system. These are some of the issues arising from Bill S-4 that will need to be assessed over the long term.

The Barreau du Québec also recommends deleting the new proposed section 715.241 of the Criminal Code, which allows the court to "require an accused who is in custody and who has access to legal advice to appear by videoconference in any proceeding referred to in those sections, other than a part in which the evidence of a witness is taken". The Barreau du Québec is of the view that this should never be at the court's discretion, that the parties should always have to consent to proceeding by video conference and that it should not be imposed on anyone. The Barreau du Québec also recommends that, before the bill comes into force, we clarify the distinction between an accused who has access to legal advice and one who is represented by counsel in a context where only accused persons with representation can communicate with counsel.

Clients who are receiving legal advice and are in a video conference might not technically have the right to call or request their right to counsel during a trial if they are not formally represented by a lawyer. In a courtroom, they could still get legal advice from a lawyer, if one is present.

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It is important to keep in mind that we need to strike a balance between the convenience of new technology and actual gains in efficiency. We can compare this to the long-term hybrid format people want for the House. When we talk to journalists about changes to the debate format here, they complain about not having direct access to witnesses. For example, when all they can see is a person talking on screen, they do not get a general sense of what is happening in the committee room. They do not see people's reactions to what the witness just said. Those reactions make journalists' work easier. They also do not have access to members leaving the House. Virtual might be easier, but it does not necessarily do as good a job of protecting democracy.

Another thing to consider is the work of interpreters. When Centre Block reopens, they might be thrown together in a room quite separate from the House and committee work. What we are hearing on the ground is that this makes their work a lot harder, because when they are considering what is being said, they look at more than just the spoken word. Emotions are important in conveying a message in another language, and this includes analyzing non-verbal cues and facial expressions, which is harder to do by video conference.

Another pitfall that must be avoided is thinking that Bill S-4 is going to solve all of the world's problems. While we may improve the issue of delays somewhat, that does not mean that everything is fixed and we can turn around and walk away.

For example, bringing into force Bill S-4 without addressing the connectivity problems would be like trading four quarters for a dollar. It will change nothing because the system will not be equipped to properly install the technology for appearances. This will not fix the infamous Liberalist file. My colleagues have talked about that here as well. This will not necessarily address the issue of public trust in the justice system.

I spent a bit of time in Albania not that long ago. The justice minister explained that his role was not to appoint judges, but to ensure that the infrastructure or the administrative aspect of the judicial branch works properly.

● (1350)

He knows the statistics, the number of files that come in each day, the number of rooms and the technology required, but he is not responsible for appointing judges. We could perhaps follow the example of that country in future.

The issue of judicial vacancies has also not been resolved. Many judges are appointed in Quebec and the provinces. I am thinking of Quebec court judges. There are also the clerks, constables and others required for the orderly administration of justice. Some cases do not move forward because of delays in appointing federal or Superior Court judges.

To avoid the problems I mentioned from occurring in the future, the bill provides for a review in three and five years. The bill at least has a certain advantage. It provides for a review after three years by an independent committee, which is excellent.

Clause 78.1(1) of the bill reads as follows:

The Minister of Justice must, no later than three years after the day on which this Act receives royal assent, initiate one or more independent reviews on the use

of remote proceedings in criminal justice matters that must include an assessment of whether remote proceedings

- (a) enhance, preserve or adversely affect access to justice;
- (b) maintain fundamental principles of the administration of justice; and
- (c) adequately address the rights and obligations of participants in the criminal justice system, including accused persons.

The bill also provides for a parliamentary review at the start of the fifth year of its existence. I hope this will allow us to determine whether there were any bad ideas masquerading as good ones in the implementation of this bill.

I hope that the feedback of lawyers will be sought on this because they are the ones who will see how this is actually working on the ground. When they are not consulted enough, that is often when mistakes are made. A bill that started off with good intentions may end up being a bad bill. As I said, we are going to make permanent something that basically resulted from a temporary situation like COVID-19.

I hope that when this legislation is reviewed in three or five years, legislators will have the humility to correct the measures that did not work rather than waiting until they are challenged in court where it will take more time and energy to correct them.

The review of the act will certainly be a useful exercise. I hope that legislators will backtrack if needed and that doing so will not be seen as a sign of failure but as a real will to advance justice, reduce delays and prevent the Jordan ruling from applying because of issues that can be easily resolved. That is my wish. Perhaps it is asking too much of politicians to show some humility, but that is my wish for this bill going forward.

● (1355)

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I just wanted to comment very quickly that, given that most Nunavut lawyers are legal aid lawyers, I feel that the MP for Edmonton Strathcona was perfectly in line when she made her intervention about legal aid lawyers.

I want to thank this member for her great speech focusing on Internet connectivity. Given that this bill will focus on only three specific areas for streamlining processes, can the member describe how maybe those concerns are actually not warranted, given that it is only going to be in so few circumstances?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, the bill does not cover everything. That is another complaint from the Barreau du Québec: There should be an in-depth review of the criminal and penal system, rather than doing it bit by bit.

In the previous Parliament, the House considered Bill C-23, which is a previous incarnation. Before that, there were bills C-75 and C-5. The Criminal Code is always reviewed piecemeal, turning it into a massive, inscrutable tome with sections that refer three sections ahead and eight sections back and a bunch of case law to help understand what is going on. It is impossible to make heads or tails of.

I agree wholeheartedly with the idea of a more comprehensive review of the Criminal Code. On the issue of connectivity, yes, adding more telecommunications may be a good idea, but it will not apply everywhere, unfortunately.

As for legal aid, even though it is not under federal jurisdiction, I think there is always room for discussion, because there are disparities between the provinces.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in acknowledging the importance of judicial independence, it is important we recognize that Bill S-4 is a reflection of the desire of a lot of provinces to make changes coming out of the pandemic, taking advantage of the technology today that is always an option. That is what the bill would provide: options for our courts to take advantage of the technology.

I am wondering if the member would concur that it is a positive thing and a reason to support the legislation.

● (1400)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I am pretty sure everyone knows that the Bloc Québécois will support Bill S-4, because my colleagues have said so. However, one clause in the bill states that appearances by video conference should not be optional. The Barreau du Québec actually recommends deleting that clause.

We should not see this as a solution. There are problems with distance and access to courts, and we cannot tell ourselves that we do not need to deal with the issue of access to courts because we have this band-aid solution, a plan B that lets us do things another way.

We have to make sure people always understand that they can choose between in-person attendance in court and appearing by video conference and that they are not indirectly forced to choose one over the other.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is such an honour to rise today knowing the person about whom I will be speaking is watching from home in my riding. Peter Godwin Chance, war hero and celebrated veteran, was born November 24, 1920. That is right: Today is his 102nd birthday. I invite all of my friends in this place to join me so that we will send out to the

Statements by Members

retired commander of the Canadian navy, Peter Chance, the kind of thanks and happy birthday only he could possibly deserve.

He was a commander. On June 6, 1944, D-Day, he was at that point not commander but navigation officer on board the *Skeena*. He was there in the thick of it on D-Day, having joined the navy volunteer reserve when he was only 18 years old. He stayed with the Canadian navy. He received multiple decorations and war tributes, including the French Legion of Honour.

Today, I thank the Speaker for allowing me to say, with all of our colleagues here, “Happy 102nd birthday, Peter Chance.”

* * *

CANADIAN MEN'S SOCCER TEAM

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canada played its first World Cup game in 36 years. What a game. I think everyone can agree that Canada played stronger. Yesterday Cyle Larin, Tajon Buchanan, Jonathan Osorio, Iké Ugbo, David Junior Hoilett, Liam Millar and team captain, Atiba Hutchinson, showcased their talent on the field. In our city, they are hometown heroes. They found their passion, and now they are running with it.

Many of Canada's soccer stars start their journey with local clubs like Brams United and Brampton Soccer Club. They enrich our communities and help our youth build stronger bonds. On behalf of the residents in Brampton, I want to send the national soccer team our best wishes and good luck at the World Cup.

Go, Canada, go.

* * *

JOHN WALSH

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Village of Arthur is known as Canada's most patriotic village. It gained this honour not through the words of politicians, but through the service and sacrifice of its citizens. In 1942, the Toronto Daily Star reported that the highest per capita enlistment in the Second World War came from this small community in Wellington County. Among those who would enlist would be John Walsh, who joined the navy within days of his 18th birthday and served aboard the HMCS *Wallaceburg*. Like so many of his generation, when John Walsh returned from the war, his service did not end. He continued to serve the community as a pharmacist, a Legion member, and Arthur's most dedicated historian. Earlier this week, John Walsh passed into history, but the legacy he leaves behind for his family, his community and his country will long survive.

I say “Bravo zulu” to Mr. Walsh, and I thank him for his service.

*Statements by Members***INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of women in Canada have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse. November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Gender-based violence encompasses many types of abuses that are perpetuated toward women, girls, two-spirit, trans and nonbinary people. Only a couple of years before the Montreal massacre, MP Margaret Mitchell was heckled in the House of Commons for raising awareness about domestic abuse.

Today, the laughter has faded and the conversation has evolved, but women are still dying. The roots of gender-based violence are entrenched and persist in our society, one that upholds patriarchal ideology. In 2021, 173 women and girls were killed by violence in Canada alone. One in five women killed were first nations, Métis or Inuit.

Including femicide in the Criminal Code is a needed move and one that must be backed by an action plan for change. I am standing in the House today asking each and every one of us to take action. In the words of Susana Chávez Castillo, “Not one woman less; not one more death.”

* * *

• (1405)

*[Translation]***TWELVE DAYS OF ACTION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from November 25 to December 6, we have a duty to recognize the 12 days of action to end violence against women. It is an important time to remember the women we have lost to violence.

So far in 2022, 13 femicides have been committed in Quebec. These tragedies serve as a terrible reminder of the importance of this campaign. We must ask ourselves, collectively, men and women alike, what we can and must do to ensure that it never happens again.

This year's theme is “Coercive Control: More than just bruises”. It invites us to break the silence in the face of such abuse, regardless of the type of abuse. These acts are not always physically violent, but they always hurt.

As elected representatives, let us commit to taking concrete action. We must do everything in our power to ensure that violence is not part of our future. Let us stand together and, at the invitation of women's groups who work every day to help the victims, let us all wear our white ribbons.

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*[English]***CANADIAN MEN'S SOCCER TEAM**

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to cheer on the Canadian men's soccer team competing at the FIFA World Cup. The last time Canada qualified for the FIFA World Cup was 36 years ago, but 2022 has ushered in

a new era, pioneering the path forward and highlighting the amazing athletic talent that we have.

I am thrilled to see the city of Brampton represented in big numbers on the team. On the 26-player roster, seven players come from Brampton. This team's athletic achievements have been record-breaking, putting Canada onto the world stage yet again. It is exciting to see such amazing talent come from this community that I love, and which I represent here in the House.

Brampton native, Tajon Buchanan, winner of the 2021 Gold Cup Youth Player Award, puts it into perspective for so many of us by saying, “We don't come from a lot. We have to show the world and work twice as hard”. I have no doubt that these incredibly talented athletes will represent Canada to the fullest. I know everyone in the House sends their best as we cheer on team Canada.

Go, Canada.

* * *

*[Translation]***HOLIDAY SEASON IN PORTNEUF—JACQUES-CARTIER**

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the holiday season approaches, I invite everyone to visit one of the 22 Christmas markets in the beautiful riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. They sell a wide range of quality products and creations by talented artists. Everyone can discover some great finds while supporting local businesses.

This time of the year is also a time for sharing. I would like to highlight the work of St. Vincent De Paul, which is one organization carrying out this important work in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. The volunteers work hard to meet the needs of society's poorest.

I would like to thank Ms. Claudette Hethrington, from Saint-Augustin, Ms. Louise Barrette, from Saint-Marc-des-Carrières, Mr. Yvon Cloutier, from Donnacona, Mr. Roch Belleau, from Pont-Rouge, Ms. Huguette Dussault, from Neuville, Ms. Diane Durand, from Portneuf and Ms. Doris Tessier, from Sainte-Brigitte-de-Laval.

I want to thank them. Let us help them support the people who are truly in need. I would like to take this opportunity to invite everyone to be very generous and to wish everyone a very happy holiday season.

* * *

*[English]***CHICOPEE TUBE PARK**

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share with the House the incredible work being done by Chicopee Tube Park. For nearly 100 years, this local treasure has provided space for winter and summer activities to occur.

Like many businesses in the tourism sector, Chicopee was hit hard by COVID-19. Despite the hardships brought on by the pandemic, it used this time as an opportunity not only to rebuild, but to rebuild better. Having won multiple awards for its environmental business practices from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, its commitment to operating sustainably has not wavered.

It has expanded its drainage system to capture and reuse over 450,000 gallons of stormwater for sustainable snow-making in the winter. This project will not only conserve water but also reduce power consumption by 10%. Chicopee is a shining example of how businesses can adapt to benefit the environment, the economy and the community.

I ask members of the House to join me in applauding Chicopee Tube Park for its ongoing commitment to environmentally responsible business practices.

* * *

● (1410)

LIONS FOUNDATION OF CANADA

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently I had the opportunity and pleasure to meet with President Michael Foote and other wonderful members from the Lions Club International.

From the provision of disaster relief grants, both in Canada and abroad, to the establishment of community centres, they are the heart of many communities in our country. I would like to express sincere thanks to the 1,400 Lions clubs and over 41,000 Lions members, whose tireless volunteerism is the epitome of community service at the local, regional, national and international levels.

One specific charitable service the Lions Club provides is guide dogs, which help to empower individuals with autism, diabetes, epilepsy, visual impairments and multiple other conditions. Guide dogs are an important investment in fostering inclusive communities. Without the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides, the lives of many Canadians would be unquestionably more difficult.

I encourage all Canadians to check out how they can support the Lions Foundation's incredible work. I thank the Lions.

* * *

HOLODOMOR

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Saturday marks the 89th anniversary of the Holodomor genocide.

In 1932 and 1933, Josef Stalin and his communist Soviet thugs used food as a weapon to starve upward of 10 million Ukrainians. Stalin's brutal regime was determined to destroy Ukraine's identity, language and culture. However, Stalin's communist dictatorship failed despite murdering in Ukraine the equivalent of every man, woman and child in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C.

Unfortunately, Ukraine's very survival is threatened today by another genocidal maniac, Vladimir Putin. Again, the only crime Ukraine has committed is being patriotic Ukrainians.

Statements by Members

It has been 274 days since Russia's barbaric invasion and Ukrainians have been fighting for their sovereignty, their democracy, their liberty and the freedom for all of us. Stalin failed to exterminate Ukrainian nationalism, and Putin will also fail.

This Saturday, we stand together to remember the victims and honour the survivors of the Holodomor. We will also remember the heavenly hundred from the Maidan, and the heroes who are dying today defending Ukraine from Putin's war machine.

Vichnaya pamyat. May their memories be eternal.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, another busy summer season has come and gone in Dawson City, Yukon, which is part of the Klondike. Now with winter here, people draw close and ward off the dark nights with sports and cultural activities outdoors and in.

[Translation]

The residents of Dawson City are doing their best to cope with the high prices caused by inflation, but the need to fight climate change is always on their minds.

[English]

Last August, a group of scientists and first nations met in Dawson City to highlight the impact that melting permafrost was having on northern communities like those of Yukon. When permafrost melts, the ground shifts, buildings twist, the road wash away, fires intensify and landslides bring new meaning to supply chain disruptions when roads are literally blocked.

[Translation]

The residents of Dawson City and Yukon know that climate change is just as real as the high prices we are dealing with these days.

[English]

Our government is there to help communities like Dawson City adapt to the climate crisis. We are also there to support those who need it most to cope with high prices so Dawson will continue to be the thriving heart of the Klondike for generations to come.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are broken. Their bank accounts are broken. Their faith in this Liberal-NDP government is broken.

Statements by Members

Instead of helping Canadians, the government is determined to pile on more financial burden with its carbon tax. When struggling Canadians are faced with such great uncertainty, they need their government to help them get ahead, not hold them back.

The Liberal government and its NDP backers need to do the right thing: Listen to the millions of struggling Canadians and cancel its planned hike on the cost of living and cancel its punitive carbon tax.

* * *

• (1415)

JUSTICE

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in only seven years, the Liberal government has broken our justice system.

Nearly 20 years of decreases in violent crime have evaporated under the government. Canada's homicide rate is now worse than at any time since the mid-2000s. There has been a 92% increase in gang-related homicides since 2015, yet the government continues to relax punishments against violent offenders.

As we all know, Canada's rising murder rate is the most reliable indicator that Canadians are experiencing across-the-board surges in violent crime. This past August, Statistics Canada recently reported a notable rise in cases of sexual assault and harassment.

These appalling statistics are proof that the Liberal government is not taking the safety of Canadians seriously. This is why we need to elect a Conservative Government led by the new leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition.

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[*Translation*]**GATINEAU 2 PROJECT**

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning in Gatineau, I had the pleasure of participating in the grand opening of Gatineau 2, the first net-zero carbon archival centre in the Americas. This \$330-million building was built on time and on budget. Gatineau 2 is a real leader in the global documentary heritage community. The Gatineau 2 building has already received the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships' gold award in the infrastructure category, and that is only the beginning. This project creates major economic spinoffs for our region and is a significant source of specialized jobs. I invite Canadians to enjoy the green spaces around the complex. Programming is being developed to bring the area to life.

I want to recognize the efforts of the Library and Archives Canada team, particularly Leslie Weir, the librarian and archivist of Canada, and Nathalie Ethier, the project director.

Gatineau is once again making a name for itself, and I am very proud.

[*English*]**THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, off the top, I would like to send out congratulations to Kimo Linders of Penticton for winning the small business of the year award from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada last night, as well as to the amazing Penticton Vees, who just won their 21st game in a row in the B.C. Hockey League.

I also want to talk about Bill S-222, which will be debated Monday morning. This is a small, but mighty bill that simply asks the federal government to consider the environmental footprint of building materials when constructing infrastructure. This was my private member's bill in a previous Parliament and I was inspired to bring it forward by the new mass timber technology pioneered by Structurlam in my hometown of Penticton.

With new materials such as mass timber, we can build safe and beautiful buildings that will also help us in our fight against climate change. I hope everyone here will support Bill S-222 to literally help build a better future for Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]**FRANÇOISE POULIN**

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the 100th birthday of Françoise Poulin. Originally from the small village of Saint-Prospere-de-Dorchester, she moved at 18 to Quebec City, where she met the father of her seven children.

Someone should make a movie of her life. When she had an appendectomy at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, she fell in love with her nurse and future husband, Joseph Dutil, and moved to their home in Saint-Hyacinthe where she still lives today.

Living in that house is a way of keeping her husband's memory alive and honour the life they shared for 32 years.

A widow at 55, she redefined herself from a wife and mother to a strong, independent, caring and loving woman devoted to her family and loved ones. She passed down her determination and courage to the next generations. These are generous, honest, hard-working, good people.

I could go on and on because her sons Richard, Alain and Dany are three of my good friends. They are great guys.

I wish Mrs. Poulin a very happy birthday. She has earned it, and it is her turn to enjoy the love.

• (1420)
[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, I attended a church Christmas bazaar. I stood behind a senior who was putting raffle tickets, at five for three dollars, into a cup for a \$50 grocery store gift card. She turned to me and said that she hoped she would win because she could not afford groceries anymore. What a sad indictment of how the Liberals and the Prime Minister, helped by the NDP, have broken our country in so many ways.

Inflation is at a 40-year high, 1.5 million Canadians rely on food banks since September and housing affordability and rental costs are out of control. Young Canadians feel they have been lied to and let down by the Prime Minister and are despondent about their future.

The problems that exist are structural. They are self-inflicted wounds created by a government so blinded by its ideology that it is impossible for it to come up with the solutions needed, and one-time bribe payments will not solve anything.

The only solution is a change in government to give Canadians control of their lives, to restore their hopes, to restore their dreams and to restore the dignity of that senior who stood in front of me last weekend.

* * *

CLOVERDALE—LANGLEY CITY

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with December just around the corner, I would like to highlight some events that are happening in Cloverdale—Langley City this holiday season.

The City of Langley's Magic of Christmas Festival is taking place December 3 and 4. This event happens at the Timms Community Centre. It provides fun for the whole family and features a holiday artisan market.

On December 4, the Cloverdale Business Improvement Association is hosting the Surrey Santa Parade of Lights, where I will accompany a decorated vintage truck. The event collects donations and unwrapped toys for local food banks.

On December 7, the Cloverdale District Chamber of Commerce presents the December charity luncheon. This event raises money for the Cloverdale Community Kitchen to provide Christmas hampers for those in need.

The Langley Christmas Bureau, with more than 100 volunteers, will assemble toy bundles and accept donations to purchase gift cards for families in need. This year, the bureau is located in Langley City Hall and will receive donations until December 15.

I thank everyone who volunteers in our community and works so hard to make sure that all residents of Cloverdale—Langley City will have a wonderful holiday season.

Mr. Speaker, from my family to yours, to my colleagues in this chamber and to all residents of Cloverdale—Langley City, seasons

Oral Questions

greetings, merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah and best wishes for a happy new year.

The Speaker: I would remind hon. members that Standing Order 31 allows individuals to give a bit of a report of what is going on in their ridings, and they last 60 seconds. That is all the time allotted. I noticed a few of them going over the time. They are great stories and I do not want to cut them off, but I would ask members to try to keep them in the 60-second parameter.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Governor of the Bank of Canada said that, had the government shrunk its deficit, inflation would not be as high. Because of today's exorbitant deficits, inflation is costing every Canadian an extra \$3,500.

Now that the Prime Minister can confirm that the deficits caused inflation, will he shrink them so Canadians can pay their own bills?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic, we chose to be there for Canadians.

We helped families, we helped workers, we helped small businesses, we helped community centres and not-for-profit organizations. We were there to support people so we could get through the pandemic as well as possible. Not only was the pandemic a less serious health crisis here than in many other places around the world, but we also got back to a growth economy faster than many of our neighbours. Our opponent wanted to make cuts, but we delivered the goods.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's top Newfoundland and Labrador minister said that he is "sick and tired" of people complaining about heating their homes in the cold weather.

It is no wonder that they are complaining. According to the CBC, the Prime Minister's favourite media outlet, the "federal carbon tax could leave seniors out in the cold". One seniors advocate said that her members are feeling "extreme difficulty" with the cost of living.

Instead of telling Atlantic Canadians to pay up and shut up, why does this government not reverse its costly carbon tax on home heat?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of mischaracterizing what members on this side of the House say, the leader of the official opposition should actually take a look at what, for example, the Parliamentary Budget Officer says in regard to our price on pollution, which actually returns more money to the vast majority of Canadians in areas where it is imposed.

The price on pollution not only fights climate change but also supports hard-working families where they most need it.

We are pleased that families in Atlantic Canada are now going to be getting the carbon incentive rebate regularly. We will continue to fight climate change and support Canadians while we do it.

• (1425)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, well, if the Prime Minister says I should take a look at the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, I think I just might. I have it right here: "A Distributional Analysis of Federal Carbon Pricing under a Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy". I will go to page 13.

The net cost to Albertans is \$2,282. In Saskatchewan, it is \$1,464. In Manitoba, it is \$1,145, and in Ontario, it is \$1,461. This is the excessive cost above and beyond the rebates that people will get.

That is what the Parliamentary Budget Officer says. The Prime Minister will not believe it.

Would the Speaker send over a page so they can deliver this report so the Prime Minister can believe his own eyes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, remarkably, buried in that rhetorical attack, was something quite important. For perhaps the first time, the member of the official opposition has finally recognized that there is a rebate associated with the price on pollution, that we give back more money every year than the average family pays, related to the price on pollution.

We are actually there to support Canadians even as we fight climate change.

The leader of the official opposition does not much care for the fight against climate change but he should care about putting more money in people's pockets. That is why he should support our price on pollution.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one has ever denied that there is a tiny rebate. What we have said is that the rebate does not come anywhere near paying the cost that people have to pay for higher—

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. Leader of the Opposition. When one is reading from something, it is not a problem, but when one is holding it up, it becomes a prop.

I am sure the hon. member knows that. He probably just forgot. I will let him continue.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that some consider a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer to be a prop. I consider it to be firm evidence that the size of these rebates is smaller than the cost that people pay in higher taxes. This is defini-

tive proof, and it shows that Canadians will pay more the higher the tax gets, all for a policy that has failed to deliver a single, solitary climate change target.

It has failed. It costs too much. Will the government cancel it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe to the Leader of the Opposition, hundreds of dollars in Canadians' pocket is a tiny amount, but I know that it matters to Canadians.

Hard-working families receiving support for the carbon price they are paying is making a huge difference, as is the \$500 top-up to the Canada rental benefit and delivering on dental care.

All of those things are things the Leader of the Opposition thinks Canadians should not get. He voted against them. Instead, he moves on recommending that they invest in Bitcoin to avoid inflation. Well, that would have destroyed half their savings.

We will continue to deliver support for Canadians while he plays rhetorical games.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those rebates would not be enough to pay for two hours in the Prime Minister's favourite London hotel, where he pays \$6,000 a night. Let me look at the costs of this tax. It is \$2,282 for the average Albertan, when fully implemented; \$1,464 for the average Saskatchewanian; and similar costs for people right across the country. These are net costs, above and beyond the tiny rebates he has offered.

Now that he has the evidence, now that it is right here in a report from an officer he appointed, will he believe the facts and cancel the tax?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the very same report the Leader of the Opposition is touting, it spells out that indeed the price on pollution is compensated for by a larger rebate than the average family pays out in a given year. The average family of four, including families in his riding of Carleton, do better off with our carbon price incentive.

That is because we know that fighting climate change is important to Canadian families, and making ends meet is as well. That is why we continue to step up on support for families, while he continues to nickel and dime them.

Oral Questions

• (1430)

*[Translation]***DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here in the House, the Prime Minister has not been taking Chinese interference in funding election candidates seriously, to say the least.

However, he thought it was serious enough to ask his intelligence services to get to the bottom of it. He is right about that: China has been increasing its efforts to interfere with democracy. He even talked to the Chinese President about it at the G20.

What the Global News report has revealed is, at the bare minimum, a glaring weakness in the political financing system. There is a very simple way for the Prime Minister to immediately correct this.

Will he bring back public funding of political parties?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our federal political party financing system is one of the most rigorous, robust, accountable and transparent of any level of government.

If the Bloc Québécois has trouble getting money from Canadians, that is its problem, but we will continue to follow the rules and do our fundraising in public. We will continue to trust the existing system instead of trying to create new systems to help the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the answer I just heard. The Prime Minister should be ashamed.

Political parties' dependence on donations creates unhealthy conditions that invite undue influence. This is already a problem when it comes to major donors. The Prime Minister knows this because he spent a whole term in trouble for charging business people \$1,500 each to join him at private cocktail parties.

The Global News report revealed that this weakness can be exploited by foreign powers seeking to influence democracy. China is probably already doing it. The Prime Minister should employ the precautionary principle. I realize he may not be familiar with that idea, but he needs to wake up sooner or later.

Will he restore public funding for political parties—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, political party financing in Canada is governed by a robust, sound, transparent system.

Perhaps the Bloc Québécois is struggling a little to raise money, but the reality is that all political parties engage with Canadians. The Liberal Party does it in a completely open and transparent way. The media is invited to every one of my fundraisers. I encourage the leaders of the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party to do the same.

We will always be open and transparent about our fundraising, because Canadians must be able to have faith in our democracy.

*[English]***HEALTH**

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, mothers, grandmothers and leaders of our community wrote a scathing letter indicting the government and the Prime Minister's lack of action in dealing with the health care crisis, particularly as it refers to children.

Children cannot breathe. They are ending up in emergency rooms that are full, waiting hours and hours to get care, and the Prime Minister has not shown up nor shown leadership. For parents, the health of their kids is their number one priority. Why is it not for the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is beneath anyone in this House to suggest that there is any one of us who does not care about the well-being of children in this country. I know we all do. I know we are all working very hard on this.

As a government, we invested over \$70 billion more over the past few years into our health care system to support the provinces to deliver during the pandemic. We are sitting down with the provinces right now to create better outcomes and better results from health care which Canadians and, yes, Canadian families, particularly Canadian kids, need and deserve.

We will continue to be there to support health care systems across the country. We will continue to work with all members of this House. All of us care about the children.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the lack of leadership shown by this government and this Prime Minister has opened the door to privatization in the health care sector.

Conservative premiers across the country are attacking our health care system, and the Prime Minister is not showing the leadership needed to address this crisis.

What will it take for the Prime Minister to take action and stand up for our health care system?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows full well, we are actively engaged in discussions with the provinces and territories on health investments, but we are in the process of ensuring that we are delivering concrete results.

We are very concerned about the trend toward privatization that we are seeing in some parts of the country. That is why we remain deeply committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

We will be there to help the provinces deliver results, but we will be there to ensure that those results truly help individuals, families, those who need it.

*Oral Questions**[English]***CARBON PRICING**

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Governor of the Bank of Canada confirmed that getting rid of the carbon tax will reduce inflation. This is the same carbon tax that has driven up the cost of groceries, gas and home heating. This is the same carbon tax that has not helped the Liberals meet a single emission reduction target. The more they keep charging for it, the more emissions keep going up.

Why will the Liberals not stop forcing their failed carbon tax scheme on Canadians?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Bank of Canada estimated that the price on pollution would add marginally to the impact on inflation, perhaps 0.1%. That is one cent for every \$10. On the other hand, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, eight out of 10 families will get more money back than they pay at the pumps. That will help with affordability and inflation.

Unfortunately, the opposition wants to take this climate action incentive away.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a job well failed by the government. It has not been able to fix the environment or the economy. It keeps making things worse, driving more families to food banks, with 1.5 million Canadians having to use food banks and one out of five Canadians having to skip meals. This is the government's plan. It does not have an environmental plan. It is a tax plan. It is not working.

When will the government axe the tax and give Canadians a break?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 450,000 children have been lifted out of poverty since we took office in 2015. We have brought in early learning and child care agreements across the country. By the end of this year, families from coast to coast to coast will receive reduced child care fees by up to 50%. We have several measures that we have put forward, whether it is the Canada dental benefit, the Canada child benefit, or the Canada rental benefit, which have seriously helped families in need.

We know these are tough times. We are there for families. We just do not understand why the Conservatives are not.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Liberals, credit card use is the highest in Canadian history. Food bank usage is the highest in Canadian history. Many Canadians are just \$200 away from insolvency. Among 38 rich countries, Canada ranks 35th in teen mental health and suicide.

It appears the Liberals have forgotten who they work for. Perhaps they should stop listening to themselves and start listening to Canadians who are struggling to survive.

Will the Liberals show compassion and leadership and stop forcing their failed carbon tax on Canadian families?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really do believe it is the

Conservatives who need to look within and find some compassion. They have voted against measure after measure that has been there to support our lowest income Canadians, families and seniors who have been struggling. In fact, 450,000 children have been lifted out of poverty.

We know there is more work to do, but that is why, in the fall economic statement, we also enhanced the Canada workers benefit. It is why we doubled the GST tax credit for the next six months. We know these are difficult times.

The Conservatives have every opportunity to be there to support Canadians alongside us. They have just chosen not to.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is sad is that Christmas is just 31 days away. Instead of worrying about buying Christmas presents, Canadians are trying to figure out how they are going to pay for their home heating, their propane bill, on which they rely, which has gone from \$4,000 to \$12,000. That is triple the cost.

Again, is there any leadership, any ability to listen to Canadians who are struggling to survive? This is not a luxury; this is a necessity. The government should axe the tax and face the facts.

• (1440)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pretty sure the Conservatives do not want to face the facts of their disastrous time in government for almost 10 years. Two million fewer people are in poverty, including 400,000 senior women. We raised almost a million kids out of poverty.

However, Mr. Speaker, do you hear what I hear in the spirit of Christmas? I am not entirely sure who are the real Conservatives on the other side: those who are asking us to spend more or those who are asking us to spend less. Fortunately, I got the answer. It is the fall economic statement. We will invest in those Canadians who need it the most, grow the economy and position for a great future for Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some people do not know how they are going to pay for groceries on the weekend, nor whether they can pay for heating. Students have to sleep in shelters, and workers have to use food banks, which 1.5 million Canadians turned to in a single month. Can the Liberal government look Canadians in the eye and tell them in all sincerity that the carbon tax is good for them?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every time that the Conservatives had the opportunity to vote with Canadians and reduce taxes, they stood with their hands on their hearts, and what did they do? They voted against it.

In their 10 years in power, what did they accomplish? They made Canadians poorer. We are going to eliminate interest on student debt. We are going to help people buy homes. We are going to double the GST/HST credit.

The Conservatives have no plan, other than cryptocurrency. On this side, we have a plan.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax only does one thing, and that is make Canadians poorer. It achieves nothing. The Liberals know that Canadians are suffering due to inflation, yet the government stubbornly insists on increasing the carbon tax.

My leader, along with every Conservative in this place, is calling for the Liberals to abandon their plan to increase Canadians' taxes. Will they do it, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have one hand on their heart while they swear they care about Canadians, but they are holding a pair of scissors in the other to make cuts because they think we are investing too much.

They need to be consistent. Where are they going to make cuts? The Conservative Party is the party of cuts, the party of austerity. Will the Conservatives cut support for our seniors or for our youth? Will they cut child care services or health care services? They need to have the courage to say it.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government unilaterally decided to bring the deadline to submit infrastructure projects forward by two years. If Quebec and its cities fail to meet the deadline, the federal government will keep \$2.7 billion, and we will be unable to use it in our ridings.

Yesterday, Éric Forest, the former president of the Union des municipalités du Québec, wrote an opinion piece explaining what the consequence would be. The consequence is that Quebec will be under pressure to choose projects based on size rather than value in order to meet the deadline. That means that small municipalities' projects could take a back seat to those of the big cities. That is neither fair nor smart.

Does the government support that? Will the government listen to reason, reconsider and listen to what the mayors have to say?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise that we do not share my hon. colleague's view that we are being unfair to Quebec municipalities and the Quebec government.

I know he will not be happy to hear this, but I can tell him that I had a very positive discussion with the Quebec minister responsible for infrastructure and with my counterpart, the minister responsible for Canadian relations. I am quite certain that we will reach an agreement with the Quebec government to support the municipalities and the community groups that my colleague wants to support, so I have good news. We will be supporting them as well.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals do not appear to understand how it actually works on the ground. Their role in projects is not complicated. They announce the money and then come and cut the ribbons when it is finished.

The reality is that our cities are the ones doing the actual work. The reality is also that the Union des municipalités du Québec has said that this is not good enough. Just last week, that organization said that March 31, 2023, is right around the corner, and that it would be severely penalized.

Projects are being threatened, projects to fight riverbank erosion, to build sports centres, cultural centres, water treatment facilities, and so on. What will these Liberals say when they go home to their Quebec ridings and have to tell their mayors that, in the end, they will not be getting any money, even though an agreement had been signed?

• (1445)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I have good news for my colleague. We will not have to say these things that my colleague claims to be true.

What we are going to do is work with the Government of Quebec in partnership with the municipalities and public transit services. I had a very constructive and positive discussion with the mayor of Quebec City. For example, we are going to share the excess costs of the tramway project in Quebec City. We have projects going on throughout Quebec, and we look forward to seeing them through in partnership with the Government of Quebec and the municipalities.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it was not clear, but perhaps the interpretation was better.

Moving up the deadline by two years and threatening to keep the money if cities cannot turn on a dime is almost blackmail.

The federal government wants its infrastructure fund to be used quickly. We agree. However, it should be used intelligently and equitably for the best possible projects for all municipalities, both small and large. The government should collaborate instead of threatening our towns, which are doing their best. This is absurd, it will have to back down.

Can it promise today that all money not spent by March 31 will be transferred to Quebec and not put back in its own pockets?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not share my Bloc colleague's pessimism. As my colleague the Minister of Canadian Heritage has said in this place several times, and rightly so, the member is desperate to pick a fight.

Oral Questions

The good news is that we are trying to work collaboratively. In the nine other Canadian provinces, we have found the right way to invest this money together with the provinces, and we will do exactly the same thing with the Government of Quebec.

I look forward to visiting Quebec with my colleagues and sharing this good news with Quebecers.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are terrified. Last year we witnessed the largest number of murders in Canadian history. Fifteen Canadians are being murdered every single week. Since the Prime Minister took office, gang-related killings have doubled. Instead of fighting crime with tougher punishments, the Liberals are making it easier for criminals to get back on our streets to reoffend.

Will the Liberal government stop its soft-on-crime agenda?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. What our party is doing in a variety of its policies is focusing our judicial and police resources on serious crime, with anti-gang measures, with tougher laws on guns, by eliminating certain minimum mandatory penalties and by allowing for conditional sentence orders in cases where there is no threat to public security so we can use resources on serious crime.

Serious crime will always carry with it serious consequences. That is a more just and equitable solution.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our justice minister is tone deaf. Despite their arbitrary bans and complicated buyback program, gun crime has gone up steadily every year since the Liberals were elected. Gun smugglers, drug traffickers, drive-by shooters and kidnappers can thank the Liberal government, because now they can serve their sentence in the comfort of their own homes.

Once again, will the Liberals stop their soft-on-crime policy and focus on making our streets safer?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat surprising to hear that colleague from the Conservative Party take issue with the \$137 million we just invested in the CBSA to further tackle illegal smuggling, which the Conservatives voted against.

Let us stack their record against the record of those on this side of the House. It is one that will continue to equip CBSA with the tools it needs to tackle gun smuggling, one that will raise maximum sentences against hardened criminals who traffic and terrorize our communities with guns and one that will also address root causes of gun crime with \$250 million for the building safer communities fund.

It is time for the Conservatives to get on the right side of this issue, and that is now.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Laval police have just launched a major investigation into violent crime. About 150 officers are being assigned to this investigation, including personnel from the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP and other police forces.

Everyone is working together to fight gun violence, except the Prime Minister. His soft-on-crime strategy has resulted in a 32% increase in violent crime across the country.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he is contradicting all police forces when he says, for example, that when a member of organized crime discharges an illegal firearm, it is not a serious crime?

• (1450)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why we introduced Bill C-21. The Conservatives have been quibbling with it since day one.

We need to pass this bill, which targets members of organized crime, aims to hand down very severe punishments to criminals and gives police more tools.

We will continue to bring forward legislation that makes sense, and we will continue to make investments to help our police and our forces at the border.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pace of climate change will make part of the planet uninhabitable and intensify natural disasters here at home. The most vulnerable will suffer. What was the Minister of Environment and Climate Change's mandate at COP27? There was none. It was to maintain the status quo, salvage whatever we can and keep the oil companies happy. One environmental expert said that what happened in Egypt highlighted incongruities, contradictions, in Canada's positions. Canada has the highest per capita GHG emissions.

Is the Minister of Environment proud to be the worst?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ with the hon. member. We received praise coming out of COP27 for our climate finance measures; for setting up a fund to help developing nations adapt to climate change; for committing to eliminating coal, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and capping oil and gas emissions; and very importantly, for investing in the clean economy, with \$9.1 billion in our emissions reduction plan. We will ensure our emissions come down and we build the economy of tomorrow.

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HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservative premiers want to take us back to the dark days of private health care. Ontario's Doug Ford openly talks about privatizing services. Heather Stefanson in Manitoba included it in her throne speech, and now Danielle Smith in Alberta wants patients to fundraise for their care. This is wrong. They threaten the very basis of universal public health care and make access dependent on wealth and privilege.

Will the health minister condemn these measures, enforce the Canada Health Act and protect patients across our country?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear that question. First, I acknowledge the very severe pressure health care workers throughout our country are under; second, I recognize the pressure on patients, with backlogs in surgeries and backlogs in diagnostics; and third, we are also very concerned with the pressure and the ambition we see across Canada around the privatization of our health care system. We want to maintain accessibility, universality and fairness in the health care system across our country.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking truth to power is not always easy, but it is necessary. Canadians take inspiration from human rights defenders and leaders like Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who have the courage to speak up for what is right. Her actions, as well as those of Ukrainians, serve as a reminder that we must work together to create the world we want to live in.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs update the House on the visit of the Belarusian opposition leader in Canada this week and measures our government is taking to hold Lukashenko's regime accountable?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week I had the pleasure of seeing my good friend from Belarus, Sviatlana. We had the chance to discuss our new sanctions against Lukashenko's regime with respect to its complicity in Russia's war of choice. We also talked about the brutal disregard for human rights by the Lukashenko regime. Of course we want to do more, and we will do more to amplify the democratic voices within Belarus.

Oral Questions

Impunity is not an option for those who commit human rights violations. There must be accountability, and Canada will seek it.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do the Liberals believe it is acceptable for Iranian Canadians to have to drive to a location far away from their homes to speak to their MP with a blurred background about their fear of reprisal for protesting Iran's brutal regime?

That is what is happening in Canada. We know Canada's spy agency is investigating credible death threats from the same regime against our citizens, who are begging for the government to keep them safe. What more does it need in order to act? When will it finally use the Criminal Code, list the IRGC as a terrorist organization and shut down its operations in Canada?

● (1455)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be unequivocally clear that on this side of the House, we stand with the women in Iran who are marching for their rights. That is why we designated the entirety of the Iranian regime using a sparingly used power under IRPA. This will allow us to go after those who are the most responsible, the senior echelons and the architects of these transgressions of human rights, including the members of the IRGC, whom my hon. colleague continues to underline here. We will give police enforcement all the tools it needs to make sure Canada is never a safe haven for any support for that regime.

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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our questions are not about the overall integrity of the 2019 and 2021 elections, nor questioning whether overall our elections are free and fair. We are asking who knew what, when, about Beijing's interference in our elections.

The Prime Minister said, in response to questions, "I do not have any information, nor have I been briefed on any federal candidates receiving any money from China."

The government is parsing its words and is obfuscating, so let me ask this question. Has the government received any information about election interference by Beijing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would begin by echoing the concerns that my colleague raises in the House when it comes to allegations of foreign interference. That is why we want to work together with all members in the House to assure Canadians that we will do whatever it takes to protect the integrity of our elections.

My colleague knows we have had independent reviews of both the 2019 and the 2020 election, which have confirmed that those elections were free and fair. We will continue to make sure our national security apparatus has all the tools it needs to make sure Canadians have their voices represented in the chamber.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told the media that he has directed his security officials to share all the information they can with PROC about Beijing's election interference. However, at PROC, the Liberals gutted our Conservative motion for the production of documents by removing expressed mention of the PMO.

Will the Prime Minister assure the House that his office will hand over all relevant documents, or does he have something to hide?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to assure my colleague and all Canadians that we are equipping our national security apparatus with all of the tools it needs to ensure that elections are free and fair. We are cracking down on foreign funding through the introduction of Bill C-76. We are providing additional resources to backstop the cuts that were made when the Conservatives were last in government. We will do whatever is necessary to continue to have a system that is transparent and accountable. Yes, that means working with the independent bodies within Parliament so that we can have elections that are free and fair.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister quoted the Chief Electoral Officer a number of times when explaining his refusal to turn over documents pertaining to foreign influence to the House.

Here is another quote from the Chief Electoral Officer: "We do not know what happened or which riding it happened in. We don't know if money went to candidates". He also said, and I quote, "these are potentially very serious violations of the act that could significantly compromise the election".

Will the Prime Minister be transparent and hand over the relevant documents to the committee, or will he continue to hide?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said, we will work with the parliamentary committee. I would emphasize that two independent, non-partisan reviews confirmed that the 2019 election results and even the 2021 results were free and fair. That is the most important thing.

Yes, there is a threat of foreign interference, which is why we are making the necessary investments in our national security apparatus. We will continue to collaborate with all members of the House.

• (1500)

SPORTS

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Liberals opposed establishing an independent commission of inquiry into the toxic culture in sport organizations. I am shocked.

Seriously, after the Hockey Canada scandals, after the gymnasts' testimony, including in committee, on the sexual abuse they suffered, after the group Global Athlete warned us about cases of abuse in football, skiing, swimming, figure skating—the list goes on and on—what more will it take for the government to launch an independent commission of inquiry into the abuse happening in all sports?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the courageous athletes who told their story and testified about the abuse they suffered in the sports system. I want them to know that I hear them, I see them and I believe them.

At the national level, we have created the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, which can investigate cases of abuse, but also investigate the culture in certain sports.

What is more, I am working with my provincial and territorial colleagues to ensure that every athlete, no matter what level they are at in the sports system, whether it is at the local, provincial or national level, knows where to turn to report cases of abuse or mistreatment.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not what they want. The truth is that the victims have lost confidence in this system and they are losing confidence in this government. They are the ones who are asking the government to go one step further and to set up an independent commission of inquiry. These victims want all sport organizations to clean house.

There is already an investigation into Hockey Canada. Now, gymnastics is in the hot seat in committee. We cannot go through all of the sports one by one as cases of abuse make the headlines. We need general recommendations to change the widespread toxic culture in sport federations.

When will an independent commission of inquiry be set up?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing some truly heartbreaking stories from athletes, including gymnasts. I stand in solidarity with those people every day.

Obviously, the sports community should be a place that is good for a person's mental and physical health. Every component of Canada's sports system needs to do better.

That is why I am continuing to work with all partners to ensure that everyone takes this situation seriously and that everyone is doing everything in their power to completely eradicate abuse and mistreatment in sports.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government is talking out of both sides of its mouth when it comes to English-French bilingualism.

It appointed a Governor General who does not speak French, it appointed a Lieutenant Governor who speaks only English in the only bilingual province, and it is blocking francophone immigration, to name just a few examples.

Now the NDP-Liberal coalition is muzzling the Standing Committee on Official Languages and preventing us from improving Bill C-13 to stop the decline of French. Talk about hypocrisy.

Can the Prime Minister immediately give orders to stop all measures that attack the French language?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is hypocritical in the House is that the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives are actually blocking our bill.

We have heard from stakeholders across the country, who are telling us that now is the time to take the next step. Stakeholders are telling us that they want to see Bill C-13 passed so we can start working on the regulations.

Nevertheless, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives continue to play political games. This is completely unacceptable.

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[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2015, the Prime Minister has doubled our national debt to \$1.2 trillion. Over \$100 billion of that was even prior to the pandemic. He has incurred more debt than all other prime ministers combined. Just yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of Canada told me that, but for this massive spending, inflation would have been less.

This is a very important question: Will the Prime Minister finally admit that his failed fiscal policy is costing Canadians more for everything?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the opposite side of the House and Canadians that Conservatives voted with us to support Canadians during the pandemic. If they are having heartache over that now, that is on their conscience, not on ours, because we did the right thing to support Canadians.

Canadians and people around the world are facing a crisis when it comes to the cost of living. While we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio and the lowest deficit in the G7, while we have among the lowest inflation in the world, that is not good enough. That is why we are helping those Canadians who need it the most when they need it the most, investing in the economy so that it can grow, and investing in our fiscal position so that we can meet the challenges of the future.

Oral Questions

• (1505)

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that 40% of spending that took place during the pandemic, according to the government's own appointed Parliamentary Budget Officer, had absolutely zero to do with the pandemic. The member's response is cold comfort for those who cannot afford to heat their homes because of the carbon tax or cannot afford to stay in their homes because of interest rates, or cannot afford groceries because of inflation. The fact of the matter is that the Governor of the Bank Canada has now confirmed what we all feared: excessive government spending is the cause of made-in-Canada inflation.

Will the Prime Minister stop this problem, stop the spending and get inflation under control?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, moms and dads who used the CERB to stay home and take care of their kids did not cause inflation. Businesses that wanted to keep their doors open so they could serve Canadians in 2022 for the Christmas season did not create inflation. This government took the steps it needed to support Canadians, to support businesses and to support provinces. What we have done in the fall economic statement is support the economy so that it can grow and make sure that our fiscal position is strong.

What are we doing? We are responding to the needs of those Canadians who need help when they need it now. What are the Conservatives doing? They are suggesting that people invest in crypto. That is irresponsible.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the strict and ineffective policies of previous governments did not succeed in protecting our communities. Instead, they contributed to the overrepresentation of indigenous people and racialized and marginalized Canadians in our justice system.

Can the Minister of Justice inform the House of the practical measures our government is taking to do away with those policies?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, my neighbour, for her important question and the work she does for our community.

Oral Questions

With Bill C-5, for the first time in the history of Canada, we have done away with some mandatory minimum sentences, giving judges the flexibility to impose sentences that fit the crime. That means that prosecutors and police officers can spend more time and resources fighting serious crime. We did away with the mandatory minimums that contribute the most to the over-incarceration of indigenous, Black and racialized Canadians. We took action for a justice system—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone agrees that the government is failing. Even the Governor of the Bank of Canada said yesterday that the government has been spending too much for too long. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that Albertans will spend \$2,000 more on the carbon tax than they will get back in rebates.

When will the government do the right thing and cancel its plan to triple, triple, triple the tax on gas, groceries and home heating?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Conservatives are spreading misinformation.

Let us look at the Conservatives' record for a moment. They cut \$350 million from the environment and climate change budget. They withdrew from the Kyoto accord. For 10 long years, they did absolutely nothing on climate change. For that, at all the international meetings they went to, they won the Fossil of the Day Award, the Fossil of the Year Award, and they won the granddaddy of them all in 2013, the Lifetime Underachievement Fossil Award.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflation is stuck at a 40-high year and the cost of groceries is up 11%. Rural Manitoba seniors like Suzanne are skipping meals. Suzanne is skipping meals so often that she is actually not eating two or three days each week. She is wearing her winter jacket in her home so she does not have to turn up her heat and she is struggling to put gas in her car to drive an hour and a half to Winnipeg to see her doctor.

When will the Liberals stop hurting our seniors and axe the carbon tax increase on heating and eating?

● (1510)

Hon. Kamal Khara (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to look at the facts. The fact is that when the Conservative Party was in power, its plan for seniors was to raise the age of retirement to 67. The fact is the first thing we did was we reversed it back to 65. The fact is that the party opposite opposed every single measure that we put forward to support seniors, including the increase to the guaranteed income supplement, including an increase to old age security by 10% for those 75 and over, including our enhancements to the CPP.

I will not take any lessons from the party opposite in supporting seniors. We are going to continue to be here for them.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talking about just the facts, here are some facts. For seven years, taxes have gone up on all Canadians. For seven years, emissions have gone up. We had a better record on emissions than the Liberal government ever has had. Those are the facts.

Here are some more facts. Some 1.5 million Canadians rely on food banks to put food on their tables. Universities are sending out fundraising letters so that kids at our universities in Canada can eat before they go to bed.

This is the Canada these Liberals have made, so when will they get it together and stop forcing their failed carbon tax on all Canadians?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so delighted to get this opportunity right now to be able to tell a family of four in Newfoundland and Labrador that they will be getting \$1,312 in their bank account every year. Four times a year, they will have cash in the bank: \$328 in July, next July; \$328 in October, just when they are getting ready for the winter, and again in January and again in April.

I welcome another question from the other side so I can talk about how we are putting more money back into the hands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Tuesday marked National Housing Day, and I am proud to say that it was this government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to have to interrupt, as I am having a hard time hearing the question.

We take turns here, and it is his turn now. As for shouting questions, it does not work that way.

The hon. member for Calgary Skyview may begin from the top so we can hear the full question.

Mr. George Chahal: Mr. Speaker, this past Tuesday marked National Housing Day, and I am proud to say that it was this government that legislated the recognition of housing as a human right.

Since its launch, the national housing strategy has invested upward of \$72 billion to ensure that every Canadian has a roof over their head. Could the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion tell this House about the work our government has done and continues to do for Canadians from coast to coast to coast?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his strong advocacy on this issue.

Since coming into office, we have had historic investments to create and repair over 440,000 homes across the country. We are not stopping there. Earlier this month, I launched the third round of the rapid housing initiative, which will ensure an additional 4,500 deeply affordable homes for the most vulnerable across the country.

We believe, on this side of the House, that housing is a human right, and we will not rest until each and every Canadian has access to a safe and affordable place to call home.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been failing veterans for years. The minister has refused to hire permanent staff to support veterans, has suspended services for over a month and is now delegating tasks to a private company owned by Loblaw's for hundreds of millions of dollars. Meanwhile, VAC has delayed the contract rollout because workers have not been properly trained.

This is a crisis. Veterans deserve so much better. Why is the minister putting profits ahead of care for our veterans and their families, and will he stop this botched contract?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to explain to the House why this is a totally unacceptable and irresponsible question. This new contract will give 14,000 veterans access to 9,000 medical services staff, and there will be 600 offices available to them. This will also allow our case managers to reduce their administrative time and have more time to spend with our veterans.

* * *

● (1515)

MARINE TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, for years the residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands have had the pristine environment where they live, on the shores of the Salish Sea, contaminated by polluting commercial anchorages, which is essentially free parking for freighters. Since last month, the Port of Vancouver has been holding what it calls public consultation. The constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands do not feel consulted. They once again feel ignored, as the Port of Vancouver tells them these anchorages are essential to the Port of Vancouver instead of figuring out how to make the Port of Vancouver efficient.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of years, we have seen global supply disruptions that have impacted our supply chains at home. Because of that, we have seen congestion at airports and an increased number of vessels anchored next to our coast.

I have been listening to constituents on the coast, particularly where the hon. colleague is raising the point. I want to assure her that we are putting together an action plan to address this. We

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tabled Bill C-33 just two weeks ago. It will introduce new tools to help mitigate the traffic of the vessels. We will work with her and constituents to make sure that we manage this adequately.

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all the time we have for question period today.

I will ask everyone to take a deep breath and, if they have a conversation, they can take it into the lobby.

In the meantime, I believe the hon. opposition House leader has a question today.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (House leader of the official opposition, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is the best part of Thursday. It is the Thursday question. I just want to ask the government House leader if he can inform the members as to the business for the rest of this week and for next week as well.

I would like to take the opportunity to make a couple of suggestions for government business. We had the Bank of Canada governor admit at committee that deficits fuel inflation, so I was wondering if there would be an opportunity for the government to introduce another fall economic update where it would lower its deficits.

Also, I was wondering if the government might schedule a take-note debate at some point next week so that the House can really study the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report that concludes, based on numbers that the government has provided, that the vast majority of Canadians pay far more in the carbon tax than anything they hope to receive in the form of a rebate.

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to ruin the best part of Thursday, although the opposition House leader and I may be alone in the opinion that this is the best part of Thursday.

I am beginning to think, and I could be wrong in this supposition, that the hon. opposition House leader is making statements and not asking questions. However, in the event that there is a question, I would be happy to respond.

First, it is not enough, of course, when we take a look down the list, that we have lower inflation rates than many countries, whether it is the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, the entire eurozone, Iceland, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the United States or Ireland. I could go on and on. It does not matter that we have one of the lowest inflation rates in the world. That is cold comfort to somebody who is working hard and trying to pay the bills. That is why—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

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Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, we are not going to stop the supports we have for Canadians. In fact, I would suggest to the member opposite that making sure our most vulnerable are protected is critical. That is why we have a number of things we are going to be doing in that regard, which I will illuminate in a moment.

As to the other question that was put, I do seriously want to ask, if the Conservatives are opposed to action on the climate, whether they have reflected about what the costs are. These are not costs that will be borne for a year or two but for all time. It is something to reflect on regarding the questions that were posed to me.

I am pleased that this afternoon we are going to complete the second reading debate of Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts. Tomorrow, we will go back to the second reading debate of Bill C-20, concerning the public complaints and review commission act. On Monday, we will resume second reading debate of Bill C-27, the digital charter implementation act, 2022. For Tuesday and Wednesday, we will call Bill C-29, an act to provide for the establishment of a national council for reconciliation, which was reported with amendments from committee earlier this week.

Mr. Speaker, I see you moving in your chair, so you will be happy to know that, finally, for next Thursday, our plan is to commence second reading debate of Bill C-26, the critical cyber systems protection act.

• (1520)

The Speaker: I was squirming in my chair when both House leaders were up. I just want to remind them of something. I know both of them have a bit of knowledge on procedure in the House, and the Thursday question is a question, not a statement. I know they did not do it on purpose. Well, I will let the jury out on that.

I just wanted to remind them of that before we proceed to the point of order being put forward by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I would draw your attention to the article, “It Being Thursday: The Weekly Business Statement in Minority and Majority Parliaments”, which does a great job, I might say, of outlining the evolution of the Thursday question and how wonderful statement of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle was.

Frankly, if we were to go back in history, to when the Liberals were last in power, we would find that it was a time when the Liberals used it as a partisan shenanigan. It was actually the Conservatives who were able to rein that in to have an excellent way of making statements, as the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle did earlier today.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member is not arguing for shenanigans to continue. I would not want that. I would want the question asked to find out what is going to happen from both sides so we can move on.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-4, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other Acts (COVID-19 response and other measures), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the speech that my colleague from Saint-Jean made earlier.

I would like to ask her a simple question. There is a lot of talk about improving technology, and this bill talks about using audio conferencing. Video conferencing is relevant, but what does she think about the possibility of using audio conferencing only?

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the issue as to whether it should be expanded was raised by the Barreau du Québec in the brief it submitted when debate began on this bill.

I understand that audio conferencing can be part of the solution in exceptional circumstances when video is not allowed, but it must be interpreted very narrowly. That is why I welcome the fact that the law will be reviewed in three years' time by an independent committee and in five years' time by a parliamentary committee, to see whether it is actually working and whether procedural safeguards are being maintained, which the courts may be called upon to do.

Furthermore, we could see the law evolve when it comes into force, particularly in relation to procedural safeguards and fairness. Perhaps this will be one of the sections of the law that will not hold up at that time. It remains to be seen.

• (1525)

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague feels, like I do, that reducing court backlogs is so important that this bill should have been introduced much earlier in this parliamentary sitting, and whether she could share her thoughts with the House as to why that was not the case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his question.

In the House, we have often talked about the fact that when the government called elections, many good bills died on the Order Paper. When my constituents tell me that elections are expensive, I tell them to consider how much more expensive they really are when they are triggered unexpectedly and negate all the work accomplished in the House.

That said, with regard to reducing backlogs, I do not believe that this bill will have miraculous results. We also have to take that into consideration. We are doing things piecemeal, and it should not be seen as a magic solution. Even though Bill S-4 is being studied, we must not stop doing the work that needs to be done on other parts of the Criminal Code to reduce court backlogs. There is much work to be done, and Bill S-4 does not address everything.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

What we are trying to do here is improve the legal system as a whole. In this particular case, the issue is connectivity. I would like my colleague to comment on the problem of judicial vacancies, internal problems at the Parole Board and, of course, the existence and use of the “Liberalist”.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Joliette for his question. I did touch on that in my speech.

Connectivity is one interesting aspect. One of the downsides I see is the emergence of regional disparities. Some people may be required to come to court to testify in person because of poor connectivity in the region. Conversely, people who live some distance away may be pressured to communicate via audio conference and testify by video conference on the grounds that it is easier for them to do so remotely even though they might prefer to do it in person. Either scenario poses a risk of unequal treatment. This is one of the important factors that the House and perhaps the independent commissions will have to study. The Barreau du Québec also raised the issue in its recommendations.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before question period, the member made reference to facial expressions and other things that may be lost in a virtual setting.

Would she not agree that those types of considerations would be taken into account in situations where they might be of concern to a defence lawyer or the Crown attorney?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, we cannot take something into account if we have no knowledge of it. Unfortunately, when people testify by video conference, we do not have a 360-degree view of what is happening, much like when we operate by video conference here in the House.

It is not just about people's facial expressions. They might be shuffling their feet, looking nervous, tapping their foot or passing a note to their lawyer. It could also be about how the reaction of the entire room, about seeing how a witness reacts when they hear another witness or when they see what is happening in the courtroom. We get information from more than just what we see framed on a screen. A number of factors are involved. Some information could be lost, and this too must be analyzed by the committees.

As I was saying, there may be a risk that lawyers could agree at the start to proceed by video conference, and that during the proceedings, they realize that the procedural safeguards are not being

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upheld and they must return to an in-person format. At that point, there would be less efficiency rather than more. I am wondering what would happen if the consent to proceed by video conference were revoked. I hope that will be studied as well.

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be taking the unprecedented step of sharing my time with the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge. I hope it will be some encouragement for him to see the light on some issues. We are co-chairs of the Canada-Holy See parliamentary friendship group, and I would invite members of the House to watch their inboxes for upcoming events.

My remarks will be a bit more abbreviated than usual today because of some other commitments.

I want to speak to Bill S-4, and the context of the bill we are debating is some proposals from the government on measures relating to digital access to various aspects of our criminal justice system. However, the larger context of it is that we have a government that so many Canadians are experiencing as a government of delay. The defining impression of the current Liberal government is that of significant delays in being able to access the vital services they need.

We have seen outrageous delays with people trying to access passports. They were standing in incredibly long and sometimes dangerous lines, needing to be there early in the morning. We have totally unacceptable delays in our immigration system. People who are waiting to sponsor vulnerable refugees have to wait, in some cases, three years or more before they can bring them to this country. They are waiting to be reunited with spouses or have employees coming to the country. We have delays when it comes to passports, immigration, and accessing benefits. It is delay that reflects the current government's poor management of so many files.

In particular, in the context of this bill, we are seeing delays and challenges in accessing the justice system in a timely way. That is particularly dangerous because, when there are significant delays in getting to a hearing or to the adjudication of issues, people who have committed crimes may not be charged or have their charges not proceed on the basis of the delays that have occurred, which is a grievous injustice for victims. There are a number of steps I think the government needs to take when it comes to addressing this issue of delays in our justice system.

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One of the things that is driving further delays and putting strain on our justice system is the increase in crime. We are seeing a dramatic increase in crime under the government, especially violent crime, and its strategy of reducing sentencing is not working, but it is adding to the burden on communities, police and also our justice system. We are seeing, in a variety of areas, increasing demand for services driven by the increase in violent crime the current government has presided over and the resources to match that have not been available and we are seeing significant delays.

Of course, there have been challenges throughout the pandemic period that relate to the adjudication of hearings, but the fundamental reality underlying that is that we are seeing an increase in crime, which is increasing demand on our justice system and causing significant delays not only in court hearings but also across the spectrum of different services the government provides.

What we are calling on the government to do is to focus on the hard work of actually running the country and to find ways of delivering services better, more efficiently and more effectively. It is not enough for it to tell people about its aspirations, hopes and intentions, because good intentions are not enough. What Canadians want to see is the ability of the government to deliver results, which means delivering services that people need in a timely way. They are not seeing that. They are seeing platitudes about good intentions from the Liberals, but a failure to actually deliver on services.

Ironically, we have a government that wants ever-expanding control. It says it is going to keep offering more, yet it cannot deliver the core services of government efficiently and effectively. We need a government that is going to focus on delivering the core responsibilities of government well, effectively and in a timely way.

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the legislation itself is, in a very real way, a reflection of what the provinces were looking at seeing some changes on. It also takes into consideration some of the things we witnessed through the pandemic; in other words, modernization to a certain extent and recognizing the importance of technological advances.

I understand that the Conservatives are supporting the legislation, which is a really good thing. Providing this opportunity is healthy for our judicial system, which is in fact independent, and there seems to be fairly good ground support to see this legislation pass.

Could the member provide his thoughts on the importance of the legislation itself?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I support the legislation. I think the mechanisms that it provides for are worthwhile, at least at this stage. I think it needs to be looked at further at committee. Our party will be coming forward with some constructive proposals for strengthening it.

Fundamentally, it is also important to acknowledge the context. Canadians are seeing, for a variety of reasons across the board, delays in delivering vital services. That includes delays in the judicial system. I do not think COVID is the only factor that is contributing to that. We are also seeing, under the government, a significant rise

in violent crime and a failure to acknowledge that and respond to the circumstances that are creating that rise in crime.

I like this legislation, yes, but there is more work to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I very much liked and agreed with some of the points my colleague raised in his speech. I am thinking about his concerns about the delays in the delivery of federal government services. These delays are so bad that we wonder if the government is working at all or if it is simply broken.

I would now like to talk more about Bill S-4. The member talked about wait times, but the bill is on the justice system. When we talk about wait times, we often think about the justice system where the wait times are very long. It is hard to have an effective justice system.

I wonder if my colleague is satisfied with this bill and if, in reading this bill, he gets the impression that it will make major improvements to the wait times in the justice system. If not, are there other changes that could be made to improve the situation and shorten the wait times in the justice system?

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I agree with the sentiment of my colleague, that the government is broken. We have significant problems and delays in the justice system. I think that, as he is from the Bloc, he will particularly appreciate the point that it is the federal government that has presided over a significant increase in crime, yet it is the provinces that are left holding the bag in terms of paying the resources that are required when it comes to the administration of justice at the local level.

What the government needs to do, in addition to moving this bill forward, is to come up with real solutions that address crime. So far, their only solution to crime is to target people who do not break the law and to add additional red tape for law-abiding citizens who happen to own firearms. We see last-minute proposals at the committee stage from this government to ban hunting rifles. That is not a solution to the crime that we see at all. That is merely harassing law-abiding citizens with, in some cases, red tape and, in some cases, outright bans. That is not going to address the problem that we are seeing.

The government has presided over a significant increase in serious, violent crime. It needs to take stock of that problem. There are a lot of strategies we can talk about for reducing delays and backlogs in our court system. One great way to do it, though, is to actually reduce crime.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, if video conferencing is going to become more prevalent in our court systems, what is the state of our Internet particularly in rural areas? Is that going to be able to service the judicial system adequately?

Government Orders

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I think that is a problem. Mine is kind of a mixed suburban-rural riding that is relatively close to the city of Edmonton compared to some areas. However, there are still some issues in terms of coverage in my riding, and it is very important for a whole host of reasons: access to justice, access to government services, the ability to participate in the digital economy—

• (1540)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is wonderful to be here this afternoon and rise to speak on Bill S-4, a bill that demonstrates co-operation on a jurisdictional basis with the provinces, and a bill that moves our justice system forward so Canadians know our justice system is accessible, efficient and effective, and provides true access to justice for all Canadians from coast to coast. It is with much pleasure that I rise to speak to the bill.

I am pleased to be here and to have the opportunity to provide an overview of some of the key areas of reform proposed in Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts.

Informed by federal, provincial and territorial dialogue and key stakeholder input, the proposed amendments are intended to mitigate the impact of court delays on accused persons and on victims by supporting the efficient and effective operation of the criminal courts during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. They are designed to enhance the courts' ability to ensure that their operations respect both public health concerns for all participants in the criminal justice system and the charter rights of accused persons to be tried within a reasonable time in order to maintain public confidence in our justice system.

The proposed amendments are based on the following criteria: One, they were critical to increasing the efficiency of the criminal justice system during the conditions of the pandemic; two, they address the current impediments to efficiency in the Criminal Code; three, they would have little or no prejudicial impact on accused persons; four, they are likely to receive broad-based parliamentary support; and five, they would result in amendments to the Criminal Code that would continue to provide efficiencies post pandemic.

The pandemic significantly impacted the operation of the criminal courts in Canada, as we all know, with courts either temporarily closing or severely restricting their operations due to public health orders. Furthermore, the pandemic exposed weaknesses in our criminal court system that can be fixed by providing remote access to proceedings under special circumstances. Bill S-4 would go beyond correcting for issues discovered during the pandemic and would make the justice process in Canada more efficient and accessible.

Bill S-4 addresses issues that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light regarding the ways in which criminal trials are conducted in this country. It also builds on past government initiatives, including Bill C-75 from a previous Parliament, which came into

force in 2019 and made significant progress in modernizing our criminal justice system, including by facilitating the appearance of accused persons, lawyers and judges by audio or video conference throughout the criminal justice process.

Criminal justice is an area of shared jurisdiction, and co-operation with provincial and territorial partners is key. Parliament has exclusive authority to enact criminal law, including criminal procedure. Provinces and territories have jurisdiction over the administration of justice, including criminal courts.

While the courts and criminal justice professionals are, for the most part, managing to maintain essential services in the criminal justice process during the pandemic, accused persons, offenders, victims and witnesses are nonetheless being impacted by delays.

While many challenges facing the criminal courts have been operational in nature, some have arisen due to legislative impediments in the Criminal Code. Consequently, the pandemic has revealed the need for a number of amendments to the Criminal Code to provide clarity to the courts on issues that have arisen and to make the criminal process more efficient and effective by expanding the permissible use of technology during the pandemic, for the recuperation period and beyond. These proposed reforms are for the benefit of all participants in the criminal justice system.

Bill S-4 would modernize our criminal justice system by employing video conference and audio conference technology to accommodate for pandemic-era challenges, and it would equip our courts to handle similar challenges that may arise in the future. Furthermore, we would improve all Canadians' access to justice.

The bill would not change the principle that all persons involved in the criminal justice process must physically appear in person unless otherwise authorized under the Criminal Code. Courts will still have discretion in this area. However, this bill would ensure that the judicial process is not unduly stalled, by permitting remote conference options under extenuating circumstances.

• (1545)

Canadians deserve a justice system that is accessible, efficient and effective, and that provides true access to justice for all. The pandemic has taught us that technology can help make the justice system work better for all people who come in contact with it. Bill S-4 proposes a range of reforms that will make court proceedings more flexible while protecting the rights of all participants.

The reforms proposed in Bill S-4 flow from the important work of the Action Committee on Court Operations in Response to COVID-19, co-chaired by the Minister of Justice and Chief Justice Richard Wagner. They are also informed by important contributions from the provinces and territories, as well as other justice system stakeholders. With Bill S-4, we have the opportunity to improve our justice system by making those good ideas permanent.

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Since March 2020, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada has engaged regularly on the impacts of the pandemic on criminal courts with provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice and public safety. The proposed amendments take into consideration input received from provinces, territories and other key stakeholders.

In addition, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada has continued to be kept apprised of the challenges faced by courts across Canada in his role as co-chair of the Action Committee on Court Operations in Response to COVID-19. These discussions have all informed the proposed changes introduced in the bill.

A more efficient justice system will benefit all Canadians. I ask that all members of this House support the quick passage of the bill. I believe Bill S-4 helps transform and modernize our criminal justice system while ensuring respect for all persons involved in the criminal court process, including accused persons and prospective jurors.

I am confident Bill S-4 and the proposed reforms will improve our criminal justice system while facilitating careful oversight by the courts to ensure that the rights of accused persons and offenders are protected.

The gist of this bill, its main purpose, is that Canadians deserve a justice system that is accessible, efficient and effective, and that provides access to justice for all. I thank everyone for allowing me the time to speak on a very important bill for all Canadians.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his well-informed and well-researched speech on Bill S-4.

My question relates to Jordan's principle, which is the requirement that people in indigenous communities receive justice in a fair and equitable manner. I wonder if my colleague could comment on whether Bill S-4 adequately addresses that.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for a very informed question on Jordan's principle, with regard to our justice system.

I am not a lawyer, but I will try to answer this question to the best of my ability. What I will say is that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is obviously working very closely with indigenous communities and consulting with indigenous stakeholders to ensure that we have a nation-to-nation relationship when it comes to reforms within our justice system and to move forward with reforms in our justice system. Much like we did on Bill C-5, where there are negative impacts on indigenous individuals, for example, the overrepresentation of indigenous individuals in Canadian jails, measures will be taken to correct that and to ensure that there are not systemic barriers within our criminal justice system that impact indigenous communities.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have to say that Bill S-4 needs improvement.

What does my colleague think about the issue of connectivity in this case? We know it is a problem. My colleague mentioned it earlier, and he also talked about the existence and use of the "Liberalist". There are currently judicial vacancies.

I would like to hear some solutions from my colleague.

• (1550)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, which is very important to this bill.

[*English*]

On the connectivity issue, obviously our government is working in a collaborative fashion with the provinces, putting funds forward to ensure all Canadians are connected to the Internet. If the opportunity arises via Bill S-4 for criminal justice system procedures or cases to occur in a manner where audio conferencing or video conferencing can take place and provides for an effective, efficient and accessible criminal justice system, we would continue to do that in a very expeditious manner.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to see Bill S-4 coming forward today to begin the much overdue work of modernizing Canada's judicial system. We know the government has known about the need for a much required overhaul since before the Liberals took over office from the previous Harper government.

I was speaking to a constituent just yesterday here in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith. She expressed to me that she had to apply to be excused from jury duty due to the costs associated with it.

I am wondering if the member could clarify why the government had to wait for almost a full year before bringing forward this legislation, which essentially is a carbon copy of a bill which was first introduced in the last Parliament, before the House, while maintaining existing systems with backlogs and barriers for jurors.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, there is obviously a legislative calendar we need to bring forward on the days allotted for it. I am glad to see this bill has been brought forward in this House to be debated by all members and hopefully quickly sent to committee and follow the regular process so that we can enact another piece of legislation that modernizes our criminal justice system here in Canada.

We all agree that this needs to occur. We all agree that Canadians need to have access to the criminal justice system and that it has to be accessible, efficient and effective. This is another step in that direction.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

Government Orders

The pandemic taught us many things. It taught us about how viruses spread or do not spread, whether asymptomatic victims of a virus can be contagious, whether vaccines prevent us from being infected or only prevent us from being very sick when we are infected and also what effects isolation has on mental health. The jury is out on many of these issues. People will be writing Ph.D. theses on the lessons we learned or failed to learn from the COVID-19 experience, but it is not just medical and scientific things that we learned through the COVID-19 years.

We also learned that we could do business differently. More and more people are working remotely and that kept many businesses afloat during the most severe periods of lockdowns and restrictions. Admittedly, working remotely works better in some sectors than others. In my profession of law, for example, working from home or from the office was completely seamless, or from my cabin, for that matter. My clients did not typically ask me where I was, as long as I was serving them. My clients did not tell me where they were. I did not ask. They did not tell me, and it did not matter in most instances. I remember that, after a lengthy conversation with a client one morning, I suggested that we meet for lunch that afternoon and he said it was a five-hour flight from Hawaii where he was and that would be difficult to do. I did not know and it did not matter. Business was seamless in some sectors.

This was before the pandemic, but the pandemic accelerated the need for us to become more and more digital in the way we do business, and that is why we are here today. We are looking at draft legislation that originated in the Senate, Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code to allow for the use of electronic means, for example, to select a jury and allow jurors to participate in hearings via video conferencing. It would allow us to expand the availability of remote appearances by video conference and/or audio conference, and it would modify case management rules, fingerprinting procedures and the issuing of warrants, such as search warrants, just as examples. There is a long, exhaustive list of what this bill would reform in our judicial system. All of this was born out of the pandemic. None of this is novel and very little of it is controversial.

Conservatives have always supported finding new and innovative ways for government operations to be more efficient and cost-effective, but we must raise some concerns.

For video conferencing to be effective, it must be reliable. We have seen even here in the nation's capital, in Ottawa, where one would think the Internet would be world class, that hybrid meetings often get interrupted because a participant in the meeting, perhaps a witness at a committee, gets frozen or the audio is so bad that our highly qualified and professional interpretation teams cannot make out what is being said. It is one thing if a parliamentary or Senate committee is disrupted because of technological deficiencies, but it is quite another when it is a criminal trial and a person's rights, freedoms and liberties are at stake. We must get it right.

That brings me to reflect on a big challenge we have in Canada, particularly in some parts of this vast country, and that is Internet connectivity. Canada's Conservatives have been calling for an end to the digital divide between urban and rural areas in our country. Every aspect of our 21st-century economy is becoming increasingly dependent on the Internet and, therefore, we must ensure that everyone has access to good, reliable broadband.

Canada's productivity metrics lag those of our main competitor nations, our trading partners. For every \$100, for example, that an American worker pumps into the economy, the Canadian counterpart contributes only \$67. That is a big productivity gap. The Minister of Finance has acknowledged that gap and on several occasions called it our Achilles heel.

● (1555)

In the recent fall economic statement, she said, "We will continue to invest in tackling the productivity challenge that is Canada's economic Achilles heel." Earlier in the year, in delivering her budget, the Minister of Finance had this to say about Canada's lagging productivity. She said, "we are falling behind when it comes to economic productivity.... This is a well-known Canadian problem and an insidious one. It is time for Canada to tackle it."

I could not agree with that more. It is time for us to tackle our productivity lag, and a good place to start would be to vastly improve our Internet accessibility, not only here in Ottawa, not only in my community of Langley where it is far from perfect in some areas, but across the country and particularly in rural areas. We can talk to any worker, any tradesperson, any health care worker, professional, trucker or teacher. They will all tell us that the best way to improve productivity is to get better tools, and the Internet is anyone's tool these days, including for the legal profession, our criminal justice system and our courts. There is nothing special about courts. They need to conduct business like everyone else.

Getting back to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code, to improve efficiency in our courts, we want to move them toward greater use of electronic tools in jury selection, in jury participation, in witness appearances and even in the appearances of the accused, when the accused and the Crown both agree. We support these measures, but we must listen to the experts.

In her May 2021 report to the standing committee, our former federal ombudsman for victims of crime, Ms. Heidi Illingworth, had this to say on this specific topic. She said, "many courthouses across [the country] have old infrastructure, and implementing videoconferencing has been a challenge. For some in remote areas, bandwidth and internet access remains an issue."

● (1600)

Ms. Illingworth was saying this in a study being conducted by the justice committee on formerly Bill C-23. Bill S-4 is almost a mirror image of it. Bill C-23 had the support of all parties, but it got bogged down because the government called an election that nobody wanted and was not necessary. That is for another day.

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Ms. Illingworth had this to say in support of increasing the availability of technology. She said, “It is my hope that these measures will help to relieve the pressure on the courts by leveraging video and teleconferencing technologies to help speed up filings and hold hearings in an inclusive and efficient way.”

She was the ombudsman for victims of crime. In that capacity, she had this to say in support of victims. She said, “ensuring access to internet service across Canada would address concerns regarding access to justice for victims of crime during COVID-19, by ensuring that victims have a means to participate in the process should they so choose”, but she also warned, “Unfortunately, not all Canadians have equal access to the internet.”

I am hearing from many people in my home province of British Columbia about how important good access to the Internet is for Pacific economic development, which is something I have a great deal of interest in, but that too is for another day.

Today, I am speaking in support of improving access to justice through Bill S-4. It is a step in the right direction. We will be supporting it. I look forward to a deeper dive into the details of Bill S-4 at committee. I welcome any questions.

• (1605)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the words the member has put on the record regarding Bill S-4. I do not necessarily agree with everything, but I agree with some of it.

We have had a fairly good discussion on Bill S-4 today. I believe a vast majority of us, if not all members, will be voting in favour of the legislation going to committee. I have consistently made reference to the fact that this legislation is before us today because of provincial input and the fact that we are going through COVID, which clearly demonstrates the importance of recognizing technological change and how that change can assist us in the judicial system.

It is important for us to recognize the issue of judicial independence, which goes to my question. It is really encouraging when we pass legislation like this, because of the direct impact. It is also always good to get unanimous support wherever possible, as we saw, for example, with Rona Ambrose's private member's bill, which ultimately became a government bill.

I wonder if the member can provide his thoughts regarding the importance of judicial independence.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, judicial independence is core to our western judicial system. It is core to our whole democratic system. It is core to every part of our society. Of course, we support it. We need to do everything we can to make sure that our judiciary remains independent, particularly from Parliament and politicians.

We appoint judges because we trust that judges are going to make wise decisions, but there still has to be some oversight. That was not the subject of this bill today, but previous debates in the House, like the one earlier this week, were on the Canadian Judicial Council and judges judging judges.

This needs to be done properly and there needs to be lay input, but the bottom line is that politicians should be hands-off.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would like to hear what he thinks about a situation that could result from the application of Bill S-4.

For example, since there is often a shortage not only of judges but also of court rooms, clerks, public servants and constables, we could potentially find ourselves in a situation where a person could get an earlier court date if they decided to have their case heard via video conference, whereas those who chose to have an in-person hearing would have to wait longer.

Ultimately, that would perhaps put pressure on people to proceed via video conference even if they would rather have their case heard in person.

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, that is a great question. I believe that the reforms in Bill S-4, if properly implemented, will have the overall effect of speeding up the judicial system and increasing accessibility to it, particularly for remote communities. I believe that all in all, it is a big improvement, but the point is well taken that there have been a lot of delays.

There has been an increase in crime, unfortunately, as we have heard from other speakers on this topic. The best way to speed up the judicial system is to not only have more judges and improve our technology, but also bring crime levels down. There is no easy solution to that, but that must be part of the solution.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, this bill does take a number of positive steps, but I am curious as to why the government left out the recommendation from the justice committee's report on access to justice and legal aid. It called on the federal government to replace the legal aid funds currently included in the Canada social transfer with a specific earmarked legal aid fund for provinces, administered under the Department of Justice Canada's legal aid program. This would help with backlogs and access to justice.

Does the member support this recommendation, and does he agree that the government should have included this in Bill S-4?

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, I do not know the details of that proposal, but I can tell the member generally that I am very supportive of more funding for legal aid. I was a lawyer in British Columbia, where legal aid was underfunded. It is so important to speed up the judicial process and make sure that justice is accessible to all people.

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Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make other related amendments. While I have much to say on this bill, I want to briefly talk about some of the failures of the Liberal government on crime in general and crime specifically.

Rural crime is a serious issue, and one that has been ignored by the Liberal government for far too long. In my area, in Haliburton County for example, incidents increased from 526 back in 2017 to 758 in 2021. Police are now trying to keep up with more people charged than in any of the previous four years.

The crime severity index, or CSI, is a measure of police-reported crime in which more serious crimes are given a higher weight in the overall measurement of all crimes. The index provides a picture of regional crime trends. In the case of Kawartha Lakes, specifically in Lindsay, the picture is not as good. Like Haliburton County, the CSI numbers for Lindsay in 2021 showed a significant increase compared to previous years. Lindsay's overall CSI was 93.1 last year, which is a jump of more than 20% over 2020, and is significantly higher than the country's CSI of 73.7 and nearly double the province's CSI of 56.21 for the same period.

Kawartha Lakes Police Service Chief Mark Mitchell described the increase as “death by 1,000 cuts”, referring to the lack of murders but an overall increase in other non-violent crimes. He further added, “Our calls for service were up 20% in 2021, our criminal charges were up 25%, break and enters, frauds were all significantly higher, and our theft charges were up 80% compared to the year before and the current year.”

I have spoken with residents who are afraid to walk in their community. They are afraid to basically be inside their own homes. They are frustrated and angry. These concerns came to a boiling point about a year ago at a community meeting I attended that was hosted by the Kawartha Lakes Police Service.

At the meeting, residents learned that the Ross Memorial Hospital's mental health program had already received roughly 1,700 referrals just this year. Concerns were raised about the impact the Central East Correctional Centre is having on the community. The John Howard Society noted the challenge given the number of those who have come to the area to support the incarcerated and those who are released into the community on their own recognition, bail or after completing their sentence.

The Kawartha Lakes Police Service is doing everything it can, but the government is sadly making its job harder. While it was distressing to hear the first-hand stories shared by many in attendance, it was evident to me that Canada's justice system has failed those law-abiding citizens. Lindsay resident Al Hussey raised concerns about the victims of crime, asking, “When does the support start flowing to us?” He was speaking of the victims of crime such as the residents living next to known drug houses, the business and property owners who are being robbed and the people who are afraid to walk near certain areas of town.

It is true a small number of people are creating a disproportionate amount of work for our law enforcement agencies, the court system, social services and not-for-profit organizations. However,

those who continually refuse help and continue to reoffend should not be repeatedly returned to the streets in a revolving door justice system.

A big part of this is linked to the passage of Bill C-75. In 2017, the Liberal government's legislation watered down penalties for over 100 serious crimes, including the use of date rape drugs, human trafficking and impaired driving causing bodily harm. Sadly, the government severely underestimated the heartbreaking impact this decision would have on individuals, communities and families. It is unacceptable that taxpayers are once again being forced to pay more while at the same time receiving a lower quality of life.

Police officers I speak with say that Bill C-75 is the root of much of the issue regarding the catch and release bail concepts through the ladder principle, a principle that instructs justice system actors to release the accused at the earliest opportunity under the least restrictive conditions.

I firmly believe that serious crimes deserve serious penalties. Most importantly, the law should always put the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens above dangerous or reoffending criminals.

• (1610)

It is clear that Bill C-75 has hurt our community. To that end, I recognize that federal lawmakers must make bold changes to our criminal justice system. New methods, such as restorative justice, should be expanded, especially for those who show a desire to be rehabilitated and released as productive members of our society.

This brings me to Bill S-4. It may come as no surprise to anyone listening that the first thing I looked at was how much this bill would impact crime in the communities I represent and how it would impact those victims of crimes. The impetus for this bill is born from the increasing backlog facing the court system here in Canada. I believe we all have stories about that.

The judicial system has been facing a series of delays in cases proceeding to trial, which has been exacerbated by COVID. This is not lost on us here in the official opposition. We have continuously raised concerns about the delays and the potential for criminals to walk free due to the Supreme Court's Jordan decision, which said that no more than 18 months can pass between laying a charge and the end of the trial case in provincial courts or 30 months for cases in superior courts. We have raised our concerns in the House and in the media.

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It was the Conservatives who called for a study into the impacts of COVID-19 on the judicial system at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Now Bill S-4 hopes to alleviate this backlog through several initiatives. It will amend the process for peace officers to obtain warrants without appearing in person, will expand the provisions to fingerprint the accused later should fingerprints not previously have been taken at the time of arrest, and will allow the courts to deal with administrative matters for accused persons not represented by lawyers.

Of these provisions I have no issue. Anything to move the process along that does not diminish the rights of the accused persons or victims or brings the justice system into disrepute is a good thing. I expect that these initiatives will be thoroughly examined at committee and perhaps even acted on.

However, I do have concerns, perhaps cautions is a better word, with the remaining provisions in the legislation, particularly around the expansion of the accused's ability to appear remotely by audio or video conference and to allow the participation of prospective jurors in the jury selection process by video conference. I would caution the members at committee to pay particular attention to the rights of victims and those citizens who are doing their duty as jurors.

We must ensure that the anonymity of jurors is protected. Technology has come a long way and the risk that recognition software might compromise jurors and risk the integrity of the trial is a real concern.

We must also take into consideration the impact of the expansion of telecommunication options, particularly when allowing accused persons to call in using a phone, which may impact the healing process for victims and their families. The bill will permit an offender to appear remotely for sentencing purposes. This measure would require the consent of the criminal prosecutor. The court would also weigh the rights of the offender to have a fair public hearing.

Nowhere is the victim asked or required to consent to the offender being allowed to call in for his or her sentence. The balance of rights in the court process is already heavily weighted in favour of the accused and I am afraid that Bill S-4 tips the scale even further.

That reminds me of another failure of the Liberal government, which is the delay in the filling of long vacancies, such as the federal ombudsman for victims of crime. Without that person in place, Bill S-4 will not be critically analyzed by a key advocate for victims to advise on how the bill will impact victims of crime.

Conservatives remain steadfast in our commitment to victims of crime and will ensure that legislation like Bill S-4 helps victims and their families in their pursuit of justice. We will stand up for law-abiding Canadians to ensure communities remain safe places to live and that delays in the court process do not allow criminals to walk free.

With that, I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to give a quick example. A number of Conserva-

tives have stood up and talked about the issue of crime stats, and that brought me back to a day when I was inside the Manitoba legislature. Stephen Harper was Prime Minister at the time, and I raised a question about the record number of car thefts. Manitoba was way above every province in the country. I think in a normal year we would get 3,000, but in that particular year it was 14,000. It was a huge increase, and we found out that a relatively small number of youths were stealing a whole lot of cars. We ended up recognizing that judicial independence is important, but it is also a shared responsibility between the provinces and the federal government. Our municipal governments also play a role.

To deal with crime in that particular issue, once the province and the city got together and developed a plan, along with MPI, Manitoba Public Insurance, they were able to drive down the number of car thefts in the following years. It proved to be very effective.

I am wondering if the member could provide his thoughts on the idea that when we talk about crime stats, we have to incorporate other jurisdictions to deal with crime.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I accept the fact that there are a number of contributing factors. I also agree with the member that in most cases, especially in the cases I laid out in my speech in my community, it is definitely a small number of people doing a disproportionate number of these crimes. At the end of the day, whether a person is a victim of crime or just a law-abiding citizen who likes to feel safe in their community, we like to see that repeat offenders, especially violent repeat offenders, are not continually rotated back into our community causing this kind of frustration, as I said in my speech about the community meeting where people said they were sick and tired of being revictimized over and over again.

I think there are ways that organizations can work together, and the member opposite laid out a few. I have a few instances in my community where not-for-profits come together and work together to try to help people and rehabilitate those who want the help. We need to look at all facets of this, and I urge the committee that is going to study Bill S-4 to do that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about increasing the efficiency of the courts and being able to process more cases.

The idea of mandatory minimum sentences is an issue that comes up often in the House. Mandatory minimums had become quite common for certain offences, preventing the parties, crown and defence, from reaching agreements in certain cases because the agreed-upon suggestion would be lower than the mandatory minimum sentence. This forces parties to go to trial and increases backlogs in the courts.

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Does my colleague agree with that reality, that is, that it also contributes in some cases to backlogs?

• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I know that my Bloc colleague was a lawyer in a previous life, and I appreciate her input in the discussion today.

I think that looking at as many ways as possible to speed up the judicial system for victims, for those awaiting trial, to either be convicted or cleared, and a whole bunch of other cases in between, is something that should be examined. We have seen massive backlogs, as I mentioned in my speech. COVID was a major contributor, but even before COVID, the backlog in the court system was quite significant. Issues have been raised about that.

I think that there is an opportunity here to have that conversation about what can be done to speed it up, and I look forward to that discussion in the weeks ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I just want to recognize that, for those of us who represent rural and northern areas, the ability for people to access the justice system remotely, as well other systems, is a very serious matter. I wonder if the Conservatives agree that Canadians living in remote and rural areas should have the same access to serving on a jury remotely, as urban Canadians do, to make jury selection.

How important is it, in the member's view, to make access to jury selection as fair as possible, particularly for rural and remote communities?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, rural communities have a number of challenges. I live in one. I represent a rural community, and I know the challenges. There are challenges related to connectivity, but as I mentioned in my speech, there needs to be protection for those applying to be a juror. There are concerns around hacking or facial recognition software, which could be used to identify, so all those considerations need to be taken into account.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton Manning.

I begin my comments regarding Bill S-4 by acknowledging the hard-working and law-abiding citizens of my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

During these challenging economic times and the troubling revelations Canadians are hearing every day in testimony from the Emergencies Act trial, Canadians in my riding and across the country know that I will always defend whomever the target is for this week's two minutes of hate from a Prime Minister who likes to make fun of other cultures by mocking them in their native attire and wearing blackface.

Why is it that whenever the Liberal Party brings forth legislation to change criminal laws or the administration of justice, it is always about protecting criminals, never about the victims or their families? The system is failing everyone. It is failing victims, it is failing the accused and it is failing everyone working in it.

We have a situation where the public lacks faith in the justice system, and that is what we are beginning to see happen. There is even a call for the Liberal-appointed head of the RCMP to resign. People have lost trust in our public institutions. Everything the government touches breaks. Everything is broken.

Bill S-4 is about technology. Knowing how the government thinks, could Judge Dredd be far behind? The fact is that technology is not a quick fix for what ails the criminal justice system in Canada. The government has all the wrong priorities. For once, the government needs to think about the victims of criminal justice. Someone has to speak for the victims.

Earlier this year, a coroner's inquest was concluded in one of the worst cases of multiple-partner violence in Canadian history. Basil Borutski murdered Anastasia Kuzyk, Nathalie Warmerdam and Carol Culleton in separate incidents on the morning of September 22, 2015, in Renfrew County. Borutski was well known to all of his victims and to police for a long history of violence. He was a dangerous serial offender with a history of beating women. The three grieving families and our entire community relived the horror of that event through the inquest. Borutski went on a violent rampage in the Ottawa Valley on that day and murdered three women: Carol Culleton, Nathalie Warmerdam and Anastasia Kuzyk.

In their verdict, the jurors determined that Culleton, Warmerdam and Kuzyk all died by homicide. Carol Culleton's cause of death was upper airway obstruction, which is a polite way of saying she was choked to death, while Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam both died of shotgun wounds to the chest and neck. The violence did not happen without warning. All the women were former intimate partners of Borutski, and the murders were a culmination of abusive behaviour that had been happening for over 40 years.

He was sentenced to life in prison with no eligibility of parole for 70 years. Multiple sentences were to be served concurrently for the multiple murders he committed.

Prior to the law passed by the Conservative government, the maximum sentence for first-degree murder, even when multiple victims were killed, was a life term with no chance of parole for 25 years. The Conservative government law that I was pleased to vote in favour of allowed for parole terms to be stacked on top of one another in cases involving multiple victims. The sentence of serial mass murderer Basil Borutski is an example of a sentence that takes into consideration the severity of the crime. The Supreme Court has since ruled that there can be no more multiple sentences.

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Alexandre Bissonnette, the Quebec City mosque shooter who was initially sentenced to 40 years for the murder of six people, had his sentence struck down on appeal. The Supreme Court upheld the appeal and ruled that sentences of that length are cruel and unusual and violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Unless the Liberal government brings in new legislation, the court's ruling will mean the maximum sentence a person can receive for first-degree murder, even in cases of multiple murders, is life with no chance of parole for 25 years. When women are killed because they are women, that is different than first-degree murder, second-degree murder, manslaughter or the general term “homicide”. It sends the wrong message to the courts.

In the case of serial killer Basil Borutski, a violent offender who openly ignored court orders that were part of his probation, he was released anyhow. Bill C-5 is a slap in the face to every woman in Canada by a Prime Minister who is consumed by his own toxic masculinity.

● (1625)

By reducing or eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, a downward pressure on all sentences is exerted, especially in circumstances in which supposedly determinate periods of imprisonment are routinely reduced, halved or more by early release. If a man such as Borutski is released early after a triple murder, what sentence will a mere murder receive?

What does all this mean to the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke? In the case of Bill C-5, which was brought to the House instead of the Senate like Bill S-4, Bill C-5 is a radical, left-wing bill that would eliminate mandatory minimum penalties. It sends the wrong message to the community and the families of Carol Culleton, Nathalie Warmerdam and Anastasia Kuzyk, and women who live in fear of domestic violence.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening attentively to the speech by the member. I am hearing her talk of Bill C-5 and mandatory minimum penalties. I do not believe any of that is relevant to Bill S-4.

I am wondering what your thoughts are on the relevance of the speech.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The member well knows that there is quite a bit of latitude, and the member has made references to Bill S-4. I would hope that, in the three and a half minutes left in the member's speech, she will come back to the subject at hand.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, there is a recommendation from the inquest for the federal government to explore adding the term “femicide” to the Criminal Code. What do Canadians get? Bill C-5 and Bill S-4. Bill S-4 was so important to the government that it has come before us several times, and the government just lets it lapse on the Order Paper.

Borutski, the eastern Ontario man who was sentenced to life with no chance of parole for 70 years for killing three women in 2015, can now challenge his sentence due to the Supreme Court ruling. Bill S-4 is not going to fix that. Even if he is not granted parole, his victims' families are forced to relive the crime and the loss of their loved ones at regular parole hearings after the 25-year mark. Real

justice calls for changes that would prevent such a tragedy from happening again. Tinkering with the system by allowing Zoom into a courtroom is no joke to victims' families, and that is what Bill S-4 is doing.

The coroner's inquest into the deaths of Carol Culleton, Nathalie Warmerdam and Anastasia Kuzyk wrapped up after hearing extensive testimony from victims' families, their counsel, domestic violence experts and advocates. The jury made 86 recommendations based on the inquest. It is important to know about them since part of accountability is our awareness, and demanding that our public institutions do the right thing to prevent intimate partner violence. However, Bill S-4 tinkers with the administration of the court system.

It is time to be more cognizant of what is causing the problems. The first set of recommendations addresses the need for oversight and accountability. These initial recommendations recognize the importance of listening to and learning from victims and survivors, and they emphasize the need to follow up on implementation.

We need to create a survivor advocate position. Understanding that domestic violence victims' experiences with police and the justice system can be difficult, the jury recommended having a survivor advocate to advocate on behalf of survivors when they interact with the justice system.

They wanted to establish an independent intimate partner violence commission. The jury wants a commission to be established, like the one in the U.K., that can be a voice for survivors and victims' families. Local activists agree that an independent commission would help ensure the inquest recommendations are followed through and engage in meaningful consultation. By speaking with intimate partner violence survivors, victims' families and experts in the field, these consultations would determine the responsibilities and direction of the IPV commission and evaluate the effectiveness of existing community supports and prevention strategies, including program funding.

I will conclude my remarks by thanking all those who were involved in the inquest process, including the witnesses who gave their time so generously, along with the women from the anti-violence community in Renfrew county and beyond.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I have the pleasure of sitting with her on the Standing Committee on National Defence, among others.

She spoke at length about victims' rights. We know that victims are generally witnesses, not parties, in criminal hearings. There may be some work to do on this. However, one of the potential positives that could come of Bill S-4 is a reduction in wait times for cases to be heard. Victims may not have to wait as long to know the outcome of a case.

Would my colleague agree that this is at least a step in the right direction for victims?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, the courts are clogged up because the Liberal appointed activist judges keep letting murderers, rapists and pedophiles out early, if they even get sentenced to prison at all. That is the reason for the backlogs.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I share the dismay of my Bloc colleague across the way at how little of the speech we just heard dealt with the actual content of Bill S-4, but perhaps I will ask a question about one of the opening statements, which was that it is always about protecting criminals, never victims.

This is particularly ironic because resolving backlogs and ensuring the timely carriage of justice, the topics of Bill S-4, are very much in the interest of the victims of crime, who the member seems so concerned about. Would she not agree? Perhaps she could take 30 seconds to breeze through where she stands on the content of the bill.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, the content of the bill is not going to do anything for the victims of crime. There is a constant revolving door of criminals through the justice system. Repeat offenders come in time after time, and then the government cracks down on lawful firearms owners every time there is another mass shooting, or even one shooting.

Then we find out that, statistically, since they have been cracking down on lawful firearms owners, shootings have gone up. There was a Statistics Canada report on this huge increase in shootings the very day the government announced another crackdown on lawful firearms owners.

• (1635)

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke a lot about the revolving door situation in our criminal justice system, and I have a private member's bill, which I call the "end the revolving door" act. It has to do with getting people who have been sentenced to federal penitentiaries into addiction treatment and recovery.

I am wondering if she could maybe speak to how that is one piece that might be helpful for people to help end the revolving door.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I know people who want to have drug treatment but cannot get into a treatment facility, and they commit crimes because that is the only way they can get access to treatment. Instead of funnelling tons of money to these harm-reduction centres, we need to find a way to get more treatment to people who are not breaking the law.

Government Orders

I must say that the bill my hon. colleague has put forth through Private Members' Business is certainly more meaningful. It would have more impact on people's lives and would prevent crimes from happening in the first place if people receive treatment. It is certainly more effective than Bill S-4, so I wish that had come first.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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 Haldimand—Norfolk, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Taxation; and the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Taxation.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other acts (COVID-19 response and other measures).

The judicial system has been facing a series of delays in cases proceeding to trial, which has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Conservatives have raised concerns about the delays and the potential for criminals to walk free due to the Supreme Court's Jordan decision, which said that no more than 18 months can pass between the laying of a charge and the end of trial cases in provincial courts, or 30 months for cases in superior courts.

We have raised our concerns over the delays in the judicial system a number of times during the pandemic, both in the House and through the media, so it is good that the Liberals are finally listening. I understand that sometimes they have different priorities.

The court system scrambled to adapt and learn how to function during the pandemic, and it was obvious that changes were needed. I could have made this speech at the height of the pandemic, when the need was very urgent. The government recognized the need then and introduced Bill C-23, but it was obviously not a priority. That bill died on the Order Paper when the House was dissolved by the Liberals for their unnecessary election. However, as with many efforts of the government, I suppose we can consider it to be better late than never, though it seems sometimes that on truly pressing issues, such as inflation, for the Liberals to do anything, it is more never than late.

It is indeed important to support the courts in the technological transition that has been stimulated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to be as prepared as possible for a future pandemic or similar disruptions.

In the past two years, we have all discovered new ways of doing business. Some of those ways have been beneficial, others arguably not as much. So too is the case with this bill.

Government Orders

For justice to be truly done, it must be seen to be done. Any citizen has the right to attend court and observe the proceedings. In the past, that has naturally been a right that could be limited by the physical space of the courtroom. Allowing virtual proceedings would change that limitation while bringing with it the issue of controlling the dissemination of images from the proceedings. We have gone from cameras not being allowed into a courtroom to everyone having the ability to take screenshots or even videos of the proceedings.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt throughout our criminal justice system. Problems that perhaps we did not realize we had have been brought into focus. A modernization of the system is long overdue. The pandemic has shown us that action is very necessary now.

With the technological tools that are now available to us, it makes sense to allow, as this bill would, peace officers to apply for and obtain a warrant using telecommunications rather than having to appear in person before a judge. This would not take away from the necessity of the officer to answer any questions as to whether the warrant is really necessary. The legal necessities would not change, but there is a savings to the taxpayer and the environment in the officer not having to drive to appear before a judge.

● (1640)

We are all aware that the criminal justice system has been subjected to delays in proceedings, and sometimes that was exacerbated by the pandemic. While justice delayed is justice denied, no one wants to see a criminal walk free because the system could not bring them to trial fast enough.

The reforms suggested in this bill are small but incremental. It is important to remember that the fundamentals of justice would still be being observed, and that the increased use of teleconferencing in the courts would not take away from the fundamental rights of the accused to appear in person, but many, given the choice, might prefer to appear by video conference. This, incidentally, could reduce their legal fees since their lawyer would not have to be with them at the courthouse waiting for their case to be called.

One thing that concerns me with these reforms is the issue of fairness. I am not sure how the government can address that. Appearing by video in court proceedings requires access to technology that, at this point, is not available to every Canadian. Not everyone has the financial resources to own a computer. Not everyone has high-speed Internet access available to them. Certainly, the government does not have the resources to provide that.

At the same time, I recognize that there are other different burdens that come with having to make a court appearance in person that could bring with it the expense and hardship of travel. I am not certain how we can provide equal access to the justice system for all Canadians, but I know we have to try to keep improving the system until we get it right.

One area where I have serious concerns is the proposal in the bill that would allow the jury selection process to be done by video conference in some circumstances. While this would certainly make it less onerous for prospective jurors to take part in the selection process from their home or workplace, it does raise some pri-

vacy concerns. While technology makes remote appearances possible, technology could also be used to subvert the process, not to mention the right of an accused to see those who are to pass judgment on his or her case.

In Canada, an accused has a right to be tried by a jury of his or her peers, but there are times when, for security reasons, the jurors are anonymous. With the availability of facial recognition software, it is easy to imagine that prospective jurors appearing by video conference could be easily identified. This could leave them open to harassment or attempts to influence a jury's decision. That may sound unlikely, but if we are concerned for the administration of justice, it must be considered. Has the government considered how to deal with this issue?

This bill is not perfect, but neither is our justice system. The question we as parliamentarians must ask ourselves is this: Does the legislation make positive improvements to the administration of justice in our country, even if it is not perfect? If so, then we should probably support it.

● (1645)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the legislation, and I have made reference to this in the past, very much recognizes the advancement of technology and how we can make our judicial system better by providing legislation that would allow, in a very formal way, video conferencing.

By doing that, one would like to think we would be providing a very viable option that would no doubt be well utilized. I wonder if my colleague could provide further thoughts on that, because he made reference to technological advancements in court proceedings being televised, and so forth. This is all a step forward in the right direction, which is one of the reasons why it is so important to pass the bill, so we can get it to committee to hear the stakeholders.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, I referred to it with respect to justice, and hopefully all Canadians would have equal opportunities to use technology and that must be provided, especially in rural areas. With respect to the level of technology that is available to make this bill specifically of better use to Canadians, and to make justice fair, we need to be more technologically fit. We need more Internet, especially in rural areas.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend down the way for his speech, for his thoughtful reflections on the bill and for the insights he shared with the House.

The member had some reservations about the use of video conferencing or teleconferencing for the selection of jurors, and I am not sure I quite understood what his reservations were. Could my friend elaborate a little on what those concerns might be?

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[Translation]

NATIONAL RIBBON SKIRT DAY ACT

The House resumed from October 18 consideration of the motion that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a National Ribbon Skirt Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to speak to Bill S-219, an act respecting a national ribbon skirt day.

This bill had already been introduced in the last Parliament by the same sponsor, a non-affiliated senator from Manitoba, Senator Mary Jane McCallum. It was Bill S-227 at the time. As we know, it died on the Order Paper when the 2021 election was called.

Passing this bill would create a national ribbon skirt day to be held every year on January 4, although it would not be a statutory holiday.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill S-219, given that it aligns with our party's general position. We are committed to being an ally of first nations, particularly by favouring nation-to-nation dialogue. It also aligns with the process of reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Moreover, it respects Quebec's areas of jurisdiction.

By way of background, I would like to explain that a ribbon skirt is a deeply symbolic garment, a bit like the orange shirt that symbolizes recognition of residential school survivors. Ribbon skirts are long skirts decorated with coloured ribbons on the lower portion. Different nations have their own colours and designs, but one thing they all have in common is that they speak to an unshakable pride. Much like the Scottish red tartan kilt, each nation has its own pattern.

The ribbon skirt is a centuries-old spiritual symbol of womanhood, identity, adaptation and survival. It is a way for women to honour themselves and their culture. It represents a direct connection to Mother Earth and its sacred medicines.

Designating this day would also pay special tribute to indigenous women as life-givers entrusted with traditional knowledge to care for their families, their communities and the environment.

Celebrating this symbol would be a way to recognize the fact that indigenous culture, tradition and ceremony, including indigenous ties to language and the land, are critical to the vitality and well-being of Canada's first peoples.

During the debate on Bill S-219 in the Senate, the bill's sponsor was generous enough to share some statements her office had received. I believe it is important that these words be heard here in the House of Commons as well. That is why I am going to read them.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, we spoke earlier about cybersecurity, which I think is a bill that will be discussed too. However, any time we use technology, there is a risk of someone breaking through, and they may see the selection of jurors, which has to be anonymous for the protection of the people who get selected to be jurors.

It is an observation, but I hope that a bill such as this would be equipped with the proper tools and a high-tech level of protection, so that when a juror gets selected or people get selected to testify, witness or judge, at least they will have that needed protection, because I think that is at the heart of our judicial system.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier on in the member's speech, he spoke about the delays in the courts and the justice system, and how that is playing out and can affect communities while people are waiting. There are a lot of delays, and in fact there might be deadlines that are not met.

I wonder if the member could speak a little more about that, how he saw it, especially during the time of the pandemic, and if in fact a lot of that has been caught up as the courts got back up and moving again.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot of stories. In my constituency office I was approached by several people who had the same concern over the timing. Again, it is the job of the government and lawmakers to provide all the tools needed so we do not end up facing these circumstances.

As I said earlier, justice should be in the justice system itself, which is why there will always be a demand to provide the proper tools to make sure everyone gets the same, equal opportunity.

• (1650)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we request that the motion pass on division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House at this time, you might find unanimous consent to call it 5:30 p.m. so that we can begin private members' hour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Private Members' Business

The first statement is from a 10-year-old indigenous girl from Saskatchewan. She says the following:

My name is Isabella Susanne Kulak and I would like to start off by telling you what the ribbon skirt means to me. The ribbon skirt represents strength, resiliency, cultural identity and womanhood. When I wear my ribbon skirt I feel confident and proud to be a young indigenous girl.

When I was 8 years old I was gifted my very own ribbon skirt from my auntie Farrah Sanderson. I wore it with pride and honor to my traditional ceremonies and pow wow's. On December 18th 2020 it was formal day at Kamsack Comprehensive Institute where I attend school, so I chose to wear my ribbon skirt just like my older sister Gerri. When I got to school a teacher assistant commented on it and said it didn't even match my skirt and maybe next formal day I should wear something else like another girl was wearing and pointed at her.

Those words made her feel pressured to be someone she was not. She eventually took off her skirt as she felt shamed. She added:

Today I no longer feel shamed and I feel proud and powerful enough to move mountains because I know that people from around the world are standing with me. I am very grateful to be Canadian, to be Indian and to represent my people by wearing my ribbon skirt proudly! Thank you to Senator McCallum and to all the people who supported me from around the world, from Canada and from all the First Nations across the nations of the earth.

• (1655)

The chief of the Cote First Nation, the home of Isabella Kulak, also shared a statement with the senator's office. He said, and I quote:

On behalf of Cote First Nation, we are honored to have January 4th as National Ribbon Skirt Day across our great Nation. Bella Kulak has demonstrated the importance of sharing our culture to other nations. Our First Nations, Metis, Inuit women are a symbol of life givers and their resilience in looking after the home fires is our strength to move forward. We thank Senator McCallum for bringing forward such a recognition and encourage all Parliamentarians to offer their support for this bill in the year of Truth and Reconciliation. Meegwetich from the Sauleaux First Nations of Treaty 4 Territory.

These testimonies confirm that Bill S-219 deals with an initiative that is very important to many indigenous peoples and communities.

This is what the sponsor of the bill had to say:

[T]his bill aims to provide social justice for Bella and other young Indigenous youth who must struggle against racism, colonialism and gender violence in their day-to-day lives. By keeping this request for a national day of recognition situated within a framework generated from and led by the Cote reserve, it ensures that the families' and communities' tradition and intergenerational knowledge is secure while they're navigating modern Indigenous struggles. This also helps to resist the colonial images of Indigenous women, girls and transgender peoples. The acts of resistance by women — including mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters and friends — against ongoing violence and colonialism is very important, as their resistive acts are models for young Indigenous girls. They are acts against cultural genocide. Both mother and daughter are no longer willing to leave their spirits at the door and are ready to take that challenge to a different level that is bringing ceremony to everyday living, not only in their home but taking it to the outside world.

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to being an ally to the first nations. That is why it is voting in favour of this bill in principle, since it responds to article 15.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and it partially responds to call for justice 15.2 of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

When I travel from town to town in my vast riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, I often see posters with photos of missing girls. That also happens in Val-d'Or. It is unbelievable. In Lac-Simon, there are the Kitcisakik, Mistissini, Waswanipi and

Oujé-Bougoumou communities. We have to protect these young girls. We also see photos of these missing girls on social media, and it is unfathomable. For the families who are looking for their daughters, it is hard to imagine that this is still happening in this day and age, especially when it comes to indigenous women and girls.

There are also two paragraphs that line up with what the Bloc stands for. Our party advocates for reconciliation, which is defined as the establishment of a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

Furthermore, Bill S-219 refers to call for justice 2.1 of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which calls “upon all governments to acknowledge, recognize, and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their cultures and languages as inherent rights, and constitutionally protected as such under section 35 of the Constitution [Act, 1982]”.

By supporting the creation of national ribbon skirt day, the Bloc Québécois is reasserting its position as an ally of first nations, because this day will highlight a distinctive element of indigenous culture in Canada and stimulate public dialogue about national history.

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to rise today in support of Bill S-219, an act respecting a national ribbon skirt day.

I want to echo messages shared by NDP colleagues, including the MP for Nunavut, who said in the House that this is an important opportunity to recognize indigenous cultures and the prominence of indigenous women.

I also want to make clear that while we in the NDP support this bill, we are also keen to put forward amendments to further improve it. That is something I will get to in a few moments.

It is important to recognize that ribbon skirts are a symbol of strength, pride and hope. They symbolize a direct connection to Mother Earth and her sacred medicines. Ribbon skirts have become a symbol not just of indigenous women's empowerment but also of the struggle for justice for missing and murdered indigenous women.

I think of the many young women, young indigenous women, first nations and Métis, here across our region in Manitoba who make their own ribbon skirts, who gift ribbon skirts, who sell ribbon skirts and who wear them to ceremonies and to powwows. They wear them as a symbol of pride and, I would say, resilience, but also of reclaiming culture and traditions that were forcibly taken away by colonizers. It is important to recognize the empowering elements of the ribbon skirt symbol and find ways to make sure that it is a formal part of our national narrative.

We also need to be clear that if we are going to talk about reconciliation, yes, we need to be looking at symbols but we also need to go much further than that. As we talk about the importance of female empowerment and indigenous female empowerment, we must also act in concrete ways to support indigenous women across Canada.

I have the honour of representing 41 first nations. I have the honour of working with indigenous women, leaders, activists, advocates, elders, young people and indigenous women who hold up their communities, who hold up a region and who, day in and day out, in the face of immense challenges, do everything they can to keep their communities moving forward.

In order for them to continue to do that work and to do that work effectively to meet the needs in their communities, there is no question that we need a federal government that is willing to step up and support that work. Unfortunately, we do not have that in the current Liberal government.

Let us take one of the biggest crises that indigenous women, indigenous communities and, I would say, Canada faces, that of missing and murdered indigenous women, which truly is a national tragedy.

There is not one community, first nations, Métis or urban, here in our region that has not been devastated by the loss of an indigenous woman or girl. As others have said, it is unconscionable that, in a country as wealthy as Canada, we see on a regular basis notices on social media and in our communities of yet another indigenous woman or girl who is missing or who has been taken.

We know that somewhere between 1,600 and 4,000 indigenous women and girls have been lost in this country in the last 20 years. We also know that this did not just happen. The historic inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women uncovered many of the contributing factors. Thankfully, it also made very clear what we need to be doing to put an end to the tragedy that is missing and murdered indigenous women through their 231 calls to justice.

I want to speak to some of those key areas that we need to be pursuing if we are going to talk about ending violence against indigenous women and empowering indigenous women.

We need to put an end to the housing crisis that exists in first nations and urban centres, which indigenous women face disproportionately. On reserve here in our region, it takes the form of third world housing conditions. I have spoken in the House about women and their families that live in remote first nations here in northern Manitoba, in homes held together, in a way, by tarps in the middle of winter.

Private Members' Business

I have talked about homes that are overcrowded and mould-infested, homes that are making people sick, and homes that have devastating mental, physical and emotional impacts. We know those impacts are disproportionately felt by women. We also know that housing insecurity can contribute greatly to gender-based violence and can prevent women from leaving abusive relationships, even though they would like to. We need to get serious about dealing with the housing crisis that exists in first nations and indigenous communities across the country, and the Liberal government is not doing that.

We also need to be very clear about the fact that indigenous women face disproportionate levels of poverty. I acknowledge the important work of my colleague, the member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, who has called for a basic annual income, not only for indigenous women, of course, but for Canadians who are on the margins. However, we know that many indigenous women are disproportionately facing poverty in our communities.

There are many ways that we can empower indigenous women and indigenous communities economically, but right now we are not taking that seriously. I would say the investments that are necessary to create jobs and opportunities in indigenous communities across our region are simply not being taken advantage of, despite the fact that many first nations are very clear about the ideas they would like to bring forward to create jobs and opportunities in their communities.

There are also other areas where the federal government is woefully inadequate in terms of action, such as addressing addictions and the need for treatment and healing supports for indigenous women in indigenous communities. Some time ago, I was in touch with the minister about yet another first nation in the region, God's Lake Narrows, which issued a state of emergency calling for federal action to deal with the addictions crisis and the suicide crisis in its community.

● (1705)

A few weeks before that, I spoke out on behalf of Red Sucker Lake First Nation, which also called a state of emergency because of the suicide crisis it is facing. Red Sucker Lake is a first nation that for some time now, along with other first nations in the Island Lake region, has been calling for a treatment centre that the federal government, while it acknowledged it, has done nothing to make happen.

Red Sucker Lake is also part of the Island Lake region, a region of over 13,000 people, a remote region accessible only by plane throughout the year, that also does not have a hospital, forcing people to go out for relatively basic medical care. Again, we know that reality has a disproportionate impact on women.

Private Members' Business

If we are speaking about infrastructure, a clear way to empower indigenous women is to make sure that they have access to the services and the kind of infrastructure that many take for granted outside of indigenous communities: proper schools, post-secondary opportunities closer to home, proper hospitals and health centres that can provide the services that are required.

Looking beyond that, I would say tracking with the reality, many first nations are disproportionately now impacted by climate change, further isolating first nations, rendering crisis situations more and more serious. I have worked with first nations that have been rocked by wildfires and flooding, clear results of the climate emergency that we are facing. These are communities that have little capacity, if any, to deal with the climate crisis. As research has pointed out, this has a disproportionate impact on indigenous women as well.

It is clear that the federal government needs to move beyond symbols and commit to action when it comes to reconciliation and empowering indigenous women.

I briefly want to share that we are keen to make amendments indicating that indigenous women not be put in a generalized category and recognizing that first nations, Métis and Inuit women have different ways of affirming each other's strength. Also very importantly, this bill needs to include indigenous persons whose identities are outside the gender binary and who choose to symbolize the importance of wearing ribbon skirts. Inclusion and creating a safe space for gender discussions for indigenous peoples must be a priority, and I point to the work of Dr. Alex Wilson, a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, who has devoted her career to understanding two-spirit identity.

There is much work to be done to recognize the strength of indigenous women, but certainly concrete action is necessary to truly respect indigenous women and empower them as they are pursuing—

• (1710)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if I may, just at the onset, recognize Senator McCallum and the member for Fredericton, our colleague in the House of Commons, who have ensured that today we are debating this piece of legislation, which I suggest should receive unanimous support of the House. I anticipate it will.

I listened to the former speaker. I think it does not matter what political party one comes from, as we all understand and appreciate the true value and meaning of the legislation that is before us. There is no political party, whether Conservative, Liberal or, in fact, NDP, that has conducted itself purely over the years when it comes to indigenous issues. However, when we have legislation like this before us, it provides us the opportunity to come together and recognize the true value of what is being proposed.

Recognizing national ribbon skirt day on January 4 of every year would be a very powerful thing to do for a number of reasons. We often recognize special days in the year and talk about the benefits

of doing so. This is something that is very tangible. It is tangible because all 338 members of the House of Commons talk about the issue of reconciliation. A part of reconciliation is recognizing the truth. It is recognizing that mistakes were made, and there are things that we can do to make life better and make our society better. What we have before us today, national ribbon skirt day, is an opportunity for us to rectify, at least in part, in a symbolic way, a grave injustice.

I want to very briefly read something about how Senator McCallum was inspired to sponsor this bill. Senator McCallum heard about an experience of Isabella Susanne Kulak from the Cote First Nation in Saskatchewan. On December 18, 2020, which was not that long ago, when she was about 10 years old, Isabella went to elementary school wearing her ribbon skirt to a formal day, but was told by a teacher's assistant that her skirt was not formal or appropriate for the day.

Out of that particular incident, a great deal of courage and an understanding by many, we now have before us legislation that recognizes the meaning of a ribbon skirt. It was not that long ago that the House passed a piece of legislation to recognize a statutory day of truth and reconciliation. When we did that, it highlighted an annual event, which has occurred twice now. The first year I was in a walk from the Forks in downtown Winnipeg to St. John's Park along Main Street. This year it went from downtown to the convention centre. Those who have participated in those walks, as I did, will know that there were many women who were wearing ribbon skirts.

The ribbon skirt is more than just a symbol. It is something that is a reflection of life in many ways. It is also intergenerational. We may see a red ribbon on the dress, which I understand is a reflection on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. We need to recognize that, even though we actually have a red dress day, when we see red dresses in Manitoba hanging from trees, in windows of homes or, obviously, being worn.

• (1715)

These are opportunities. I suspect it is only a question of time before we see some form of programming taking place, whether it is in our schools, in community centres or in the workplace, and there will be opportunities for individuals to become more aware of why the ribbon skirts are so important. One time it was explained to me how a ribbon skirt can be very meaningful in different ways. I was able to do a bit of research this afternoon in anticipation of having the opportunity to see this bill pass. I recognize very much that at the end of the day, statutory holidays matter. Days of recognition also matter.

In fact, when we recognize those days when there is no statutory holiday, it affords another type of opportunity that might not necessarily be there during a statutory holiday. It is what the community wants to make of it. I fully believe we will see opportunities for indigenous and non-indigenous people, for people of all backgrounds, to be engaged and participate directly or indirectly in national ribbon skirt day.

We see it with the national Red Dress Day. In fact, a lot of residual carries over. I know of at least a couple of places where I still see the red dresses up virtually year-round, and there is a message there. I had an interesting discussion with a group of young ladies regarding the red dress and the issue of missing and murdered girls and women. I do not know to what degree people really appreciate the fact, but there are still indigenous girls and women who are disappearing and being murdered.

It is just like we have Orange Shirt Day, which somewhat coincides with the statutory holiday and talks about residential schools and the thousands of students, and I believe it is well over 100,000 over the years, who were taken out of their homes and put into residential schools, and the impact it had.

Culture and heritage means everything. We are very proud of our Canadian heritage, and our Canadian heritage grows virtually every day. Our indigenous heritage, our first nation, Métis and Inuit heritage, is what enables Canada to be a diverse country and adds to its value second to no other community, because it is our first community. We all have a responsibility to understand and appreciate that.

That is why the idea of a national ribbon skirt day is a positive thing, and I would like to compliment all those who were involved in making this legislation possible. I give a very strong shout-out to the young person, Isabella Susanne Kulak, for having the courage to do what she did.

• (1720)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to have the opportunity to stand in this place to speak to Bill S-219.

As mentioned, the bill calls for national ribbon skirt day to be declared as a part of our commemorative activity on January 4 of each year. It is an opportunity for so much more than just giving importance to a piece of clothing. It is what that piece of clothing or that article points to. It is what it symbolizes. It is what it represents. It is the power within, so it is this that I wish to speak to today.

I believe that to gain an appreciation for the bill, we really have to understand a bit of history. There is a recent past, there is a distant past, and then there is today and a way forward. If members will bear with me, I would like to just go through a few of my reflections on those items.

A few years ago there was a young girl by the name of Isabella Kulak. She was a young girl from Cote First Nation, which is in Saskatchewan. She was a riveting young woman and continues to be, and she wore a ribbon skirt to school one day. Unfortunately, an educator commented negatively and told this young woman that it was an inappropriate item to wear on what was called "formal day".

Private Members' Business

This girl, who was about eight years old at the time, I believe, was berated and shamed in front of her peers and her teachers, which is devastating for a young girl to experience, especially not just the action of the berating and the shame but the fact that it was so deeply attached to her culture, her history and her way of life. The fact that she would be attacked on that, of course, had an impact on this little girl's heart. Her parents very bravely took this story and, with courage, shared it on social media. From there, it spurred a movement.

It captured the attention of not just a few within her city or neighbourhood, but it actually managed to capture the attention of a country and a nation. What is so powerful, and why I am perhaps brought to tears a bit with this story, is that this young girl demonstrated courage and, supported by her parents, she was able to draw attention to something that is so important in our country right now, which is the disadvantage indigenous folks find themselves in and the fact that there are still these persisting inequalities within Canadian society.

As much as it is a ribbon skirt, it is so much more that we would be commemorating through the bill before us and its call for January 4 to be declared national ribbon skirt day.

I wish to share the words of Isabella with the House today and with the Canadian public. She wrote a letter to the Senator from whom the bill originated. Isabella wrote:

My name is Isabella Susanne Kulak and I would like to start off by telling you what the ribbon skirt means to me. The ribbon skirt represents strength, resiliency, cultural identity and womanhood. When I wear my ribbon skirt I feel confident and proud to be a young indigenous girl.

When I was 8 years old I was gifted my very own ribbon skirt from my auntie... I wore it with pride and honour to my traditional ceremonies and pow wows. On December 18, 2020 it was formal day at Kamsack Comprehensive Institute where I attend school, so I chose to wear my ribbon skirt just like my older sister Gerri. When I got to school a teacher assistant commented on it and said it didn't even match my shirt and maybe next formal day I should wear something else like another girl was wearing and pointed at her. Those words made me feel pressured to be someone I am not. I eventually took off my skirt as I felt shamed.

Today I no longer feel shamed and I feel proud and powerful enough to move mountains because I know that people from around the world are standing with me. I am very grateful to be Canadian, to be Indian and to represent my people by wearing my ribbon skirt proudly! Thank you to Senator McCallum and to all the people who supported me from around the world, from Canada and from all the First Nations across the nations of the earth.

Sincerely Isabella

• (1725)

It is so important to read her words into the record. I could stand here and talk about the importance of this day or the significance of the skirt, and I will comment on that to some extent, but what is so much more important are the words of this girl who initiated the movement.

To Isabella and many indigenous women across this country, the ribbon skirt serves as a powerful declaration of what it is to be female, what it is to hold a feminine spirit: the strength, the power, the beauty, the resilience, the ability to give and maintain life. These are all parts of what it celebrates.

Private Members' Business

The ribbon skirt is about indigenous culture, tradition, history and a way of life. The skirt's meaning, yes, does vary from person to person and, of course, the way that it is put together and the colours that are used also vary from person to person. It is meant to be just as unique as the individual who wears it. Because of Isabella, other young girls and women of all ages are now once again able to wear the skirt as a declaration of their power, their resilience and their cultural identity. That is something that is incredibly powerful.

I would like to talk about the more distant past, and it is again with some sorrow that I do because Isabella's actions are particularly powerful when considered against the backdrop of what has happened in this country. In 1885, the potlatch ban was put in place. It actually prevented indigenous folks from being able to wear ribbon skirts. The fact that this eight-year-old girl bravely put one on and wore it to school is profound. Ribbon skirts, along with ceremonial items, were outlawed in that original ban. For us as a culture to once again be able to embrace that and say with a united heart that we accept them and celebrate them is so important today.

While national ribbon skirt day is an important opportunity to celebrate indigenous women and their incredible strength in the face of colonialism, more has to be done. It is one thing to commemorate culture, history, a way of life and the power that is within women, but it is another thing to take concrete action. In this place, we have heard the government talk a lot about missing and murdered indigenous women and, in fact, three years ago a report was done. It is significant. We are missing an integral part of our population in this country. What action has been taken?

Further to that, we have folks in this country who are living without potable water. The members opposite enjoy talking about throwing money at the problem, but getting it resolved has not happened. We have a housing issue in this country. Up north, there are 15 people living in a household. There is mould growing up walls. These are conditions that are not okay. What are we doing about that?

Furthermore, there are so many mental health concerns that have been expressed by indigenous communities. They are asking for assistance. They are asking for treatment with regard to addiction. These folks are also asking for a commitment to moving forward in reconciliation. It takes so much more than just promising funding or delivering good talking points.

As much as this bill is about the ribbon skirt, as much as it is about the courage of Isabella, as much as it is about celebrating culture, history and identity, it is also about calling this place to a way forward, a way forward that allows for economic prosperity among indigenous folks in Canada and allows us to move forward truly reconciled and united toward a vibrant future.

● (1730)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to first recognize the unceded Anishinabe territory that we are gathered on this evening, because for the Anishinabe people everything is interconnected, and it is a good reminder that the work we are doing in the House has a ripple effect outside of these walls on the lives of every Canadian. I am proud today and every day of our collective commitment to making Canada more inclusive and culturally safe.

I want to thank everyone who took part in this debate, shared their thoughts and, most importantly, told Isabella that we are listening, that her advocacy matters and that she has the full support of the members of the House. It is indeed a positive message for all indigenous women from coast to coast to coast.

I also want to recognize the member for London West for seconding the bill. I forgot to recognize that the first time I was able to speak to this legislation, and I am grateful for it.

I want to celebrate the member for Halifax West for her intervention in this debate, and the personal commitment she has made in her own riding.

I thank the member for Manicouagan for her passion and grace, and the members for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River for their support and excellent work at the indigenous and northern affairs committee. I look forward to further studying this bill there.

I thank the member for Lethbridge, who just gave a very emotional address and asked for better for indigenous people across this country. I want to echo that.

I thank the member for Nunavut for her leadership and collaboration and the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski for speaking about missing and murdered indigenous women and wanting to put forward amendments, which I am certainly open to discussing.

I thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for her meaningful intervention this evening, and the members for Kitchener Centre and Saanich—Gulf Islands for their support and friendship.

This is truly a team effort, and these are the good days when we get to be united on something that is so very important and so meaningful.

I want to thank, once again, Senator McCallum for giving me the honour of being the voice of this bill in the House of Commons. She is an inspiration, and I am forever grateful for the privilege of bringing forward her work. I look forward to studying this bill in committee and seeing if there is any way for it to be improved.

As a final note to Isabella, *meegwetch*. She is an inspiration. Look what she has done; look what she has accomplished. I think she should be so proud. Again, it is an honour to carry her voice in this amazing place.

January 4 is just around the corner, and I am hoping that this day will be enacted in time to celebrate it for the first time in 2023.

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here tonight to ask the government for transparency on one of its signature policies, the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

The bank was celebrated with much fanfare by the government in 2016. The Liberals claimed that every dollar invested would yield a return of four private-sector dollars. They even anticipated that with investments from the municipalities and provinces, it would yield a multiplier effect of 11 to one, but that was six years ago and that has not happened. Now what we see is, sadly, a version of corporate welfare, with the taxpayer subsidizing industry projects that they can fund themselves.

The Infrastructure Bank has failed by almost every standard. Not only has it failed to deliver the private-sector investments it promised, but it has never even completed one project. Now we find that a \$1.7-billion partnership with Fortis Inc., a North American utilities company that rakes in billions of dollars in revenue every year, has also failed.

The bank promised \$655 million to the U.S.-based ITC Holdings, which is a subsidiary of Fortis, for the Lake Erie connector project. The cancelled project was going to be a 117 kilometre-long underwater power cable under Lake Erie. It would also have brought in \$33 million to the Six Nations reserve. In fact, this line would have run between Pennsylvania and Haldimand County, which is the community I represent.

When the agreement was first announced one and a half years ago, the government gushed about how it would deliver tons of low-carbon energy, billions in GDP and hundreds of Canadian jobs. Now that the project has flatlined, the government needs to answer for the millions it committed.

It is completely unacceptable that at a time when Canadians are struggling to put food on the table, the government cannot account for \$655 million that it loaned to a multi-billion dollar corporation. It is a project that, ironically, according to the media reports, failed due to inflation caused by the Liberals.

What is worse is that there has been no transparency. It is a statutory requirement that this bank operates with transparency and re-

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ports to the public. We know only from local media reports that the project was cancelled back in July. To this day there is still no information on the bank's website or on government websites about the real status of the project.

Where did the money go? Is the money still in the Infrastructure Bank? Is it with Fortis, the company? Is the money gone? We just do not know. In fact, the bank's corporate plan was tabled in this very House and still lists the deal as an active project. It says that final due diligence is still in progress. This is misinformation.

To have the—

• (1740)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada Infrastructure Bank was established to ensure Canadians benefit from modern and sustainable infrastructure through partnerships with governments and the private sector. The bank helps public dollars go further by investing in revenue-generating infrastructure projects in the public interest and by developing innovative financial tools.

With regard to the Lake Erie connector, which was the subject of much of my friend opposite's speech. It is our understanding from the bank that discussions on the Lake Erie connector project led by ITC Holdings were suspended at this time. The project itself was planned to improve the reliability and security of Ontario's energy grid and allow access to the largest electricity market in North America.

The 117-kilometre underwater transmission line was projected to cost \$1.7 billion, with the Infrastructure Bank contributing \$655 million. No funding has been provided, but regular and minor administrative costs would have been incurred during the due diligence period. I hope that answers my friend opposite's question.

While this project is not proceeding at this time, it is these kinds of ambitious projects that the Infrastructure Bank is pursuing across the country, literally transforming how infrastructure is planned, funded and delivered in Canada. To date, the bank has advanced over 40 signature projects, committing \$8.3 billion in capital from the bank, while attracting \$7.8 billion in private and institutional investment. The bank is connecting Canadians, creating good jobs and advancing complex and transformative projects.

By focusing on key priority sectors, such as public transit, green infrastructure, broadband, clean power and trade and transportation, the bank is supporting a recovery that is greener, more resilient and more inclusive. It is doing all of this while empowering private partners to envision quality, high-value projects for Canadians, while reducing the financial burden on taxpayers.

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Budget 2022 reaffirmed the government's support for this innovative financing model, broadening the bank's vital role by including investment in private sector-led infrastructure projects that will accelerate Canada's transition to a low-carbon economy.

The bank is also helping to close the indigenous infrastructure gap through its indigenous community infrastructure initiative, which provides low-cost and long-term debt financing for indigenous, community-based projects, including the first indigenous-owned and -operated railway in Canada.

The Government of Canada, together with its partners, is building a better future for Canadians. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is playing a key role in that effort, delivering vital infrastructure to Canadians, while creating good-paying jobs and growing our economy.

I look forward to working with my friend opposite so that we can identify and deliver more innovative and transformative infrastructure projects for Canadians.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for that informative answer, and I am glad that we are finally getting some answers, even if we had to extract them from the Liberals.

The bank keeps failing Canadians and it is missing the mark. During these economic times, Canadians cannot afford to be on the hook for bad investments. Conservatives warned from the beginning that the Infrastructure Bank was not capable of completing this project. We asked reasonable questions early on at committee. We asked, "Why does a multi-billion dollar corporation need a government subsidy in order to build this project?" Moreover, we asked simple questions like, "What are the terms of the loan?" These questions were all ignored.

Conservatives will continue to call on the government to respect the only recommendation made by the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, and that is to abolish the failed Liberal bank and create a—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, the Canada Infrastructure Bank is making significant progress in advancing its goals of attracting private and institutional investments to projects, while using innovative financing tools to get more infrastructure built for Canadians.

To date, the bank has advanced over 40 signature projects, committing \$8.3 billion in capital, while attracting \$7.8 billion in private and institutional investment. The bank is working with all orders of government to deliver more infrastructure for Canadians, while reducing the overall financial burden on taxpayers.

We are helping to expand Canada's economy while meeting our net-zero emission goals through investments in zero-emission buses, energy-efficient building retrofits and clean power transmission, generation and storage. We are doing this alongside our public, private and indigenous partners.

• (1745)

TAXATION

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to be here in the House today to ask a question that I initially asked back in June about inflation.

Members will notice that inflation has not abated as much as the government thought it would. In June we were at 7.7% and the latest number is 6.9%, so if people think we are moving down, we are still sticking around that 7%.

One thing about inflation in Canada is this. When the government trumpets that it is less here than in the rest of the world, it is because of how we measure inflation in Canada versus the rest of the world. If I ask Canadians and my colleagues outside of the House if they believe inflation is less here than elsewhere and why they think that would be, the answer is because we measure it differently. We do not count as much for housing in Canada. We use a thing called owners' equivalent rent, which has consistently, over 30 years, underestimated what the inflationary effects of housing are in Canada.

However, in June it was at 7.7% and it continues to go up. It is 6.9% now. The minister wants to increase taxes on fuel. We hope the minister would drop the taxes on fuel. I know a lot of the members in the House say that the issue around petroleum is that the companies that produce petroleum are earning excess profits. They are earning profits for the first time in seven years because the commodity has gone up in price.

However, the last time the commodity cost this much on the world market, gas in my province was worth \$1.40 a litre. Now it is worth \$2.10 a litre, so there is a disconnect here. Where is that extra 70¢ per litre, that extra 50% uptick, in gas? I will tell members right now that it is in the extra taxes and the extra regulatory costs that the current government has imposed upon Canadians to get the fuel they need to get to work, fuel their homes and get things done, because energy is essential to getting everything done in Canada, especially with respect to our food.

Seven years ago was a long time, but Canadians need to ask why things are getting so much more expensive when the actual cost on the world market is the same as it was seven years ago. Again, it is taxes. These are inflationary effects. I know the current government has a number of taxation measures that are built into gasoline now, which includes the clean fuel standard. The new clean electricity standard is going to add more costs for Canadians. However, the big one here of course is the carbon tax.

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Seven years ago there was no carbon tax. It was zero. Then it went to \$20 a tonne. In the election in 2019, the Prime Minister said that it would remain at \$20 a tonne and then immediately moved it to \$50 a tonne. Now it is going to move up to \$170 a tonne, but this will not be inflationary of course. Let me give members a quick education here. Inflationary taxes are designed to be inflationary. They raise the cost of everything. That means that things are going to go up in price and consumers are going to feel it, no matter what the current government says.

I know the Liberals will say that they give a whole bunch of it back to Canadians anyway. They give a bit of it back. Yes, there are some Canadians who get some of the money they spent back. Let us think about that, the churn and burn the government goes through with respect to this. Let me ask it to actually think about that.

I am going to pre-empt my respondent here to get past the doublethink that will be part of his notes when he says that we can have our cake and eat it too, because I heard the minister say again in the House the other day that the government is going to raise taxes on all the things Canadians consume and that it will not make it financially punitive to Canadians. That is absolute hogwash. When the government increases taxes on Canadians, it is going to make things inflationary. Things are going to go up in price and, therefore, it is causing a problem where we are going to pay more for everything we have to buy in Canada. That is a fact. We cannot get over it.

I have a lot more to say on inflation, but I know my time is up. I also know that my colleague across the way has some kind of response for me on this.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take a lot of time writing my notes, but to get off that for a second, at the request of my colleague, there was in fact a carbon price seven years ago, just not in his home province of Alberta. In my home province of B.C., there absolutely was a price on carbon, and guess what. During that period, British Columbia had the fastest-growing economy in the country at the same time as we had a carbon price. That is just some food for thought before I get into my extensive notes.

Our government understands that many Canadians are worried about our country's economy and that we are facing a global slowdown due to global challenges of high inflation and higher interest rates. However, it is important to remember that inflation is in fact a global phenomenon. Indeed, it is a lingering result of the COVID pandemic, Putin's illegal war on Ukraine and the snarled supply chains that are affecting so many people and businesses right around the world. The good news, though, is that no country is better placed than Canada to weather the coming global economic slowdown and thrive in the years ahead.

Canada's inflation rate is less severe, at 6.9%, than those of our peers, like the United States, at 7.7%, the United Kingdom, at 11.1% and Germany, at 10.4%. We rely on Stats Canada to do those calculations. Also, our country has a AAA credit rating and has had the strongest economic growth in the G7 so far this year. That is alongside the lowest deficit- and net debt-to-GDP ratios in the G7.

In fact, we have strengthened that advantage over the course of the pandemic. Our unemployment rate is also near its record low, and 500,000 more Canadians are working today than before the pandemic.

We do appreciate, though, that this is a difficult time for families, friends and of course our neighbours. That is why we are now moving forward with targeted measures, including new ones introduced in the fall economic statement. For example, Bill C-32 would make the federal portion of all Canada student loans and Canada apprentice loans permanently interest-free, including those currently being repaid.

We are also continuing to implement our government's affordability plan, which includes targeted measures worth \$12.1 billion. For example, with Bill C-31 having recently received royal assent, we are moving forward with the creation of the Canada dental benefit for children under 12 in families with annual incomes of less than \$90,000 who do not have access to a private dental plan. Also, individuals and families receiving the GST credit started receiving an additional \$2.5 billion in support earlier this month, and I thank my friend opposite for supporting that measure.

These are targeted measures that help make life more affordable for Canadians who need it the most, while being careful not to add fuel to the inflationary fire.

When it comes to pollution pricing, we know that a national price on pollution is the most effective and least costly way of reducing greenhouse gas emissions while putting more money back into the pockets of most Canadians. Climate action is no longer a theoretical political debate; it is an economic necessity.

Earlier this month, the Parliamentary Budget Officer published an analysis showing climate change has negatively impacted and will continue to negatively impact the Canadian economy. The Conservatives regularly conflate the increased cost in global commodity prices with a price on pollution, but this is a fundamental error in practice. In B.C., for example, the carbon price has increased by only two cents per litre over the last three years while the price of gas has increased by over a dollar. That means the Conservatives are regularly ignoring 98% of the real problem. They also ignore the fact that the federal carbon price is revenue-neutral and that it actually makes life more affordable for eight out of 10 Canadian families through the climate action rebate.

● (1750)

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, the first thing I asked for in this debate was for my colleague across the way to pull his head out of his Liberal notes and actually do some thinking on this, but a bunch of what he said is malarky. In any event, let us go through the actual numbers.

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He talked about the G7. He talked about how Canada performs on a net debt basis. His numbers, his government's numbers and his speaking point narratives are far different than those of any other body in the world that measures where we are economically in the world, including the IMF, which has recently ranked Canada far lower than his vaunted expectation of where this country is. That is because some people know how to count. I do not think anybody on that side of the House knows how to do the math on this.

On the G7 countries he talks about, Canada is the only G7 country that has not either reduced its carbon taxes because of inflation or done away with them completely. How does he respond to that?

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, he did not hear this, because I said it while he was speaking, but I take a lot of time writing these speeches. I hope he likes all the effort that goes into them.

Our government has continued to reduce our debt-to-GDP ratio and has created over 500,000 new jobs since the pandemic began. Our fiscally responsible plan has maintained our AAA credit rating and allows us to invest in Canadians while we fight global inflation. Those are independent ratings done by independent experts, and I will rely on those independent experts as opposed to some of the opinions by the member opposite, although I do respect his opinion.

We are going to continue to focus on making life more affordable and growing an economy that works for everyone. It is not just the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. It will ensure that Canadians remain in the best place in the world to live, to work and to thrive. We are going to make sure that we make life better for future generations while we grow the economy and fight climate change at the same time. In fact, it is crucial that we do both.

TAXATION

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here tonight to follow up on a question I asked the Minister of Seniors a few weeks ago. I note that I represent one of the demographically oldest ridings in Ontario. Here is the question I asked the Minister of Seniors, and I am looking forward to her response tonight.

Massive Liberal deficits have caused 40-year high inflation, resulting in major increases in the cost of living. I have many seniors in my riding, such as Cathy, who at 68 years of age, has had to go back to work to pay for her utilities and food and make her mortgage payments.

As well, a disabled constituent emailed me a few weeks ago indicating she is down to one meal per day due to inflation and gas prices. In her words, she is contemplating applying for assisted death instead of starving to death. What is the government doing for seniors 65 to 74? Will the Liberals stop punishing them and cancel all tax increases on gas, groceries and home heating?

Unfortunately, when the minister replied to me a few weeks ago, she focused more on attacking the previous government. She seemed to have forgotten that the Liberals have been in power for seven years, going on the better part of a decade, and that my question was specifically about what actions the Liberals are taking now and moving into the future. It is simple.

First, I want to understand what the Liberal government is doing for those seniors aged 65 to 74, and I want them to give me a list of concrete measures that support the people in that demographic. Second, will the government stop punishing seniors, especially those living with disabilities, by committing to no new tax increases on gas, groceries and home heating?

Let me use not my words, but the words of my constituents. Here are some of the emails that I have received over the last six months or so.

Back in June, I received one that said, "Once again, [the finance minister] has forgotten about seniors 65 to 74. Do they want us to go back to work?"

Another email from June, which was also sent to the Prime Minister and a number of cabinet ministers, said, "it appears now that I am a member of the second-class seniors club as I am in the age group of 65 to 74, not 75. Age 75 and older are going to get a 10% increase in their OAS, and I am not!

"Why are we in the 65 to 74 age group being discriminated based on age and not getting this 10% increase?"

Here is another email from September. This is part of an official reply to a senior from the Minister of Seniors department. It said, "In July 2022, the maximum OAS pension increased by \$18.16." It was a whole \$18.16. My constituent replied to the official saying, "It does however provide little solace to the many Canadian seniors who are struggling with high rates of inflation!

"I was hoping for some concrete new measures to be brought forward to assist the seniors who I know, who continually struggle with their finances in light of the recent increases in inflation."

Another email in October said, "Ages 75 plus received an increase...while us, age 65 and older, received zero. Why are we neglected? We face high costs of living and expenses also. We appear to have been forgotten about, neglected and are treated as unimportant by the [Liberal] government. This is unfair!"

Finally, just in November, an email stated, "we as seniors on fixed income are feeling the pinch with extra costs for pretty much everything."

Food bank use across the country is up for seniors. We have seniors who are having to refinance or remortgage their houses and their property in order to pay and live in this country. It is unacceptable.

In conclusion, what is the Liberal government doing to help seniors, especially those 65 to 74 and those living with disabilities, to eat, heat and live so that they are not turning to medical assistance in dying as a solution?

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• (1755)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad to be addressing a large variety of topics this evening.

Our government understands that the elevated global inflation we are experiencing is a major issue for all Canadians, including seniors, and that many are struggling to make ends meet. There are higher food and energy costs due to the Russian invasion in Ukraine, as well as longer lasting impacts from supply chain disruptions due to the pandemic.

That said, I am sure the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has noted that inflation is decelerating in Canada. It was 8.1% in June. It is now at 6.9%. This is lower than the United States at 7.7%, the United Kingdom at 11.1% and the euro area at 10.6%. Still, at 6.9%, inflation in Canada is high and we know that Canadians are experiencing higher costs of living when they go to the grocery store, when they fill their tanks and when they pay their rent.

This is why our government is supporting Canadians who are affected the most by inflation. For example, we doubled the GST credit for six months. I thank my friend opposite. He gave a speech supporting that particular measure.

This will deliver \$2.5 billion in additional targeted support to roughly 11 million households and, interestingly enough, over 50% of our seniors in Canada, those who need it the most, will benefit from this particular measure.

I am certain that my friend opposite will agree with me when I say that Canada owes our seniors a great deal, which is why our government takes retirement security so seriously. It is also why I get nervous when the Conservative Party of Canada repeatedly asks for us to reduce the cost of government by shrinking the future pension benefits of seniors. This is simply not a responsible policy.

On the other hand, we think it is very important that the Canada pension plan, the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement continue to be indexed to the consumer price index. This means that seniors do not have to worry about the value of their benefits keeping pace with inflation because, as costs increase, so will their benefits. This is very helpful for seniors, especially if they are on a fixed income.

Small changes in income can make a big difference. That is why the Conservative plan to increase the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS from 65 to 67 was so harmful. It literally took thousands and thousands of dollars away from seniors right when they needed it the most. Fortunately, our government reversed these measures that were introduced by the Conservatives and Canadians can count on receiving their benefits at 65, as previously promised.

We also increased the maximum GIS benefit for single seniors aged 65 and up who needed extra help, and we permanently increased the old age security pensions by 10% for seniors aged 75 and older. That will be waiting there for all of us when we get to that age. This means increased benefits for more than three million seniors and more than \$800 in new support for full pensioners over the first year. This is in addition to numerous programs that support seniors and our health care system right across the country.

While there is still more work to do, Canadians should know that there are 25% fewer seniors living in poverty today than when we took office in 2015. I think that is a trend that we can all support in the House and that every party can support.

I look forward to working with the member opposite to do even more to support our seniors and to further strengthen retirement security for future generations of Canadians.

• (1800)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary did not really answer any of my questions. He talked about a GST rebate, which we did support on this side of the House, that is going to all Canadians who are in that low-income tax bracket. They will receive it, but it is not specific to those 65 to 74. That is really the focus and crux of my question. What is the government doing for that specific demographic, including those with disabilities?

As well, I would appreciate it if the member did not mislead the House and mislead Canadians by talking about Conservatives calling for the gutting of the CPP program. That is not the case at all. We have asked to freeze the premium increases.

If the member could answer another question, does that money for those CPP increases go into the CPP fund or into the general coffers? It is one thing if it is being protected, but the fact of the matter is that it is going into the general coffers and being spent on a bunch of other things.

He talked about the OAS increases for those 75 and older. It is \$18.16. Again, what is the government doing?

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, I am happy to address those particular questions.

We are focused on making life more affordable, especially for our seniors. The point of talking about the GST benefit was pointing out the specific point that, while it is going to 11 million households, disproportionately, the seniors who need that benefit are getting it. In fact, over 50% of seniors in Canada are getting it.

I also talked about how OAS and GIS and other important benefits are all indexed to inflation. One gets that at whatever age one is when one is collecting that. As people are dealing with the price of gas going up and the price of food going up at the grocery store, they can trust that those benefits are, in fact, going up as well.

When it comes to CPP, if one is putting forward a policy that is reducing the benefits that are going into CPP, then one is putting at risk the future benefits that we worked so hard with premiers all across the country to put in place so that we can increase future pensions by up to almost 15%.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The motion to adjourn the House is now 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 6:04 p.m.)

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