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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 10, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)
[English]

STRENGTHENING THE PORT SYSTEM AND RAILWAY SAFETY IN CANADA ACT

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.) moved that Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Customs Act, the Railway Safety Act, the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992, the Marine Transportation Security Act, the Canada Transportation Act and the Canada Marine Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, before I begin my remarks, let me just take a moment to pay tribute to our friend and former colleague Marc Garneau, who resigned this week from his seat as a member of Parliament. Marc Garneau was a member of Parliament who served with dignity and pride. He served Canadians throughout his career in various roles. I know he will be deeply missed by his constituents and certainly by his friends and colleagues here in the House of Commons.

Today, I am building on the work that he started when he was the Minister of Transport. I just want to acknowledge and recognize the work he has done. It gives me great pleasure to build on a lot of the excellent work that he did.

The last three years have been extraordinarily hard on Canadians and on global and domestic supply chains. From global inflation to delays for many products, Canadians have been impacted by a global phenomenon experienced by the rest of the world. Global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, labour shortages and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, as well as extreme weather events, have all contributed to major supply chain disruptions.

Our government remains focused on supporting Canadians during these unprecedented times. Whether it was support during COVID or targeted initiatives to help Canadians weather its lingering impacts, we have been there and we will continue to be there. Our government's priority continues to be making sure that Canadi-

ans have access to the goods they need, when they need them, at a reasonable price.

• (1005)

[Translation]

Our government is here for Canadians.

[English]

That is why we continue to take action to strengthen our supply chain, which will help reduce cost pressures on the transportation of goods. This in turn will help make life more affordable for Canadians.

One of the many ways we are taking action is with Bill C-33, the strengthening the port system and railway safety in Canada act. Bill C-33 would modernize Canada's transportation system, making it more sustainable, competitive and resilient. Canada's transportation system is the backbone of our economy. Our primary modes of transport, which are marine, air, rail and road, are interdependent, and a disruption in one can impact the entire supply chain.

[Translation]

Our transportation system drives our economy.

[English]

That is why Bill C-33 seeks to modernize our ports and secure our railways, because an efficient and reliable supply chain is key to building an economy that works for all Canadians.

In January 2022, I hosted a supply chain summit and created a national supply chain task force. The mandate of the task force was to provide ideas on how we could strengthen our supply chain. Last fall, I shared with Canadians the report from the supply chain task force. It consulted extensively with industry and labour representatives across the country on priority areas for immediate and long-term actions to reduce congestion, improve reliability and increase resilience within Canada's transportation supply chain. It also met with representatives in the United States to understand how we could improve supply chains across our shared borders. The recommendations outlined in the task force report will inform the national supply chain strategy that our government has been working on.

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Ensuring our supply chains are strong has always been a top priority for me and for our government. That is why Transport Canada has initiated two separate reviews since we came into government: the ports modernization review and the Railway Safety Act review. With both reviews now complete, we are able to advance concrete and immediate actions to modernize how our ports and railways respond to the evolving demands on our transportation infrastructure.

The bill I am proposing today is a demonstration of the government taking action to directly support two key modes of transportation that connect us domestically and to world markets.

[*Translation*]

With this bill, we are taking real action.

[*English*]

This modernized framework for port governance, railway safety and security, and the transportation of dangerous goods will be used for decades to come. Through Bill C-33, I am proposing an ambitious set of reforms to the marine transportation system.

This includes significant reforms to the governance of Canada's port authorities and improvements to marine safety and security through changes to the following legislation: the Canada Marine Act, the Canada Transportation Act, the Marine Transportation Security Act and the Customs Act. In a constantly changing world, ports, as key hubs for trade, need a modern framework to better respond to increasingly complex challenges. Bill C-33 would provide them with these tools.

Additionally, I am proposing amendments to the Railway Safety Act to improve the safety and security of Canada's railway system. Resilient railway operations need a modernized legislative framework to maintain safe, secure, efficient and reliable services that not only foster economic growth but also benefit all Canadians. Collectively, these measures would keep our supply chains resilient and competitive.

[*Translation*]

These measures help our supply chains stay strong.

[*English*]

Finally, our government is proposing changes to the Canada Transportation Act to enhance the overall movement of goods across Canada, and to the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act to enhance and clarify the safe and secure transportation of dangerous goods in Canada.

I will start by focusing on Canada's ports.

The proposal before us today is the result of four years of work and stakeholder engagement. Importantly, it takes into account the many lessons learned from the challenges that have hit our transportation network over the past few years. The changes being advanced are focused on six areas: competitiveness, investment, governance, indigenous and local communities, environmental sustainability, and marine safety and security. This bill proposes to ease congestion in our ports; advance reconciliation and enhance structured, meaningful engagement with indigenous people; act on risks posed by climate change; and promote a resilient system that is safe and secure.

I would like to first focus on the measures that would advance competitiveness.

This bill would increase competition by improving the flow of goods through our ports. This was a key ask from stakeholders, who stressed that collaboration is key to improving fluidity, encouraging investment and expanding port capacity. Additionally, industry-led recommendations from the supply chain task force called for new enabling authorities to facilitate leasing land and transporting containers inland and for regulations and legislation to empower our government to take actions that decongest ports.

To better position our strategic ports and support national supply chain performance, the bill would amend the Canada Marine Act to expand the ability of ports to govern and manage traffic, including marine vessel traffic and anchorage use, which are often a source of concern to coastal communities. In support of this traffic-management mandate, our government would establish information- and data-sharing requirements with ports and port users to improve the efficiency of their operations. We will ensure the shared data are appropriately protected.

This framework would also support the work our government is doing to develop a national supply chain data strategy. This proposed legislation would expand the operational scope of port authorities, enabling them to move operations inland and away from congested urban areas, which would reduce the impacts these operations can have on local communities.

The ability of Canada's port authorities to rise to these new challenges and improve supply chain fluidity is dependent not only on new authorities proposed in this bill, but also on their financial capabilities to invest in infrastructure and take action. The current rules put rigid limits on port borrowing, which ultimately inhibits growth. To facilitate timely and more predictable access to funding, port borrowing limits would be reviewed every three years. These regular reviews would also hold ports accountable to responsible debt repayment to limit financial risk to Canadians.

Government Orders

● (1010)

Proposals in this bill would also improve investment in ports by providing greater clarity and predictability to private investors who have been key to the development of the world-class ports we have today. Specifically, this bill proposes to amend the Canada Transportation Act so that transactions at ports with a value of more than \$10 million would be eligible for review by the Minister of Transport. This would ensure these investments meet Canada's competition and national and economic security objectives. This bill would allow our government increased flexibility to act quickly to mitigate security threats to supply chains and further their resiliency during times of emergency.

The recent devastation to rail corridors resulting from flooding on the west coast illustrates the need to have tools to respond when the safety or the security of supply chain operations is under threat. Specifically, this legislation would enable swift intervention in exceptional circumstances caused by disruptive events, such as pandemics, extreme weather and the actions of a hostile state actor. With these new powers, I, as the Minister of Transport, would be enabled to send a notice to the responsible authority and direct measures to be taken to restore supply chain fluidity.

I would now like to focus on measures that seek to update the governance structure of Canada port authorities. These measures would provide ports with the tools necessary to meet current and future challenges.

Let me be clear. The arm's-length nature of ports remains an essential part of their operations and will be maintained. This feature is key to ensuring our ports are seen as credible partners in the global market. However, consultations with stakeholders and local communities identified that the governance structure could more effectively balance national, local, economic and socio-environmental considerations. That is why I am proposing changes that would better frame the relationship between government and ports while enhancing efficiency and transparency and preserving port authority autonomy.

These measures involve providing the Minister of Transport with the ability to designate the chairperson of the board from among the board members and in consultation with the board. This measure would ensure Canadian port authorities and our government are aligned on how we deal with the increasing complex economic, social and environmental issues facing our ports.

Prairie provinces play a crucial role in supporting a competitive Canadian economy, with ports representing the gateway that connects them to the rest of the world. Given the interdependence between the two, the bill would increase the prairie provinces' representation on the boards of the Prince Rupert and Thunder Bay port authorities. This would reflect their growth and importance to the Canadian economy and would mirror similar structured changes previously made to the board of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority.

In addition, a series of amendments would improve board performance, accountability and transparency.

First, I am proposing to broaden the pool of prospective board candidates by expanding the list of eligible persons to serve as di-

rectors. Currently, the exclusion criteria are far too broad and exclude individuals whose employment would not present conflict, impacting the eligibility of highly qualified candidates. This would enable port authority boards to access a wider selection of highly qualified candidates and would further facilitate their success.

Another improvement being proposed through the bill is a requirement for Canada port authorities to undertake a review of governance practices every three years. These reviews would evaluate the effectiveness of board governance practices, such as assessments of conflicts of interest and record-keeping practices. The results of these assessments would be shared with Transport Canada and would inform future policy measures as needed.

● (1015)

Furthermore, legislation would provide the authority to make regulations pertaining to the governance of Canada's port authorities. This authority would enable the government to keep governance requirements up to date, recognizing the importance of working with port authorities, indigenous groups and stakeholders as part of the regulation-making process.

As I have noted, a key challenge to port governance is in aligning their national mandate with local realities. As part of the engagement process, we heard about the importance of a strong relationship between port authorities and local, notably indigenous, communities. Indigenous communities stressed that more could be done to recognize indigenous rights, including increasing efforts to address issues and consider interests raised by indigenous communities.

[*Translation*]

It is important to work with indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

This bill would create more opportunities for port authorities to work together with indigenous groups and for local communities to improve responsiveness and transparency in port management of economic, environmental and social issues. This change of approach starts with a proposed amendment to the Canada Marine Act that would explicitly provide distinction and recognition for indigenous groups within the legislation, setting the stage for better port-indigenous community engagement.

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Building on this, and as a complement to the ability to designate the board chair, and a suite of measures to improve internal port governance, proposed changes would see ports being required in law to establish three new advisory committees: one with indigenous communities, one with local stakeholders and one with local governments. These groups would be designed to structure engagement, enable ongoing dialogue and inform port planning and decision-making.

Indigenous peoples, municipalities, communities and industry groups also stressed that ports should also be leaders in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building greener infrastructure and operations. Aligning with our government's climate agenda, new reporting requirements in Bill C-33 would have ports better integrate environmental considerations in their planning, specifically in their financial reporting, to better account for and mitigate environmental risks. In addition, our government is proposing important new measures to ensure ports establish targets, monitor progress and publicly disclose the results of their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and mitigate climate-related risks.

I will now turn my attention to port security.

Our government recognizes that securing our ports is critical, not only to the integrity and competitiveness of our gateways but also for the safety of all Canadians. Bill C-33 proposes significant improvements to enhance the safety and security of the marine sector while strengthening our supply chain. Once in place, this legislation would give Transport Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency the authorities needed to enhance timely screening of containers and to build a more secure and efficient marine transportation system at the same time.

I will speak briefly to what Bill C-33 seeks to strengthen in the safety and security of Canada's railway and movement of dangerous goods regulation. A resilient, fluid rail supply chain must be underpinned by its safety. To maintain our rail sector as one of the safest and strongest in the world, we need to ensure our regulations remain up to date.

There is so much in this bill that would further improve the resiliency and safety of our ports and rail network. I look forward to engaging with my colleagues in this chamber to ensure that we advance this bill. I look forward to my colleague's feedback and questions and to passing this bill.

• (1020)

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am concerned that there has been a lot of talk and not a lot of action: reviews, reports and strategies. We have heard about all of that. The minister referred to the supply chain task force in his commentary, a report of which he has on his desk for six months. In the introduction of that report it says that Canada's supply chains are at a "breaking point". That was six months ago. It makes 13 immediate recommendations for action, as well as eight for longer-term action.

Of those immediate actions, how many have been completed, how many does Bill C-33 address, and when will those be completed?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for highlighting the work that was done by the supply chain task force, which our government established last year. I want to take a moment to thank those members who have put together a thoughtful, meaningful report.

Our government is committed to a lot of the recommendations that are in this report. Some of those recommendations are, in fact, in this bill, Bill C-33. As I mentioned in my speech, there are future action items that will be introduced soon to Canadians.

I want to assure my colleague that, if he supports the conclusions that the task force came up with, he should find a lot of comfort in what Bill C-33 is offering, because it really targets and addresses many of the solutions that the task force had recommended.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for his bill and his speech this afternoon.

Recently we heard news out of the United States about a major train derailment in Ohio. The train was carrying toxic chemicals. Not too long ago, there was a train accident in Greece that caused many deaths.

Back home in Quebec, we remember July 6, 2013, when 47 people perished following the derailment of a 72-tanker-car train transporting crude oil. This serves as a reminder of the significance of transporting people and goods.

Does the hon. minister think that Bill C-33 goes far enough to prevent these types of tragedies in the future?

[*English*]

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, indeed, we all have been following the tragedies that have unfolded in the U.S. and in Greece. In fact, 10 years ago in Canada, we experienced our own tragedy in Lac-Mégantic, when 47 lives were lost because of a tragic rail incident.

Our government has taken action to further strengthen the safety of our rail network. We have already implemented several measures that will enhance the safety of transporting goods via rail. This bill further adds additional measures, including the registry of dangerous goods and including additional authorities to the Minister of Transport, to ensure that we further build on the safety of our rail network.

Government Orders

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government has carved out room on the boards of our ports for municipalities and local governments for obvious reasons. They are important stakeholders in our ports. As well, they have carved out room for the prairie provinces so that shippers of natural resources have a voice when it comes to the operation of the ports that deliver those resources to market. However, we all know that it is the working people at our ports who are so essential to their success.

I wonder if the minister would be willing to expand the representation on our ports to include the working people who are so essential to the function.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his advocacy.

I want to take a second to express my gratitude to the workers in our ports and in our transportation systems. During the last three years, where we faced unprecedented challenges, the workers in our transportation system stepped up and showed up to work every day. While some of us could work from home, they showed up on the job to make sure that our supply chains continued to move and to be resilient.

I want to assure my hon. colleague that labour and the voices of workers are incredibly important. To make sure that we do things right, in our government, we will always stand up for their rights and continue to listen to their input and to their advice.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. minister. I want to acknowledge that he has been working extremely hard on a number of supply chain issues that have an immediate impact on indigenous nations in Saanich—Gulf Islands and throughout the areas of the Salish Sea.

I want to acknowledge that this bill is encouraging to many of us, but I want to ask a question very bluntly. Can there be amendments, and how open will the minister be? The supply chain issue to which I refer, which has the biggest environmental damage on the issues of rail safety and ports, is the placement of freighters, representing free parking to freighters where the Port of Vancouver does not have the capacity to move them through quickly. It causes environmental damage, and it offends indigenous rights in Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Is the minister open to amendments?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her kind words.

This bill is an important bill. It would further enhance the resilience and strength of our supply chains, of our ports and the safety of our rail network. This bill does not necessarily cover everything that can be done and needs to be done. This bill is a result of the review that was done over the last few years on rail safety and port modernization.

As we have demonstrated, we are always willing to work with our colleagues in the House of Commons to identify opportunities and to introduce amendments. I look forward to her input, as well as my colleagues' in this chamber.

• (1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to compliment the minister. On a couple of occasions, he came to Winnipeg and met with long-haul truck drivers. The role that they play in our ports is of an essential nature. There is a great deal of interest by the long-haul truck driver industry in the bill.

I would be very interested in getting the minister's thoughts on the critical role that our long-haul truck drivers play in the supply chain.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for his hospitality. I had a chance to visit him in his communities and to visit many truck operators and truck drivers in Winnipeg, in his riding, to express my personal gratitude to them.

Truck drivers have stepped up during an extraordinary period of time and have delivered goods that Canadians depend on. We may not have spent a lot of time, as Canadians, thinking about how goods to get to our shelves or to our kitchen tables, but we knew during the pandemic that we depended on our truck drivers. I know truck drivers take pride in their work and understand how important their work is. Our government is committed to working with them to improve their working conditions and to improve their safety. It is important that we listen to their input and continue to support what they do.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is regarding the minister taking over the ability to appoint the board chair. It says in the legislation that he would be able to do so after consulting with the board. However, we know that the minister has ignored the recommendations of port users when they have put forward board nominees. He has ignored the recommendations of the prairie provinces when they have put forward nominees.

Given the minister's track record of ignoring the recommendations from the groups that are putting forward nominees for board positions, what is to stop him from ignoring the board, as he has done in the past, and simply making a choice that he wants to do his government's bidding?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Madam Speaker, I know my hon. colleague is trying to personalize his question, but let me be very clear. Ports are public institutions. They are there to serve Canadians and the Canadian economy. It is really important that the port mandate is in line with government's expectations and commitments. Therefore, it is important that the board of directors is aligned with government's objectives.

Yes, we need to be careful and sensitive about this and make sure that the ports have the independence they need, but, at the same time, make sure that they maintain their responsibility to the public.

Government Orders

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be a part of this debate today on Bill C-33, which would make amendments to several different acts. Supposedly, based on the press release from the government, this was going to have a profound impact on supply chains and rail safety. Having spoken to dozens of stakeholders over several weeks, they do not see it.

Quite frankly, this is a missed opportunity. This is after four years of government consultation. As the minister said, opportunities do not come along very often to change the way our ports and rail systems operate, and this was a missed opportunity to actually make a difference and improve the supply chain in this country.

The general feedback we received is that this is actually heading in the wrong direction. We heard a lot of stakeholders who said this will do nothing to improve supply chain efficiencies, while others have said it will make them worse. The best the minister received from the feedback I heard is indifference. That is certainly not a ringing endorsement of what has been touted as being a major change to supply chain systems and a major answer to the supply chain problems we have seen plaguing the country for the last number of months and years.

My colleague referenced the national supply chain task force report, which explained the urgency of this situation and proposed several changes that should be made on an immediate basis. We just do not see enough of that urgency. We do not see enough of what was in the supply chain report in this bill. This is the first opportunity the government has had to show it was listening to that report, and we just do not see it.

There is nothing in this bill about rail service reliability or the relationship between shippers and rail companies. In fact, it simply seems to indicate that the status quo is just fine. There is nothing in this bill about what would happen to our supply chains and our international reputation when there are labour disputes that impact the supply chain either at the ports or on our railways. There is nothing here about how we would to reconcile concerns with loading grain in the rain, for instance, in Vancouver. All of these were missed opportunities.

In fact, as the minister indicated a couple of times in his speech, the ports are at arm's length. He just indicated in his answer to my question that, in fact, that arm is getting shorter and shorter. The government is extending its arm into the ports to impose its will on what are supposed to be independent authorities. It is quite shocking to hear the minister openly admit that the problem clearly is that the ports do not do what Ottawa wants enough and that it needs to exert more control over the ports. The ports are supposed to operate in the best interest of the national economy and the best interest of the supply chain, not in the best interest of the government in Ottawa.

Some of our primary concerns revolve around the changes that have been made to the governance system at the ports. The independence of the ports should start with the ability of the board of directors to elect its own chair. That is the current way the system operates. I have certainly not heard that this has been a major issue that has impeded the operation of the ports, but we see an "Ottawa knows best" or "Liberal government knows best" approach when it

says the local port boards cannot be trusted to select their own chairs, as they currently do, and that the minister himself needs to make those selections.

● (1035)

I will also note that the port users, the port tenants, the shippers, the grain companies, and so on, have had their influence on the boards diluted. There have been additional board positions given to local representatives. There are two additional board positions, both given to government entities, and no additional seats given to compensate for the people who actually run our ports and get our goods from our farms to the customers overseas.

I think that is an oversight. I also think that the overly prescriptive and bureaucratic red tape nature of imposing a "made in Ottawa" solution on consultation is going to prove very difficult to manage in many of the ports across the country.

Bill C-33 seems designed to be imposed on big ports, like the Port of Vancouver. There are 17 port authorities in Canada and some of them are very small. There are no provisions in the bill to allow for any flexibility for the smaller ports, which may not have indigenous communities in their proximity or which may not have the capacity to set these things up without significant new costs, which will be passed on to port users and to Canadian consumers. These are imposed costs that will be passed along at a time when we are already dealing with record inflation. These are going to be inflationary costs that will impact the costs of the goods that Canadians need.

The Port of Vancouver, for instance, already has robust indigenous consultation, robust community consultation and robust local government involvement. As for creating advisory boards, I have heard some feedback from folks who have maybe one first nation in their entire province. How would they set up an indigenous advisory board to deal with that situation?

As for the Port of Vancouver, in my home province of British Columbia, who would be on this board? It certainly would not just be the handful of first nations that are in the Vancouver area. It would be communities who are up the Fraser River. It would be communities that are along the shipping routes.

Now that it would be an official consultation board mandated by law, there will be questions about who would be on it, who would be part of it and what role they would play. If there is nothing in the legislation that indicates what the role of that board would be or what the powers of that board would be, would they simply give advice that can be ignored? Would they have the power to actually prevent the ports from exercising their authorities? We just do not know.

Government Orders

I think that is what we have heard a lot of in the stakeholder feedback we have received, which is that there are a lot of changes that have been made where the Ministry of Transportation or the minister says, “Oh no, do not worry about it. That is not what we meant when we put those changes in the legislation. We will find a way around it. We did not mean that the minister would appoint the board chair. He would just consult with the ports and then take their advice.”

That is not what the legislation says. I think that this is poorly drafted legislation that leaves an awful lot to interpretation and will actually create greater uncertainty for the ports at a time when they need more certainty.

I want to touch briefly on the active vessel traffic management portion of the legislation.

I think, obviously, that there is some need to give the port the authority to manage vessel traffic within its jurisdiction. I think that there is, again, a lack of certainty about what this will mean. How far out will the ports be given the authority to manage the vessel traffic? Is it just in their jurisdictions? Is it hundreds of kilometres offshore? These are things that need to be clarified.

● (1040)

It also needs to be said that, by focusing solely on the marine vessel side of things and not on the rail side of things, the government has missed an opportunity again. It has not talked about rail service reliability, service levels, ensuring that shippers are well served by the rail sector, or that there needs to be reliable data so that the ships know when products are coming by rail. It seems to be focused entirely on the marine side.

We also have concerns about what the government means by allowing the ports to manage anchorages. In British Columbia, there are significant concerns about what that means. Some want anchorages to be removed from certain areas altogether. Others would like to see the anchorages better regulated, and still others would like to see the efficiency of the ports brought up to a standard such that there would not be the need for so many anchorages.

It has been difficult to deal with this issue in a post-COVID context, because there was such a backlog as a result of supply chain collapses around the world and therefore anchorages that had not been previously used were being used more often. What does it mean that the board would have control over these anchorages? Does it mean they would be able to remove them? Does it mean they could limit the number of days ships can dwell there?

These are all questions that are very concerning to port users if we want to expand the ports. The Port of Vancouver has indicated it wants to expand and is looking to increase capacity. We cannot increase capacity at the port and reduce the ability for vessels to safely anchor to await their turn at the port.

Would we simply remove these anchorages without consultation and without any plan as to what would happen when ships show up and have nowhere to berth or to safely anchor? Are they simply going to circle around burning fuel and wait for their turn to enter the port? That needs some clarity.

Overall, on the rail safety side, we support the clarity on the fact that blockades of rail lines are illegal. I suspect most Canadians would have thought that was already the case. In fact, it already is illegal to cause a disruption to rail service. However, the problem is not with the rules; it is with the enforcement of the rules. I think increasing the clarity is a good thing, but if it does not result in increased enforcement activity, I do not think there will be much of a change on that front.

There are concerns about the increased red tape and regulatory burdens. We want transparency at the ports, but we need it to be reasonable. I think there are concerns about whether the reporting requirements would simply be publishing data that the government already receives or whether they would be imposing a new burden on the ports, which, again, would all be passed down throughout the supply chain and ultimately onto consumers. Would quarterly financial reports, for instance, be a new requirement or would that simply be making public what the government already gets?

I think these are questions that have not been answered. That also needs to be looked at in terms of the environmental reporting. The big ports are already doing this work. Would this be duplicative? Would this simply take the work that is already being done at the ports and put it into a format that is more universal? If we are burdening the ports with more reporting requirements when they are already doing this work, that is ineffective and inefficient and we need to make sure we are not duplicating the work.

● (1045)

We also fundamentally disagree with the government here on what the role of the ports is. The port has to have a national lens on protecting the national supply chain; serving our international markets; and getting the goods of our farmers, shippers and creators to our markets. We heard from the minister here today that the government wants to impose a different set of rules. It wants a different focus for the ports and to increase the local perspective on that. The local residents are absolutely impacted, but the primary focus has to be on delivering goods for Canadians and our customers.

We cannot get into other focuses for the ports. I think the government has done that by making these changes to the board of directors. By making those changes to these advisory boards, it is certainly increasing Ottawa's involvement, as well as local government involvement. It is increasing local interests that I think need to be heard but cannot divert the ports from their primary responsibility, which is to serve the national Canadian economy.

Government Orders

When we hear the minister say that the port boards must align with the government's agenda, that does not sound like arm's-length governance to me but an arm of the government. There are just too many cases in this bill where it is imposing its perspective on the ports. It is imposing its agenda on the ports and doing so in a way that does not consider the different ports. Those in Saguenay, Thunder Bay, St. John's and all over the country have a different reality than the ports of Montreal, Vancouver and Halifax. This is a one-size-fits-all approach that will not improve our supply chain but instead increase the burdens on everyone in the supply chain. Most of all, it will increase the power of Ottawa at the expense of the independence of those port authorities.

We believe the bill should go back to the drawing board. It does not do enough to address supply chain concerns. It imposes too many Ottawa-knows-best solutions and too much of the minister's authority on our ports. It does not do enough to improve the situation. Therefore, we will not be supporting Bill C-33. We think it is a missed opportunity. The governance changes cannot be supported. The additional costs that will be passed on to everyone throughout the supply chain as a result cannot be supported.

After four years, the government should have done much better. We hope it will go back to the drawing board and come back with a bill that will strengthen our supply chain and allow the ports to do the job they are mandated to do. We hope it can do that without the heavy hand of the Ottawa-knows-best approach that, unfortunately, this legislation would impose.

• (1050)

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have to express my disappointment with my colleague's take on the bill.

I would say that he has said a couple of contradictory things. On the one hand, he said that the ports need to have a national lens. On the other, he opposes introducing representatives of the prairie provinces to the boards of the ports.

On the one hand, he said that the ports need to be at arm's length from the government, which I agree with. However, on the other, his own leader is criticizing the government for policies that, by the way, the ports enacted under the Harper government.

Therefore, he has made several contradictory statements.

I would ask my colleague this: Will he really miss out on this opportunity for us to work together on strengthening the governance of ports? I welcome his ideas for amendments, but it would be prudent to send this bill to committee so that we, as members of Parliament, can work together on advancing the goal that we all agree on, which is making sure that our ports are more efficient and resilient.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, I certainly disagree with the minister's characterization of my remarks.

I have no problem with the provinces having representatives on the board; they already do. I have said that the users of the port, the tenants, are having their voices diluted by adding others to it. That needs to be addressed.

As I said in my question to the minister, it does not really matter if the provinces and port users are supposed to have a voice in who

is selected to the ports to represent them if the minister ignores their voices. He would be ignoring them if, when nominees are put forward by the provinces or port users, the minister said, "No, I know best. I am going to appoint people who have not been recommended because Ottawa and the Liberal government know best." They do not know best, and they should start listening to those groups that are directly impacted.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. The Bloc Québécois supports the bill in principle, but we have some concerns.

The various proposed measures may end up creating a disproportionate administrative burden for small ports.

According to my colleague, how might we amend this bill in committee to ensure that the administrative burden is not excessive for small ports?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, and I tried to address some of that in my speech.

I think the bill was written for the Port of Vancouver. It was clear that the government looked at the Port of Vancouver and designed the bill around that port. This absolutely does not take into consideration a port like the Port of Saguenay, which has very different volumes and financial resources, as well as a different size.

The bill is very clear. It imposes all three advisory committees, no matter where the ports are across the country; quarterly financial statement requirements; and a greenhouse gas emission evaluation. We have to delete all the clauses that impose these new burdens on all ports, because not all ports have the same capacity to manage them.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague noted his disappointment that Bill C-33 does not include more provisions to deal with labour disruptions in the supply chain.

I think comments like that raise alarm bells for a lot of working people, who have borne the brunt of the penchant for draconian back-to-work legislation among both Conservatives and Liberals. It will be no surprise to folks here in the House that New Democrats believe the best way to settle labour disruptions and achieve the best labour outcomes is at the bargaining table.

What measures does my colleague have in mind to deal with labour disruptions in the supply chain? Does the member support our view that working people and their representatives deserve a voice on the boards of directors of our ports?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Madam Speaker, of course Conservatives support the collective bargaining process and believe that governments should support that process to ensure that our vital supply chains are not disrupted through labour stoppages, whether lock-outs or strikes.

We have seen the devastating impact of just the rumour of a strike or a lockout. It can cause millions of dollars of damage to the Canadian economy. We saw this when there was a stoppage on the CP Rail network for just a number of days. For every day of stoppage, it takes weeks to clear up.

The damage to our international reputation is lasting. When people are not assured of the reliability of the supply chain in Canada, they look for other options. Moreover, there are other options in North America. That is what we want to avoid. The national supply chain task force spoke of this very clearly. That is what I was referring to: There is a need to ensure that our supply chains are treated like the valued service they are. We need to make every effort to prevent anything that would impact the reliability of our supply chain for our international partners.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ANTHONY JOHNSTON

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Robert Frost once wrote, “I am not a teacher, but an awakener.”

My community of Windsor-Essex lost a great teacher this week. To many, he was “Tony” or “TJ”. To my brother and me, and countless students he awakened, he was “Mr. Johnston”.

Born in Derry, Northern Ireland, Mr. Johnston immigrated to Canada in 1962, where he started his teaching career in Barrie before moving to Windsor. He taught at Holy Rosary, St. Alphonsus, Brennan, St. Michael's and my alma mater, St. Joseph's.

An amateur boxer with an incredible memory, he was the original Google. He taught English, coached *Reach for the Top* quiz teams and loved coaching cross-country. He was the recipient of the 1997 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. He was proud of his Irish heritage and was a proud member of the Irish Canadian Cultural Club and the Gaelic League of Detroit.

His ashes will be taken home to Ireland, but his lessons and his love for his students, those are ours to keep.

* * *

• (1100)

BRITTANY MACNAB

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with great sadness that I stand today

Statements by Members

and recognize the life of Brittany Macnab, a proud, young Métis woman gone way too soon at only 24.

Brittany was a person who radiated kindness and generosity. While in high school, she volunteered for the hockey team that I coached. Every home game, we would find her working the door, selling 50-50 tickets and even singing *O Canada* when asked, all this because she was a good friend.

It is no surprise that after high school, Brittany went on to become an amazing teacher. She was a teacher who cared deeply about her students and would routinely go above and beyond to build authentic relationships.

As I stand here today, staff and students in Meadow Lake schools are wearing ribbon skirts, sashes, orange T-shirts, moccasins and mukluks in honour of Ms. Macnab, all this at the request of her grade 8 class.

I want to offer my condolences to all who loved Brittany. She will be deeply missed.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister was in Winnipeg last week, and we participated in a press conference with the Premier of Manitoba. Come April, Manitoba is going to have \$10-a-day child care. It is joining, from coast to coast to coast, a true national day care program that really matters. It is going to enable more women than ever to enter into the workforce. It is going to improve our economic situation. It is going to make a profound, positive difference in the lives of all Canadians.

Moving forward with a national child care program is the right thing to do, and I, for one, hope that the Conservative Party will flip-flop its position and support a national child care program.

* * *

OPIOIDS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to dedicate my statement to people across Canada who are suffering through unresolved trauma and mental health problems, especially to those who have sought solace in substance use. I also want to recognize the family members, especially those who have lost a loved one to an overdose because of the toxic and deadly supply of street drugs. This is why a safe supply is needed.

I urge my fellow parliamentarians, especially the Conservatives, to stop demonizing safe supply and decriminalization. Treatment and recovery are not at odds with harm reduction and safe supply. They are all part of a continuum of care, and we need more of both.

Statements by Members

At this time, more than ever, we need compassion. We must stop the stigmatization of people who use illicit substances, which pushes them further into the shadows and forces them to take a chance with their lives. Instead of criminalizing poverty, homelessness, addiction and drug use, let us focus on supporting the members of our communities who suffer from these health conditions.

* * *

[Translation]

DÉFI25

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, throughout the month of March, the people in my riding and on the South Shore can indulge their sweet tooth while supporting an important cause that affects far too many families: suicide.

In 2015, Martine Loiseau lived every parent's worst nightmare when her 25-year-old son Francis took his own life. In an effort to give her grief meaning, keep her son's memory alive and give back to the organization that had done so much for her family, she started Défi25, le goût de la vie.

Every March, with the help of volunteers, Martine bakes cookies that can be ordered in exchange for a \$10 to \$25 donation. All the funds go to Suicide Action Montréal. To date, this initiative has raised \$45,000.

Let us accept this challenge. I invite everyone to visit the website, ledéfi25.com, and make a donation.

* * *

[English]

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, representatives of Open Doors Canada came to Parliament Hill this week to highlight the 2023 World Watch List of the 50 most dangerous countries in which to live as a Christian. More than 360 million Christians around the world are suffering high levels of persecution and discrimination. Last year, 5,621 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons. An additional 4,542 were detained without a trial, arrested, sentenced and imprisoned.

Christians are not the only ones who face persecution. Ah-madiyya Muslims in Bangladesh have also seen a recent increase in violence against their community, with homes torched and people killed: two dead and 100 injured, according to March 3 reports.

I call on all members of this House to recognize that freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental right, not just here in Canada but around the world.

* * *

● (1105)

ANTON PHILIP SINNARASA

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to honour the life of Anton Philip Sinnarasa, whose passing last week has devastated the Eelam Tamil nation.

In 1981, he documented the burning of the Jaffna Public Library, which housed ancient texts and a rare collection of Tamil literature. He was a political prisoner at the Welikada prison during Black July, where thugs were sent to kill Tamil inmates.

Anton Philip, who was once ordained a Catholic priest, continued to be true to his faith and spent a lifetime supporting the many clergy and churches at the forefront of the struggle for Tamil self-determination and equality. In Canada, he started the Centre for War Victims and Human Rights, documenting the atrocities committed and the loss, trauma and displacement of his people.

As we mark the 40th anniversary of Black July this year, we lost a survivor, human rights defender and inspirational leader who served us to the end. Please join me in extending my deepest condolences to his wife Devi, his children Edward and Veena, and his extended family and friends.

* * *

2SLGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Milton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the basic human rights of 2SLGBTQ+ people are under attack. Hatred is on the rise, as gender diversity and expression have become frequent targets for Republican politicians, far-right groups and social media trolls. Reports in the U.S.A. point to a conservative movement driving over 300 pieces of legislation that directly target transgender rights.

News reports from Canada indicate that this disgusting trend is prevalent here as well, with rising anti-LGBTQ rhetoric at school board and town council meetings. The rising attacks on drag performers and night clubs are horrific and completely unacceptable. This kind of hatred, violence and intolerance has no place in Canada, or any place. Everyone should have the right to live their life as their true self, free of fear or judgment. Trans and gender non-binary people face immense challenges and are continuously subjected to horrific hate crimes, social ridicule and unequal treatment. They deserve equal access to education, health care, employment and housing opportunities, just like any other individual.

I believe in a world where everyone is treated equally, fairly and justly. We must fight against transphobia and work toward creating an inclusive society for all. We must unite against hate.

* * *

WORLD WAR II HERO

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, the word “hero” is not to be used lightly, but I will use it today.

Norm Johnson is a hero in every sense of the word. From 1942 to 1945, Norm fought in World War II. Stationed in both India and present-day Myanmar for much of the war, Norm served as an RAF pilot. He flew many resupply missions for the Allies, often coming under enemy fire. Despite having his share of close calls, Norm never backed down, and performed his duties admirably until the war was won. After the war was over, Norm and his wife Lillian settled in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure of visiting Norm as he celebrated his 100th birthday surrounded by friends and family. On behalf of all Canadians, I thank Norm for his service and wish him a happy birthday. Keep fighting the good fight.

* * *

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Wednesday was International Women's Day, but it is not too late to reflect. In fact, we should never forget them: the millions of women who live in conflict areas, displaced by war and without home or family. These women are often the victims of rape, trafficked or forced into sexual slavery or servitude, and girls are forced into early marriage just to survive. Many have no access to health services, and their protectors are often their aggressors.

Let us think of them, advocate for them and ensure they are always in our thoughts and at the front of the line for humanitarian aid.

* * *

● (1110)

ONLINE STREAMING ACT

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, former prime minister Pierre Trudeau once said, "there is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." That is exactly where the government intends to be with Bill C-11. If the NDP-Liberal coalition gets its way, the CRTC's regulatory claws will sink into the Internet to tell Canadians what they should be watching 24-7.

The Liberals say Canadian content must be pushed to the top, but no one can define over there what Canadian content is, so the next time Canadians turn on their favourite streaming service, they will be in shock. The government may creep its way in late at night and while citizens may grow tired of looking for their favourite show and might finally settle on the billion-dollar sleep aid called the CBC, the government should kill Bill C-11, heed the words of the former prime minister and get out of the nation's bedrooms.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of these Liberals, Canadians are struggling. While the Prime Minister spent millions of tax dollars to upgrade his official lakeside cottage, housing costs for everyday Canadians have doubled. Almost 40% now have to borrow just to make ends meet, more than half cannot feed their families and save money, while 20% skip meals to afford the basics. Canadians on fixed incomes

Statements by Members

have to choose between food, fuel and home heating, and two-thirds of Canadians have to put off retiring.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister spent more than all previous prime ministers combined before COVID. The reckless, record cost of his government drives up the cost of living. Canadians have never had it so bad, but Liberal insiders have never had it so good. Liberal ministers give thousands of tax dollars to their close friends, their staff's families or even former Liberal MPs. Liberals broke ethics laws six times, the Prime Minister himself twice, for lavish vacations and perks for their pals.

Conservatives will end the corruption, make life more affordable and turn hurt into hope.

* * *

[Translation]

JEANNE CARRIÈRE

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize the courage and resilience of one of my constituents and the exceptional work of the specialists working to find medical solutions to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Following a nerve and tendon transfer procedure carried out at Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital last July 28, Jeanne Carrière, a young quadriplegic woman from Lachute, became the first woman in Canada to regain the use of her hands and fingers. The goal was to re-route functioning nerves and connect them to non-functioning nerves nearby to make the electrical current travel once again from the brain to the paralyzed muscles. Two surgeons performed the more than nine-hour operation and after seven months of rehabilitation, which is still ongoing, the procedure is a resounding success. The good news is that the doctors believe that the mobility of her hands will continue to improve over the course of the next year.

I would also like to point out that Jeanne Carrière is a screenwriter and was recently selected by—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry to interrupt the member, but his time is up.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

*Statements by Members**[English]***FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, a media investigation is raising serious questions about the pulp and paper giant Paper Excellence. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry must come clean with what he knows about this company. He rubber-stamped its takeover of Resolute Forest Products, making it the largest pulp and paper company in Canada. It controls over 22 million hectares of Canadian forests. That is larger than the province of Nova Scotia.

What kind of financing did Paper Excellence receive from a state-owned Chinese bank? What is the connection of Paper Excellence to the Asia Pulp & Paper company? What does the minister know about media allegations of price collusion between these two companies? Is this company being run from Canada or Shanghai?

The takeover of Canadian forest companies by Paper Excellence has been called a “fibre grab” to use Canadian trees to feed Chinese pulp mills. The Minister of Innovation must explain what due diligence was done in turning over such huge tracts of Canada's forests to this company.

* * *

*[Translation]***GUY FONTAINE**

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Guy Fontaine, a distinguished citizen from Saint-Amable, who passed away on January 18, 2023.

Mr. Fontaine was known and loved by everyone in Saint-Amable, and with good reason. Throughout his life, he was involved in many causes and fundraisers to help his community. In his civic life, he was the founder of several events and organizations, including the Saint-Amable business association, the potato festival and the demolition derby. He was also the founder and grand knight of the Knights of Columbus Council 7019.

He was awarded the National Assembly medal in 2011, a well-deserved recognition. He was extremely energetic and hard-working and always had new projects in mind, which is why everyone was so surprised to hear of his passing, despite his 85 years.

In closing, I would like to offer his wife Ivonne, his children and his family, and everyone in Saint-Amable, my deepest condolences

* * *

• (1115)

*[English]***DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been weeks since bombshell allegations appeared in the Globe and Mail about a sophisticated foreign interference campaign in our federal elections. The claims are shocking, as they include bullying and intimidation of fellow Canadians, a foreign consulate directing votes and volunteers, and illegal donations.

After ferocious denials and face-saving backtracking, we have a hand-picked special rapporteur of the Prime Minister's, a committee with secret hearings and secret evidence with secret conclusions. As well, MPs' presence on that committee is subject to a veto of the Prime Minister. These tricks have only one thing in common: The Prime Minister controls it all.

He praised China's basic dictatorship. His party's fundraisers chase big-dollar donations from Beijing-connected businessmen. He appointed two Beijing-friendly ambassadors. He led the last Five Eyes government to ban Huawei. He ordered his government to abstain condemning Beijing on genocide. He tried and failed to kick off free trade negotiations with Beijing in 2016.

All roads lead back to one man, the Prime Minister, so why will he not tell Canadians the truth?

* * *

NATIONAL DAY OF OBSERVANCE FOR COVID-19

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tomorrow is the third national day of observance for COVID-19. It is hard to imagine that it has been three years since the first COVID death in Canada and all of the suffering that has happened since and still does. I want to first acknowledge all those who have lost a loved one to or because of COVID-19.

[Translation]

Their grief is compounded by how their loved one died, especially for those who could not be with him in his last moments. Today, we all share their grief, hoping to ease their pain a little.

[English]

I also want to acknowledge the nurses, paramedics, doctors, PSWs and all other frontline workers who were there when we could not be; those still suffering from long COVID and mental health challenges stemming from those difficult years; and those who are still getting COVID today. I want them to know that we see them. They are not suffering alone. That is why today, the whole country is taking a day to pause and remember.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to say he takes foreign interference in our elections seriously, but in fact, he has embraced it. This started with a \$200,000 donation to the Trudeau Foundation, and it has ballooned into a large clandestine transfer of funds from the dictatorship in Beijing to influence Canadian elections. The Prime Minister has known about Beijing's influence in two federal elections in Canada, and he has done nothing about it.

Will the Prime Minister please explain why he has allowed Beijing's influence in Canadian elections to escalate?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just because the Conservatives continue to repeat this narrative does not actually make it true. We have taken the issue of foreign interference incredibly seriously since we formed government. In fact, foreign interference was raised when the Leader of the Opposition was the minister responsible, but what did he do? He did absolutely nothing. That is why, when we came into office, we made sure our democratic institutions were built strong and robust to protect Canadians from threats of foreign interference.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, here is the fact: According to Global News, Canadian security officials gave officials in the Prime Minister's Office a classified and urgent briefing weeks before the 2019 election. This briefing was a stark warning to the Liberals that one of their candidates was compromised and allegedly part of Beijing's influence network. The Prime Minister did nothing. In fact, that candidate was still allowed to run, despite those stark warnings.

Can the Prime Minister say who that candidate was, and is he a member of his current cabinet or caucus?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have outlined on numerous occasions all of the measures we have continued to take to address the issues of foreign interference, but let me introduce a fact to that hon. member. It was just this week the Leader of the Opposition said that, of course, the previous Conservative government did nothing about foreign interference because it was not to its partisan advantage to do anything about it. The Conservative leader is actually admitting to the fact that this nothing more than a partisan issue for them. We reject that premise, and we will protect our democratic institutions for all Canadians.

• (1120)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us stick to the facts. In 2019, Canadian security officials gave a briefing to the Prime Minister's Office that a Liberal candidate was implicated in Beijing's foreign interference network, yet the Prime Minister turned a blind eye to potential interference in the federal election. Even yesterday, Canadian security officials said that ev-

Oral Questions

eryone plays a key role in protecting Canada's democracy from foreign interference, including the Prime Minister.

Will the Prime Minister unveil who in his office was briefed about a compromised Liberal candidate, and will he unmuzzle his chief of staff to let her testify at the committee?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am really glad the member opposite raised the fact that everyone has a responsibility to deal with foreign interference. I want to ask the Leader of the Opposition to unmuzzle himself to talk about the fact his own caucus members were involved with meeting with far-right organizations after CSIS has warned that domestic foreign interference in our elections is a very real threat. Will the members opposite and the opposition leader become unmuzzled to actually condemn his front bench today?

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister is trying to sweep a foreign interference scandal under the rug, but every day brings new revelations.

Yesterday, we learned that the Communist regime in Beijing had reached its tentacles into Quebec by setting up two active secret police stations.

The Prime Minister wants to keep everything secret, but even the RCMP is appealing to the public for help. Instead of hiding information, why does the Prime Minister not ask the public to help the RCMP?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we take allegations of foreign interference or intimidation in Canada very seriously. That is why the RCMP is investigating. We use all tools at our disposal to address interference and protect Canadians, including investigations and charges by law enforcement, diplomatic levers such as withholding visas, and examining new tools such as a foreign influence transparency registry. Everyone should feel safe in this country, and we will exhaust all efforts to protect them from unacceptable behaviour by hostile authoritarian states.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, clearly, nothing the government did worked. Foreign interference is more widespread in Canada than ever. Now they are talking about a foreign agent registry. This morning, the minister announced he would be holding consultations to decide how to proceed. He said the same thing three months ago.

The U.S. has actually had a foreign agent registry since 1938. Australia set one up in 2018. Moreover, senior Privy Council officials recommended setting up a foreign agent registry last year.

Why is the Minister of Public Safety now talking about holding more consultations?

Who is he going to consult, his friends in China?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to be there today when the Minister of Public Safety announced that we would launch consultations on the creation of a Canadian foreign influence transparency registry. This is only one of the tools we are using to combat foreign interference, which is meant to create chaos in this country, but we want to make sure we get it right. We will be consulting with Canadians from across the country. The consultation will close on May 9, and I encourage Canadians to take part.

When it comes to hostile states, we will always move with our eyes wide open.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the federal government has just announced \$82 million in cuts to health care, half of which will affect Quebec. We are losing out on \$41 million because of the minister, and that money was earmarked for our health care system. Has the minister been to a hospital lately? Has he turned on his television or read a newspaper?

Health care centres everywhere are in crisis. It is extremely hard to give people the treatment they need and deserve. Is there anyone in the House who is heartless enough to think that this is the right time to cut health transfers?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for giving me an opportunity to talk about this issue.

Health care in Canada is top of mind for every health minister in the country, including me. We have different roles to play, but we have the same responsibility to serve the same people with the same funding. That is why, in Canada, no matter where we live, we must have access to health care based on our medical condition rather than our wallet.

That is why in Quebec, and everywhere else in the country, we will continue to work together to ensure that this remains the case for the coming years.

• (1125)

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the minister was really pushing it when he told the media that this was an opportunity, that this was good news for Quebeckers. I think we can all agree that no one here is in favour of any type of billing, but we need to remember that Quebec needed \$6 billion in new investments just to begin repairing our health care system. The federal government gave Quebec just \$1 billion, one-sixth of what it needed, and now it is announcing an additional \$41 million in cuts.

I repeat: Who in the House is heartless enough to think that making cuts to health care right now is good news?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are all pleased to hear that my colleague agrees that extra billing is not part of the health care system in our country, including Quebec. The good news is that Quebeckers and the Government of Quebec can be quickly reimbursed for these deductions if Quebec, like the other provinces, continues to ensure that people are being provided with treatment based on their medical condition, not their ability to pay.

* * *

[English]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, Joe Biden has just announced that he will eliminate \$31 billion in subsidies and special tax treatments for the big polluters, yet Canada continues to give out billions of dollars every year to profitable oil and gas companies. Big oil is watching this coming budget for more giveaways, handouts and subsidies for things such as carbon capture. These companies are making record profits. They are giving out huge payouts to shareholders and massive bonuses to their CEOs while gouging Canadians at the pumps.

Why will the Liberals not just show some courage and commit in the upcoming budget to eliminating the billions of dollars in tax breaks for big oil?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that we need to go further and faster on emissions reductions. That is why we are capping emissions from the oil and gas sector, implementing a clean fuel standard, and investing in carbon capture and storage. We will be exporting that technology around the world, and we are also phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. We have phased out eight, and we are on our way to phasing out the rest by the end of the year.

*Oral Questions***WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY**

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada and the BC Humanist Association found that the majority of crisis pregnancy centres post harmful misinformation. These centres present themselves as medical clinics, but feature false information about abortion, contraception and sexual activity. The Liberals promised to revoke charitable status from anti-choice organizations, and two years later, they have still not done it.

Today, on Abortion Provider Appreciation Day, will the minister finally remove the charitable status from organizations that mislead and shame women?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think access to safe and accessible abortion services across Canada is not only a right but also a priority for this government. That is why we have been working with provinces and territories to make sure that this is true across Canada, including in provinces where access is more problematic and where fees are sometimes imposed, to ensure safe and accessible abortion services in this country.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have seen the reports in *Global News* and *The Globe and Mail* about the coordinated campaign by the Communist dictatorship in Beijing to influence our elections. It is doing that with money and resources to try to get preferred outcomes for parties and candidates sympathetic to it.

We know that our security services briefed the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford. Now the procedure and House affairs committee has been filibustered for three days as part of the Liberal cover-up to prevent her from coming.

Will the Prime Minister announce today that he will allow his chief of staff to testify and tell Canadians what she knew?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite raised the issues that are happening at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. PROC is doing incredible work to try to do the work of Canadians.

Members opposite can laugh. It is no surprise that when we actually had ministers there, again, to answer questions for Canadians, all the Conservatives could do was make misogynistic cracks and take digs at them, suggesting that a female minister could not possibly do their job in dealing with foreign interference.

At PROC, we are focused on doing the hard work and asking the questions of Canadians while they continue to spread their misogyny—

• (1130)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are looking for answers for Canadians, and the Liberals are engaged in a multi-day cover-up filibuster. Our ask is very simple.

The most senior person working for the Prime Minister, his chief of staff, Katie Telford, was briefed by CSIS on the interference attempts by the Communist regime in Beijing to interfere and to change the outcomes of our elections.

We want the Prime Minister's chief of staff to testify at committee, and we want to know when she is going to testify.

Otherwise, we need to know: What are they trying to hide?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a bit rich coming from the Conservatives. We have heard time and time again that the issue of foreign interference is not new.

In fact, it was raised when the Leader of the Opposition was the minister responsible. He actually said that they were not going to do anything in regard to dealing with foreign interference because he felt that it was not in their partisan interest. Meanwhile, we continue to bring public servants, ministers and members of our national security community to the committee because we want to ensure that we are strengthening our democratic institutions while Conservatives play—

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, they are stalling for time. Intelligence agencies briefed the Prime Minister's staff about direct election interference.

They know information that the parliamentary committee needs to do its work. They are offering word salad, an alphabet soup of agencies and organizations to hide behind.

Will they stop blocking the work of Parliament and get the chief of staff to testify immediately?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on the contrary, we continue to do the work of Parliament by adding meetings to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs so that we can continue to have as many meetings as possible.

We are working even when we are on constituency weeks because we find this issue so important. Our members are willing to be there to bring ministers back again. We brought public servants and the national security community back. We want to ensure that Canadians get the answers.

Conservatives continue to play partisan games. We are not going to let that get in the way of the very real work that we have to do to strengthen our institutions.

Oral Questions

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, they are stalling for time. They are not allowing the committee to get to a vote to call the Prime Minister's chief of staff to testify. They are announcing a special rapporteur to take even more time to give us the one thing we need, which is a national public inquiry.

They are now directing to NSICOP, where they will hear secret hearings, evidence and conclusions. Moreover, every single MP on that committee can be vetoed by the Prime Minister.

It is very simple. They are stalling for time. Only a national public inquiry will stop it.

Will they call one?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will remind the House that Canadians and Canadians alone determined the outcomes of the 2019 and the 2021 elections. We will use every tool available to us, unlike the Harper Conservative government, which did nothing to create an oversight committee of parliamentarians. It was one of our first acts as government.

NSICOP is a committee of parliamentarians that provides oversight. The U.K. has had one since 1994. We were late to the game, but we did it when we formed government, unlike the opposition.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office was informed three weeks before the 2019 election that a Liberal candidate had been assessed by CSIS intelligence as having ties to the regime in Beijing.

This week, the Prime Minister did not deny that information. The Prime Minister and his chief of staff were surely briefed about these allegations and this intelligence CSIS provided. We are naturally anxious for the Prime Minister's chief of staff to appear before the committee to tell us what she knows about these briefings.

Will the Prime Minister allow Katie Telford to testify?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, interestingly enough, foreign interference into elections is not new.

In fact, if members look into it, there were reports to former prime minister Stephen Harper. It is unbelievable, when we recognize that the leader of today's Conservative Party was the minister responsible. What did the current Leader of the Conservative Party do? He did absolutely nothing.

We have been very aggressive on this file. We will ensure the integrity of democracy here in Canada.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about what is happening right now.

The Prime Minister did not deny that a caucus member was involved in a case of interference by the regime in Beijing. He did not deny that his staff had been informed about this interference when

he was asked about it this week. The Prime Minister did not even deny that his party allegedly received illegal money directly from the foreign dictatorship in Beijing.

We now know why he asked his members on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs not to allow Katie Telford to testify. The government is afraid she will tell the truth under oath.

Why does the government keep refusing to allow Katie Telford to testify before a public parliamentary committee?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, we see a litany of questions. On Wednesday, there were 20-some questions from the Leader of the Opposition.

What I really want the Conservative Party to recognize, as I indicated, is that it is not a new issue. When the Conservatives had the opportunity to actually deal with it, they intentionally chose to do nothing.

Since 2015, whether it is the Prime Minister or the ministers responsible, we have taken tangible actions. We will continue to do so to protect the integrity of our democracy. All of us believe in it. It is an apolitical—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time is up for that question. I want to remind members that they have had an opportunity to ask questions. They cannot be asking more questions or making comments while the answer is being given to them. I would hope that they would want to listen so that they can ask follow-up questions thereafter.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, in 2018, the federal government signed an infrastructure agreement with the Quebec government. Under the agreement, Quebec would get \$7.5 billion for our infrastructure and have until 2025 to submit the projects.

Since then, the federal government did a 180°, decided to rip up the agreement, like a good partner, and unilaterally decided that, now, the deadline would be March 31, 2023.

March 31, 2023, is soon, so soon that we can count the number of sleeps left. It is in 21 days. If Quebec does not comply within 21 days, it could lose nearly \$3 billion.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we do not share the pessimism of the Bloc member. In fact, we are working with the Quebec government now to ensure that the infrastructure dollars that are allocated to the province are actually being spent.

Our goal is to ensure that infrastructure dollars allocated for the province of Quebec are not line items on a budget somewhere. We want to see shovels in the ground, projects being built and jobs being created. That is why we are working with our counterparts to do just that.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, what the member opposite does not seem to understand or maybe she does know is that, ultimately, there will not be any projects without the money.

If the government wants projects in Quebec to go forward, it needs to give us the money. It owes us the \$3 billion that was in the agreement and that was not yet allocated. The deadline is around the corner.

Members of the Union des municipalités du Québec are panicking. They are afraid that major projects in their municipality will get slashed. The Liberals need to wake up.

When the Liberal MPs go back to their ridings, what will they do? Will they tell their mayors that there will not be any projects for them because they decided to change their minds one fine day and say that Quebec's money is gone?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our objective is to ensure that good, quality infrastructure projects are built in the province of Quebec. The minister is working aggressively with his counterpart to identify those projects. We need the Quebec government to put forward those projects so we can release the money.

We want to see the jobs and the infrastructure have the funding that is desired in Quebec, and we are going to keep working with our counterparts until all that money is allocated.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, for weeks now, the Prime Minister and his front bench have misled Canadians about what they knew and when they knew it. We know the Trudeau Foundation took money from the Chinese Communist Party. We know Beijing Communist operatives were directly funding Liberal nominations and elections. The facts are indisputable, yet they continue to try to sweep the scandal under the rug to cover up their own interests.

When will they stop misleading Canadians and call for a public inquiry?

• (1140)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. Let me reiterate that we trust our public servants and the national security community. Do members know what the national security community said? That it was Canadians, and Canadians alone, who determine the outcome of our elections.

While the Conservatives have already identified that they see this as a partisan issue, we do not. We are working incredibly hard to support our national security community to ensure that our institutions are robust and that only Canadians determine the outcome of our elections.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, the national security community told the Liberals about foreign interference and briefed Katie Telford and the Prime Minister weeks before the election. About 48 hours before the nomination deadline, CSIS urged them to rescind the nomination of a Liberal candidate. Foreign operatives funded their candidates, and the Prime Minister did nothing. The Prime Minister and his bench continue the cover-up. In law, one cannot stand in judgment of oneself, yet that is exactly what the Prime Minister wants to do to cover up his own scandal.

When will the Prime Minister call for a public inquiry?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad the member opposite talked about this issue again because I find it a bit rich. The Conservatives seem to be talking out of both sides of their mouths now. The Leader of the Opposition allows his MPs to cozy up to far-right members of foreign governments. They supported the convoy, which we know involved foreign funding, and then they grandstand about the impacts of foreign interference without actually condemning it among their own benches. If members care about Canadian democracy, they should call it out in their benches.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, with many leaked reports on ways Beijing has interfered in our democracy, politics and government, the Prime Minister first denied, then deflected and then decided to turn toward a committee. This committee is completely behind closed doors, with secret meetings, witnesses, testimony and conclusions. It is a committee with no openness or transparency.

Why are the Liberals hiding the truth from Canadians?

Oral Questions

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am extremely upset about the way that NSICOP is portrayed by the opposition. It was created by an act of Parliament. It was debated at committee. It was passed in this House. It has members from all parties. They are privy to top secret information, which keeps our country safe. That is why they are not allowed to divulge it. To portray it as a secret committee is wrong, and it is misleading Canadians. It was created by Parliament, and I am very proud of the work that it does.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, this committee is not independent. It reports to the Prime Minister. There are serious interference allegations. There is the \$200,000 donation from Beijing influences to the Trudeau Foundation and what The Globe and Mail called an “orchestrated machine” of Beijing's influence to elect Liberals and defeat Conservatives. Nothing is covered that will not eventually be revealed.

Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing and call for a public inquiry?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the committee is independent. In fact, two members of the official opposition sit on that committee, as well as members of the Senate and other opposition parties. While the report is given to the Prime Minister, I would remind hon. members that it is also tabled with the public safety committee annually. We review it, and in fact, the legislation says that if the Prime Minister asks for any changes to that report, this has to be reported to Parliament.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, far-right ministers in Israel are celebrating horrifying attacks on Palestinian civilians. They are engaging in dehumanization, threatening democratic institutions and calling for violations of international law. Thousands of Israelis are on the ground, right now, protesting the actions and the rhetoric of their government. Here, JSpace Canada is asking the government to take a firm stance against these comments and actions. It is not enough to merely condemn the remarks. The government must listen to this group.

Will the government ensure that no Canadian officials legitimize extremists, like Smotrich or Ben-Gvir, by meeting with them?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are appalled by the reprehensible comments made by Minister Smotrich. We unequivocally condemn these remarks. We stand firmly against all incitements to violence and condemn all acts of violence and terrorism.

Those responsible must be held accountable, and measures must be applied equally and applied consistently. We call on Israeli officials to denounce these comments. We call for an immediate de-escalation of tensions to restore calm. Our thoughts are with all those affected by the recent violence.

• (1145)

TAXATION

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, in April, Canadians will see the biggest tax increase in 40 years on beer, wine and spirits. Last week, I spoke with Jorg and Anette Engel, constituents who own a small distillery, who are worried about what this tax means for their livelihood.

We are in an affordability crisis, and a tax hike this large will make things worse. The Liberals escalator tax on beer, wine and spirits is going to cost small business owners tens of thousands of dollars.

Will the Liberals fix this tax, and stop this tax hike to help Canadians already feeling the squeeze?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government supports small craft brewers from right across the country. Most of us probably have small craft brewers that are in our ridings. That is why we have decreased taxes on small businesses, not once but twice, including reducing the rate of taxes for small businesses from 11% to 9%. Last year's escalator equated to about one penny for every five cans of beer sold.

We will continue to work with the brewers in the craft brewing sector to make sure that they are supported and that their businesses continue to grow.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, indigenous people in Canada often face challenges in accessing health care, particularly finding a doctor or finding nurses in rural and remote areas. In addition, first nations, Inuit and Métis should, like all Canadians, be able to receive health care without encountering prejudice or racism.

Can the Minister of Indigenous Services update the House on what our government is doing in partnership with indigenous communities to improve their health care?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have heard, and I am certain that my colleague has seen in his practice over many years, the experiences that indigenous people have in our health care systems, every single day, that are rife with racism and with systemic discrimination. That is why I am so pleased that the Prime Minister announced a \$2-billion indigenous health equity fund that will help to end the systemic discrimination that members of our communities all across the country are facing, like Joyce Echaquan.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for this inclusion, and I want to thank the member for his work in this space.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, in July 2020, Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, testified before a House of Commons committee on the We Charity scandal. In May 2021, she testified before a House of Commons committee with regard to sexual misconduct. Now the Liberal government is preventing her from again testifying under oath before a House of Commons committee.

When will the Liberal government end its filibuster, and allow the Prime Minister's chief of staff to testify on Beijing's foreign interference?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, the work that PROC is doing on this file has included recalling witnesses, ministers, public servants and members of the national security committee, all to talk about this very important issue because we take it so seriously.

It has already been confirmed in the House that the leader of the opposition sees this as nothing more than a partisan issue. While we are focused on ensuring that our institutions are strong, Conservatives continue to play games at committee and to take political cheap shots, instead of doing the work that Canadians sent them here to do.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, the chief of staff is the nexus for sensitive communications in the Prime Minister's office. She came to the finance committee to testify on the Prime Minister's WE Charity scandal. She came to the defence committee on former general Vance's sexual misconduct because the Prime Minister would not. Even if she missed the CSIS briefing on Beijing's interference into election scandals, she would have been advised by the national security advisor.

Will the Liberals end their filibuster and allow her to come to committee?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is very clear that we have had apolitical, professional civil servants, who have made it very clear to all Canadians that the outcome of the 2019 and 2021 elections were not influenced in any way by international interference. In fact, if we take a look at what we have done, in contrast to what the Conservatives have done, we will find that the Conservative government failed in its responsibilities, while we continue to live up to ours.

• (1150)

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, the cold winds of election interference have been blowing in Canada, and the Prime Minister has been caught up in their wintery blasts. The Greek storyteller, Aesop, tells about a contest between the wind and the sun. Who was stronger? Who could remove the traveller's cloak? In the end, the sun won and was able to expose the traveller.

The Prime Minister needs to open the shutters, allow the sun to remove the cloak of secrecy and to expose the truth of Beijing election interference. Will the Liberals end their filibuster and let the

Oral Questions

Prime Minister's chief of staff testify on Beijing election interference?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a fairy tale to talk about, as well, on this issue. This week, the Leader of the Opposition said that of course the previous Conservative government did nothing about foreign interference, because it was not to its partisan advantage to do anything about it.

While the Conservatives have clearly demonstrated that they want to play games and to not take this seriously, we feel that their actions are reckless, when it comes to national security. That is why we are going to do the serious work, at committee and in the House, to ensure our institutions are strengthened.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, when it comes to interference in Canadian elections, this Prime Minister's trust is somewhat selective.

He says he trusts the parliamentarians sitting on the secret special committee that will prepare a secret report. However, when asked to let his chief of staff, Katie Telford, testify before a public parliamentary committee, he refuses outright.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to let his chief of staff, Katie Telford, testify?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would remind the House again that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians is not a secret committee. I would also provide this House with a list of some of the things we have done.

We appointed an independent panel to review the 2019 and 2021 elections, and it found that both of those elections were free and fair.

The Prime Minister announced that he is going to appoint an independent expert as special rapporteur, to review the elections and to see if there were any gaps that we need to fix.

Today, we announced that we would have a foreign influence registry—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Jonquière.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, on March 1, Paper Excellence got its hands on Resolute Forest Products, a forestry industry giant that controls 25% of Quebec forests.

Oral Questions

If a buyer were to revitalize Resolute, which was investing very little in modernizing its facilities, that would be a good thing. However, an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which includes CBC/Radio-Canada, gives us cause to doubt.

Paper Excellence has ties to Asia Pulp & Paper, a corporation with dubious practices that is financed by the Chinese government.

We want to know if the government did the necessary checks to ensure that the Chinese government is not indirectly controlling one-quarter of Quebec's forest resources.

[*English*]

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that all foreign investments are reviewed under the Investment Canada Act, and this transaction is no different.

In the case of Paper Excellence's takeover of Resolute, it was subject to a national security review process. Not only that, the member will be pleased to know that, as part of that review process, the investors committed to maintaining existing Canadian patents, to maintaining facilities in Quebec and to adhering to Canadian employment and environmental laws.

Due to the confidentiality provisions of the Investment Canada Act, we cannot comment further.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not the issue, but all right.

Better forestry development, increased processing and new products to replace oil will be key to having a prosperous and renewable carbon-neutral economy.

However, that is not the business model of Asia Pulp & Paper. It does as little processing as possible and sends kraft pulp directly to China. The jobs and value added are in China.

What conditions did the government impose on Paper Excellence to protect our paper mills and to ensure that Quebec's forests generate profits in Quebec, and not in China?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the acquisition of Resolute Forest Products by Paper Excellence was subject to the provisions of the law governing national security reviews of investments. As part of the review process, the investor made significant commitments to Canada, including guaranteeing high levels of investment in the facilities in Quebec, maintaining existing Canadian managers and complying with Canadian labour and environmental laws.

Because of—

• (1155)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The parliamentary secretary's time is up.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of Liberal governance, all Canadians are paying more for everything, especially the necessities of life. Take housing, for example. Renters are paying twice as much as they were eight years ago. Homeowners' mortgage rates have doubled in eight years. That is down to Liberal management. For eight years, the Liberals did absolutely nothing to control spending, and that led to the inflation we are experiencing now.

Will the government accept responsibility for this? Will the Prime Minister step aside so we can get on with fixing things?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Inflation slowed in Canada last month.

Speaking of Canadians' rent, I cannot for the life of me figure out why the Conservatives voted against a direct benefit we offered Canadians specifically to help them make ends meet.

We are here to support Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is not just about housing. Food is another thing all Canadians need in order to survive. Like many residents of Loretteville, I will be taking food to the community fridge on Racine Street. There are many of us doing this. I can say one thing: The food does not stay on the shelves long because people need it. I would guess that this is happening in the parliamentary secretary's riding as well. People who used to donate to the food bank are now the ones asking for food.

Is the government aware of the inflation issue it has created by not controlling spending for eight years?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague knows very well that inflation is currently affecting every country in the world because of the war in Ukraine, supply chain issues and so on.

I volunteer at MultiCaf, a community cafeteria. As a side note, all the government members do volunteer work in their ridings too. We see what is happening on the ground. That is why we have a plan to help Canadians with affordability issues.

Oral Questions

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, his housing record spells double trouble. Average rent costs have doubled to \$2,200 a month. Average mortgage costs have more than doubled to \$3,500 a month.

After eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, many Canadians are worried about keeping a roof over their heads. Here is my question: Will the Prime Minister take responsibility for this out-of-control inflation, or will he step aside and let us fix what he broke?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to assure the hon. member that we take the issue of supporting Canadians with rent very seriously. That is why we introduced the Canada housing benefit and have recently topped it up with a one-time payment of \$500.

The fact of the matter is that we have been there for Canadians, and we will continue to be there for Canadians.

The hon. member should have a conversation with his leader. It has been a year since his leader announced that he was running for that position, and he has not presented a plan to Canadians. The Conservatives have no plan and have no solutions to bring to this Parliament.

* * *

[Translation]

GROCERY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Madam Speaker, inflation in the food industry is indeed worrisome. I am very pleased that the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food is looking into this matter. The experts who testified had very positive things to say about a code of conduct that could reduce pressure on rising food prices. I know that, yesterday, the Conservatives were a bit confused about the issue.

Can the parliamentary secretary explain exactly what the advantages of having a code of conduct would be and how it would help consumers?

• (1200)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Pontiac, who advocates not only for agriculture, but also for rural issues that affect all Quebecers and Canadians. The code of conduct is vital to ensure fair prices for consumers. It will ensure fair dealing between processors and retailers, the grocery stores. We saw that this week at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. We expect the industry to implement the code of conduct by the end of this year. This is good news for consumers.

[English]

HOUSING

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, rent and housing have doubled. The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment across Canada is over \$2,000 per month compared to \$1,100 in 2015. After eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, average mortgage rates have doubled and now cost Canadians over \$3,000 per month.

Will the Prime Minister finally take responsibility for driving up the cost of housing, so we can fix what he broke?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have introduced the Canada housing benefit to be there for Canadian renters. We have also introduced the top-up payment of \$500 that is going toward almost two million Canadians to support them with the cost of rent. What did the party opposite do? Not only did it vote against that real help for Canadian renters, but it also played procedural games in the House to delay its implementation.

I would urge the hon. member to have a conversation with her caucus members, who believe that the federal government should actually do less on affordable housing.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, the cost of groceries is also rising in Canada, at its fastest rate since 1981. In fact, Canada's Food Price Report 2023 predicts that families will spend over \$1,000 more on food this year. That is another 5% to 7% increase in food prices over last year, the largest increases since it began reporting 12 years ago.

Will the Prime Minister take responsibility for his inflationary spending so we can fix what he broke?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to take this opportunity to talk about the strength of the Canadian economy in a time of global inflation. While it is true that we still have the lowest deficit in the G7 and that we still have the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, we are still focusing on making life more affordable for Canadians.

I would like to take this opportunity to correct the record from a statement I made a few weeks ago when I said Canadians working hard to come through this had created more than 600,000 jobs. As of this morning, that number is 830,000 jobs.

I would also like to correct the fact that I said, for focus on affordability, getting kids dental care used to be 150,000 kids. Now it is over 200,000 children.

Oral Questions

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister, “This isn't working.” These are the words of a food bank chair from northern Saskatchewan, who says, “Everything is increasing—gas, rent, food, heat...I just don't know how people are supposed to manage.” Its monthly food budget is \$5,000 and it produces half the food hampers it did just three years ago. This is less than a one-night stay for the Prime Minister in a hotel

Will the Prime Minister take responsibility for this crisis or get out of the way so we can fix what he broke?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that global inflation is stretching the budgets of Canadians, but that is why we have put together a \$12.1-billion affordability plan. That includes doubling the GST benefit that went out to over 11 million Canadians, including more than 50% of our seniors. That includes strengthening the Canada workers benefit that helped 4.1 million workers get the help they need to put food on their tables and that helped more than 200,000 children under the age of 12 get the dental care they deserve, taking a burden off parents in this country.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government recently launched its new and ambitious Indo-Pacific strategy. This comprehensive plan makes it clear that India, the world's fastest-growing economy, is a critical partner for Canada. While Canada and India have a long-standing bilateral relationship, this strategy commits Canada to further strengthening both economic and people-to-people ties.

Having just travelled to India, could the Parliamentary Secretary please tell the House about the work done so far to implement this new strategy?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Whitby for his advocacy.

I had the opportunity to accompany the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the G20 in India last week. This was the minister's second trip to India since the release of our Indo-Pacific strategy and we are hitting the ground running. As part of my trip, I had meetings on strengthening cultural and educational ties and met with business groups, like the Indo-Canadian Business Council.

Our government will continue strengthening our position in the Indo-Pacific region to unlock economic opportunities for Canadians and grow our strong people-to-people ties.

* * *

• (1205)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, in Alberta, indigenous communities are pushing back on megacorporations, like Imperial Oil, that are polluting our land and jeopardizing our health, but the Liberals turn a blind eye, and Pre-

mier Smith rewards them with billions of dollars. Seepage of toxic water from Imperial's oil sands facility poisoned indigenous lands and waters. The government is allowing these corporations to continue with just a slap on the wrist. Delaying justice is denying justice.

When will the Liberals take indigenous rights seriously by closing the environmental loopholes?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is absolutely appalling that the leak from Imperial Oil was known by the Alberta government for well over six months and that neither the corporation nor the government informed indigenous people who rely on that water and that land for life. We have to do better, and we will. This government will take indigenous rights seriously. We will protect water, we will protect the land and we will work together to do that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, this we know: for nine months, the Kearl mine leaked toxic effluent on the lands and waters of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. This we know: in that time, Imperial continued to lobby for more subsidies from Canada while failing to inform the Athabasca Chipewyan people. Our prisons are overrepresented with indigenous people, which means they are under-represented with corporate criminals, like the CEO of Imperial Oil.

When will the government stop subsidizing big oil and get tough on corporate crime?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, like the hon. member, our government is deeply concerned by the reports about the Kearl mine tailings ponds. Our first thoughts are for the health and well-being of the families in the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, the ACFN, and other affected indigenous communities. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change has reached out directly to the ACFN, the Mikisew Cree and the Alberta environment minister to better understand the situation from their perspectives and to ensure that they know the Government of Canada is there with them every step of the way.

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ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

THE BUDGET

DESIGNATION OF ORDER OF THE DAY

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is focused on building a clean economy for Canada in the 21st century, strengthening our universal public health care system, making life more affordable and creating good jobs and prosperity for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

[*English*]

That will continue to be the focus in the budget I will present to the House on Tuesday, March 28, at 4 p.m.

Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for that purpose.

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order, or usual practice of the House:

(a) on Thursday, March 23, 2023,

(i) when the House adjourns, it shall stand adjourned until Monday, March 27, 2023, at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1), provided that, for the purposes of any standing order, it shall be deemed to have sat on Friday, March 24, 2023; and

(b) on Friday, March 24, 2023,

(i) the address by the President of the United States of America, to be delivered in the chamber of the House of Commons before members of the Senate and the House of Commons, together with all introductory and related remarks, be printed as an appendix to the House of Commons Debates of Thursday, March 23, 2023, and form part of the records of this House, provided that the media recording and transmission of such address, introductory and related remarks be authorized pursuant to established guidelines for such occasions,

(ii) any standing, standing joint, special, and special joint committees, as well as their subcommittees, shall not be empowered to sit on that day.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

It is agreed.

[*English*]

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, on Wednesday, March 22, 2023:

(a) the House shall meet at 1 p.m. and proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business for that day from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.;

(b) the time provided for Government Orders shall end at 9:30 p.m., and may be extended pursuant to Standing Order 45 (7.1);

(c) proceedings on any opposition motion pursuant to Standing Order 81(17) shall conclude at the end of Government Orders, provided that paragraph (e)(i) of the order made on Tuesday, November 15, 2022, shall continue to apply; and

(d) after the disposal of every question relating to Supplementary Estimates (c) for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2023, interim supply for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2024, and the appropriation bills based thereon, the House shall adjourn to the next sitting day.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay. It is agreed.

[*Translation*]

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, entitled "Supplementary Estimates (C), 2022-23".

FINANCE

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled, "Responding to the Challenges of Our Time."

I would like to thank the finance committee clerks, Alexandre Roger and Carine Grand-Jean; analysts, Joëlle Malo, Michaël Lambert-Racine and Sylvain Fleury; committee assistant, Lynda Gaudreault; the whole team of interpreters, technologists and staff of the committee; and of course all the hard-working members of the committee, our witnesses and department officials for their hard work in getting this report completed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to table the Conservatives' dissenting opinion to the finance committee's pre-budget consultation report.

First, I want to say that Conservatives thank the clerks and analysts, and all committee staff, for their work during this process. We also thank the witnesses who appeared or made written submissions. Conservatives dissent to this report because it fails to address the inflation and cost of living crisis created by increasing tax hikes and out of control Liberal spending. For those reasons, we cannot support the recommendations of the report.

Routine Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Translation was on the auxiliary channel. I was listening to it. In the future, we should put out a statement advising members what channel it will be on, but it was on the auxiliary channel.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights presented on Thursday, April 7, 2022, be concurred in.

I first want to thank my caucus for making the opening available for me to move this concurrence report, and I also want to thank, in particular, the members for Victoria and for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, with whom I continue to work very closely on matters to do with combatting violence against women.

In Parliament, unanimity is a very rare thing, but fighting violence against women provides an instance where all parties have agreed. This report and its recommendations have now twice received the support of all parties in the justice committee.

The statistics on violence against women in Canada are shocking and clearly demonstrate that intimate partner violence is a growing problem. At the start of the pandemic, I heard from both frontline service providers and police in my riding that domestic violence calls for assistance had increased by more than 30%. Unfortunately, this happened in communities all across the country, and these rates of violence have not decreased, even as pandemic measures have eased.

We continue to lose one woman every six days to intimate partner violence in Canada. More than 40% of women, that is more than six million Canadians, reported experiencing some kind of psychological, physical or sexual abuse in an intimate partner relationship in their lifetime, and marginalized women bare the brunt of this violence. For indigenous women, the number reporting abuse is 61%, and for women with disabilities it is 55%. For lesbian, bisexual and transwomen, it is over 67%. While indigenous women account for 5% of the population, they account for 21% of all women killed by an intimate partner.

Making coercive and controlling behaviour a criminal offence is not really about adding a new offence to the Criminal Code. Instead, it is about recognizing that this behaviour is, in itself, a form of violence. It is about moving the point at which victims can get help to one before physical violence occurs, instead of making them wait until there are bruises and broken bones. As femicide in intimate partner relationships is almost always preceded by coercive and controlling behaviour, this change will save lives.

We should also recognize the broad community impacts that intimate partner violence has in all of our communities, not only on survivors but also on families and, in particular, on children, both in their physical safety and their mental health.

I urge all members of the House to support this concurrence motion, to support the necessary legislation when it comes forward lat-

er in the session and to support the other important recommendations in this report. Let us show Canadians that we are united and that we are determined to bring an end to violence against women in this country.

• (1225)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I want to thank my colleague on the justice committee and in the House from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. This is an area that is close to my heart, and I anticipate speaking to this issue in a few minutes. It is certainly something that causes great concern.

I am curious what my colleague thinks about the penalties we should be ascribing to this behaviour. It should obviously be looked at as criminal behaviour, based on the report. That is fairly clear. Would he see this as being something where we should be looking at having a deterrent effect in sentencing? I am curious to have his thoughts on that.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I think what we are trying to get across as a justice committee and as members of Parliament is that there is a failure to recognize that coercive and controlling behaviour is, in and of itself, a form of violence.

As I said in my brief remarks, this is really not about creating a new criminal offence. It is about moving that goalpost to where people can get assistance when they are in problematic relationships instead of making them wait until there is physical harm before social service agencies, law enforcement or whoever else can step in to assist them in escaping coercive and controlling behaviour.

I think that this is where we are starting, by recognizing this as a form of violence and doing so explicitly in the Criminal Code of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for tabling the report.

I would like him to address the issue of help and rehabilitation. Should we not try to find a better balance between criminalizing coercive behaviour, helping victims and potentially rehabilitating people who committed acts of coercion?

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the report of the justice committee does not just deal with the legislative part, it also make serious recommendations about increasing the supports, in particular, for frontline community and women's organizations that provide assistance to the survivors of domestic violence. So, it is a package of measures that is in the report and not just adding to the Criminal Code.

However, I do want to emphasize what I think is very important here, which is that we need to move that intervention point, or that help point, forward. When we can do that, it will not be really about prosecuting more men, it will be about making sure that the violence does not occur, which ends up in prosecutions.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I listened to my colleague's intervention on this issue, and what struck me was when he talked about recognizing the pattern of behaviour as itself violence. All too often, it seems as though we have looked at what we often call a "crime cycle" or a "cycle of violence", and we do not look at the antecedents themselves as violence even though those things are really part of what makes up the offence.

I am very proud of my wife. I am going to give her a shout-out here as I stand up. She runs two free legal clinics that often deal with people who have been abused, particularly in the intimate partner violence setting, and people who are struggling to get away from their abusers. One of the things she reports to me that really captivates my interest, if you will, and really beckons to my concern on this point is the fact it is incredibly difficult to get police resources devoted to these types of things. I am wondering if my colleague might be prepared to comment on that.

I know that the NDP might have different views on police resources and things like that, but at this point, the police are stretched very thin and sometimes it is difficult to have the resources to police this matter. This is incredibly important, and we know that so many intimate partners end up the victims of homicide. I wonder what my colleague's thoughts are on that.

• (1230)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, before I came here, I was a member of a municipal police board, and I am quite familiar with the challenges police have, because we leave so many social problems to them to try to deal with rather than providing the services in advance that would prevent these problems from ending up in the legal system.

What was most striking to me at the beginning of the pandemic was when I phoned and talked with local police agencies. They were saying that "We have an increased number of domestic violence calls, and in many of those, we know that this will end up in violence, but with the way the law is structured right now, we have no way to offer assistance to those victims until there are bruises and broken bones."

That phrase that I have been using came from one of those police officers who gets sent to those problematic relationships. So, it was from both police and women's agencies that the suggestion came that we needed to move that point where we provide assistance closer to those times when the victims actually need it.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his hard work over the years on this issue. We have spoken extensively on the need to ensure that coercive behaviour and controlling behaviour is addressed.

I would ask the member's opinion on Bill C-233, which passed the House, in terms of how the bill would assist us in addressing coercive and controlling behaviour.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am going to turn back to the justice report and the very specific recommendations about do-

mestic violence rather than talk about another bill today, because the motion is to get what I hope will be support from all parties in the House for moving forward on the very broad range of recommendations in the report.

So, that is what I am hoping we will get to. I am hoping that this debate will conclude today so that we can have a vote when we come back and express the will of the House, which I believe to be unanimous in that we need to take further action on intimate partner violence.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for this important debate and initiative. I would add that there is intimate partner violence where the police say they have to wait until something has happened. There are also the deaths of children who are caught up in partnership breakdowns when an intimate partner not only wants to kill his own partner, but wreak the worst kind of revenge and kill the children as well.

I do not know if this aspect of intimate partner violence is on the minds of those who have brought this forward to us today. I would appreciate any comments on that.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, yes, when we held hearings at the justice committee, it was made very clear to us that we ought not forget that not only are children often used as part of the coercive and controlling behaviour, but they are also the victims of coercive and controlling behaviour. To see this kind of violence used against their mother, as it is almost always the case of men versus women, has long-term mental health impacts on children.

We have tried to be aware, in writing these recommendations, of the need to consider those broader impacts, not just on the survivors, but on broader family dynamics.

• (1235)

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I will offer a comment to my colleague, especially based on what he just said.

It is very important, as he mentioned, to recognize victims. If we look at the Criminal Code, "victim" is actually defined very broadly. Anybody who is impacted by an offence can submit a victim impact statement, for instance. I commend my colleague for recognizing that because far too often, children are, themselves, victims by virtue of seeing this type of violence or seeing any violence, for that matter, and part of stopping the cycle of violence within a relationship is stopping it so children do not see it any further.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I think one of the important aspects of this whole issue is making sure that we, as a society, clearly condemn coercive and controlling behaviour, like the attempt to deprive women of their autonomy and their ability to escape from harmful relationships. The fact that this has not been considered a criminal offence, in many ways, condones that kind of behaviour.

Routine Proceedings

I look forward to the day when we make that very clear statement, as a Parliament, that this is unacceptable behaviour and we can provide support to those survivors.

• (1240)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights' report entitled "The Shadow Pandemic: Stopping Coercive and Controlling Behaviour in Intimate Relationships". I am grateful for all the individuals and organizations who provided evidence at the committee during its study of this very important issue. I would like to commend the committee for its comprehensive report. I also want to thank my colleague and friend from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke for all his work on this issue.

Addressing all forms of gender-based violence continues to be a priority of this government and this Prime Minister. This is a timely conversation, given International Women's Day was just this week. Coercive control in intimate relationships, also known as coercive and controlling behaviour, is an insidious form of intimate partner violence that often precedes physical violence. An abuser engages in a pattern of controlling behaviour over a period of time, eliminating the victim's sense of freedom. Abusers use a broad range of controlling conduct, including isolating the victim from their friends and family, monitoring and controlling the victim's activities and finances or threatening, belittling, humiliating or assaulting the victim. Coercive control focuses on the accumulative impact of the abuser's conduct on the victim.

While we know that anyone can be a victim of intimate partner violence, victims are most often women, and this violence is commonly perpetrated by men. In 2021, eight in 10 victims of such violence were women and girls, and the rate of victimization was nearly four times higher among women and girls than men and boys. We must also consider that many experiences of victimization are not reported to the police. The under-reporting of certain types of violence, including intimate partner violence, is well established.

Indigenous people are over twice as likely to experience spousal violence as non-indigenous. About six in 10 indigenous women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and four in 10 experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime. More specifically, 43% of first nations women, 48% of Métis women and 35% of Inuit women have experienced physical and sexual assault by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.

The World Health Organization has recognized that intimate partner violence is a serious public health concern and a violation of women's rights that has profound, immediate and long-term impacts on survivors and victims and requires a multi-sectoral approach. We know that gender-based violence is unacceptable and has no place in Canada. We also know that it is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality.

I want to note that the Minister of Justice raised the committee's recommendations at the fall 2022 federal-provincial-territorial meeting of ministers responsible for justice and public safety and that his officials have engaged their provincial and territorial counterparts on the issue of enacting a new offence prohibiting coercive

control consistent with one of the committee's recommendations. I, for one, will be interested to learn about what this collaboration with the provinces and territories will result in. Indeed, they will have valuable experience to contribute to this issue, given their responsibility for the administration of justice, including the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences.

Once again, I want to thank my colleague for this discussion that is taking place today. I look forward to continuing the work with him and all parliamentarians on this very important issue.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the justice committee we have heard from many witnesses, including from groups that advocate for women who are victims of crime, and they have told us that, in their opinion, reducing sentences for men who are guilty of intimate partner violence is not helping the cause of women.

I wonder if the member has a comment about that.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I agree.

Reducing sentences is not a good thing, particularly in the case of intimate partner violence. What is important is that our government is undertaking reforms that would really speak to a number of issues in our communities. Bill C-5, for example, would address issues with mandatory minimum penalties, which we know do not work. What we have done with Bill C-5, for example, was allow judges to make decisions based on the individual who is before the court that are based on a number of different personal circumstances, and I think it is smart public policy. We will continue toward reform that is meant to be smart, that is meant to address issues of serious criminality and also to ensure that intimate partner violence is not accepted, in any way, in Canada.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I am going to follow up on the last point my friend and colleague just made, which was in regard to sentencing.

I know he mentioned Bill C-5, and we may have some disagreement on minimum penalties. For instance, if memory serves, the maximum penalty for assault is five years when proceeded by an indictment and two years less a day when proceeded summarily.

Does my colleague believe or agree that perhaps we need to elevate the maximum sentences when it comes to intimate partner violence?

I would point out a couple of things. One is the fact that the Criminal Code talks about people who are vulnerable, and when we talk about the cycle of violence, we are in fact talking about people who are vulnerable. The second is that the Criminal Code mentions that it is an aggravating feature to abuse one's intimate partner.

Routine Proceedings

Given those factors, would he propose raising the maximum sentences for people who abuse their intimate partners?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the Minister of Justice is open to suggestions from all parliamentarians.

What is very clear for the minister is that we need smart criminal justice policy that is rooted in evidence, and we look forward to working with all parliamentarians in this regard.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was hesitant to ask questions, but it always disturbs me when the Conservatives introduce disinformation.

There has been no reduction in the sentences in the Criminal Code for cases regarding domestic violence. That has not happened. It is not a fact.

What is really important here is not to talk about the sentencing but the ability to use interventions that will remove perpetrators from the home and get survivors of this violence out of those dangerous situations. When this is placed in the Criminal Code, it will allow for earlier intervention.

Would the hon. member agree with me that this is about prevention and not about sentencing?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely will agree with the member in this regard.

I know this is an important issue, and we have heard from many different organizations and individuals who have been directly impacted by it. The minister has been very clear on this a number of times when he has appeared before committee. In fact, he answered the question the member asked several months ago. He will continue to work with his provincial and territorial counterparts in order to advance smart criminal justice policy.

• (1245)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice for this discussion today.

I have been working on a piece of legislation that is right now in the final stages in the Senate, where we are ensuring that coercive control training for judges is part of the national conversation and understanding of how we create preventative measures in protecting women and children who are experiencing abuse and are being funnelled through the judicial system.

Does my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, feel that this study, in addition to the legislation that we currently have in the Senate, is opening up the conversation so that we can really get a handle on resources and safety measures for women and children experiencing coercive control?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her intervention. I know she has worked very hard on this issue with Bill C-233 for a number of years. I admire the depth to which she and her colleagues have gone to ensure that it not only passes but also brings everybody together. I think she has successfully managed to do that.

Of course, this is an important conversation starter, but it should not be the end. Back to the point that my friend from Kamloops made, it is one of the important tools to ensure that sentencing, for example, is appropriate and that judges are informed of the peculiarities, special circumstances and risks involved in intimate partner violence. Therefore, I think it is an important and smart first step, but of course, there is much more to do.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. This is questions and comments, so this is a comment to my colleague and friend on the other side of the floor.

What we are talking about here really is victims, who are vulnerable. One of the things I found quite dismaying is that when it came to the ombud for victims, that position was left unfilled for months and perhaps even years. I cannot recall off the top of my head.

It is difficult because when we are talking about intimate partner violence, the victims we are dealing with are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized. This ombud would be the type of person who would presumably help those victims, so I just wanted to express that here we are talking about victims, particularly in the most vulnerable of settings, but that position was left unfilled for a significant period of time. It is just an inconsistency. I would have liked to have seen the government fill it earlier.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, it is a Friday afternoon, and my friend from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke has brought forward a very important conversation today.

I do not really want to get into a political debate, but I want to put on the record that the member and the party opposite have consistently spoken out against Bill C-75, which in many ways addresses the issue of gender-based violence. Many provisions were brought in that were not available in protecting victims, so I find it a little disingenuous when the party opposite starts going into a political discussion on timing of an appointment, where the real issues are addressed in Criminal Code amendments we have brought forward as a government, which they continuously criticize, demean and in fact misinform the public on.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-75 was introduced four years ago. One of its stated purposes was to reduce the number of indigenous people in our criminal justice system and in our prisons. However, our correctional investigator, Dr. Zinger, said in his latest report that the number is going in the wrong direction, particularly for indigenous women. Could my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I have an incredible amount of respect for Dr. Zinger. I have followed his work for the last decade, and he is one of the most underused persons in this House. He is absolutely right. If we look at Bill C-5, which again the party opposite consistently and continuously drags down, its aim is to address the issues of overrepresentation. Again, I go back to smart public criminal policy.

Routine Proceedings

• (1250)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. I did not anticipate speaking today. I know I have 20 minutes, so if the Chair would indulge me, I would like to do a couple of quick shout-outs.

One shout-out is to my niece, Juliana Bradley. She came into this world 23 years ago. I was a criminology student with a lot of hair back then. I still remember going to the hospital from Simon Fraser University, travelling to Kamloops that night on a Greyhound bus and holding her in my arms. We cannot travel by Greyhound anymore. Juliana is 23 today, and we are proud of the young woman she has become. She is a force, and I am proud to be her uncle. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I say happy birthday to Juliana.

The second shout-out I want to give goes back to my being trapped in the airport in Toronto early Monday morning. My wife and I did not have a flight. We missed our flight to Ottawa. Julie and Bernard Caravelles rented a minivan and gave us a ride to Ottawa here in the middle of the night. We got here at about 5:30 or 6 a.m. They are actually both retired civil servants. Both worked for the Canadian government. It turned out that Julie and I had a mutual contact because we were both parole officers a number of years ago. They did not know anything about us, but they were generous enough to open themselves up to us, as perfect strangers, and give us a ride in their vehicle. This is the type of generosity that, in my view, defines Canada. I wanted to take a minute or two to recognize that. My thanks to them, Julie and Bernard, who are now in Hansard.

I am going to speak mostly from the heart here today. I did not know that I was going to be giving a speech on this issue when I first arrived today, so much of what colleagues are going to hear is essentially from the heart. I have a few notes jotted down. I want to speak about the broader issue of intimate partner violence that is specifically addressed in this report. I was not a member of Parliament here during the 43rd Parliament, but obviously, I am now here. It is a pleasure and an honour, as of late, to be on the justice committee.

We are talking about the reports that my colleague has tabled here. We are looking at intimate partner violence, and within that, we are specifically addressing the discussion around controlling and coercive behaviour. When we look at this, in my view, we have to recognize that this type of conduct straddles every single socio-economic group. This is not something that happens behind closed doors for people who are poor or only people who are rich. This is something that happens and impacts every group. It may go unsaid more often in upper-class settings, but that does not mean it is not happening. It is perhaps under-reported in those instances. That is what makes intimate partner violence a unique subset of offences. Impaired driving is another one, but there are not a lot of offences that really straddle all groups and that impact so many socio-economic groups as intimate partner violence does.

This is something that the House has to get serious about. I may have even raised it in my maiden speech, my first speech in the House of Commons. When we talk about this, I often refer to my wife. She is my better half. She is much smarter.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No argument from this side.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, yes, my much better half, as my colleague from behind me said, and there is no argument from my colleague from Winnipeg. She is much better looking. I do not know if there would be an argument on that either. He just threw up his hands, for the record. She is much smarter, much wiser and much more charming, and I am indebted to her for the work she does. She has told me stories about women who come to her terrified in this setting.

• (1255)

If we look at the Criminal Code, section 810, which I believe the intimate partner violence report references with regard to peace bonds, was dealt with historically through a peace bond. For people out there watching, a peace bond means that a person has a reasonable ground to fear another person. It does not even need to be in an intimate partner setting. It can be in any setting.

Peace bonds are often used as part of a plea bargaining process when the original charge is assault. However, the peace bond process is like a trial. The police have to submit a report to Crown counsel, and Crown counsel, in British Columbia anyway, will approve that charge. When I say “charge” I mean counsel will approve the allegation. Then there is disclosure. It is essentially a full-blown trial for this hearing about whether or not a person has reasonable grounds to fear someone. However, let us say something happens January 1, 2021. That matter may not get to trial until January 31, 2022, for instance, which is a full 13 months. I believe the maximum duration or the typical duration of a peace bond is 12 months. This is generally quite inadequate.

I do not know if other jurisdictions have this, but in British Columbia, a person who has grounds to fear someone can, on sworn evidence or on affidavit evidence, go to the full court under provincial legislation and get a court order prohibiting contact. I did not practise law in this area so I am just paraphrasing here, but that is my understanding. This court order is done *ex parte*, which means there is no notice to the person who is the subject of the order.

Routine Proceedings

For anybody who may be watching on CPAC or anywhere else, be aware that some provincial legislation may allow a person to go to court, literally today or tomorrow, to sign an affidavit, which is a sworn document, and have their lawyer present it to a judge. Once that document is served on the person whom there is a reasonable ground to fear, that person can no longer have any contact with the person who signed the affidavit. If they do, they will be subject to a Criminal Code offence.

Coercive behaviour is, in my view, part of what sometimes in justice circles we call the “cycle of violence”. Members may have heard me say there is an “offence cycle”, as people do not just go from zero to 60 such that one second they are not offending and the next second they are. There are often antecedents, and one of those antecedents or precursors, if you will, might be drinking too much. It might be dysfunction in the relationship. It might be manipulation itself. Those things will almost always, from what I have seen, precede an offence, such as uttering a threat, or assaultive behaviour, which is the laying on of hands without consent, sexual assault or anything like that when it comes to the intimate partner violence.

When we are talking about an offence cycle, it is my view that controlling and coercive behaviour really is the offence cycle. What we are trying to do here, as the report addresses, is ensure that the offence cycle itself is criminalized based on the report. We can never forget that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.

I hope the House will indulge me as I share some anecdotes from my experience. They really go back to the cycle of violence. They play into this notion of controlling and coercive behaviour. Up to this point, we have been talking about coercive and controlling behaviour in the context of what precedes the offence, but controlling and coercive behaviour occurs after the offence as well.

Typically when there is an allegation of assault or of uttering threats, an accused person will be put on conditions under the Criminal Code. However, those conditions get enforced variably. Some people in law enforcement take them more seriously than others, and frankly, some accused persons take them more seriously than others.

• (1300)

Let us say we have somebody on a condition to stay away from their intimate partner, who is the victim in this instance. Then, regardless of that condition, the accused person gets to that intimate partner, either directly or indirectly. When I worked at the prosecutorial office, we would see about one person a day, in a relatively small community, walk up to our counter and say they want to drop the charges. It was almost always an intimate partner who would say that. I do not think I am really stretching to say that it was one intimate partner a day. We would often have to explain that it is not their decision to drop the charges. This is not the United States, where someone can say they want charges or they do not. The Crown, His Majesty in this case, makes that decision.

I was always really bothered by that, as people were clearly victimized. Sometimes, if it was my case, I would bring them in and talk to them, and they would say they want to drop the charges. Sometimes we would actually have to play their 911 call. For those

who have not listened to a lot of 911 calls, they are pretty harrowing. If someone is calling 911, they are calling for a reason. They are scared because there is an emergency.

We would see somebody who had clearly been victimized and had been part of this coercive behaviour over the course of months listen to their 911 call from six months earlier, when they said they were petrified or they had just been abused by their partner. Then they would say they want to drop the charges because they love this person, they do not want to see them punished or they are fearful. These are the things the report gets to. I am mindful of the fact that these are underlying problems. As it has often been asked, how do we deal with these underlying issues? I am not going to say that this is not a huge issue.

Another thing I would often ask an intimate partner in this setting is if they had children. Let us say their daughter is the one who made the 911 call. Would they be giving them advice to take the action they are taking? A number of them would be taken aback by that, and that was the point.

Again, we do not want the cycle of violence to continue. However, if we look at justice system participants, look at statistics or just sit in court, it is really difficult to see that oftentimes, it is the same people, the same abuser and the same complainant. If there are three sets of charges, one from January, another one in April and another one in July, we are fooling ourselves to think that this conduct was only about the assaultive behaviour that occurred in January, April and July. There were intervening events typically marked by what the report calls “coercive behaviour”, so there is certainly a reason to address this.

Criminal law does not capture this issue. This is something my colleague from the NDP stated. I believe he has a private member's bill on this point, and I look forward to discussing and debating it, because criminal law does not really capture this.

It does not capture another thing. I am probably not letting the cat out of the bag here too much, but it is something I am looking at for a private member's bill as well. Right now, if a person assaults their intimate partner, they get the exact same charge as a person who assaults somebody at a bar, at a pub or on the street. It is in section 266 of the Criminal Code. It just goes down as an assault. Our Criminal Code, in its charging section, does not distinguish between assaulting an intimate partner and assaulting a stranger, assaulting a best friend or assaulting anybody else. There is no distinction.

It is the same with uttering threats. The person who is most likely to get threatened, in my view, anecdotally, is an intimate partner. Again, the Criminal Code does not distinguish between uttering a threat against an intimate partner and uttering a threat against a person on the street or something like that.

Routine Proceedings

• (1305)

What troubles me about that is the sentence, therefore, is the same. If we are going to say that this is an insidious event that occurs far too frequently across all sorts of socio-economic groups and that we are going to come down on it, why do we treat assaulting one's partner the same way as we treat assaulting somebody at the pub? It makes sense that we should be treating it more seriously, and we would be treating it more seriously by making the penalty more serious.

It is great to say this is more serious, but if the penalty is identical, Parliament is communicating that it is not, itself, any different. We can talk about it, but when the rubber hits the road, what is the law on the books? We can have aggravating features in the Criminal Code, but I call on the House to make that change, particularly to the assault section under section 266, the uttering threats section under section 264.1, the assault causing sections and the aggravated assault section.

If anyone wants a parallel, simply look at the peace officer domain. There is a discrete section regarding assaulting a peace officer. Anyone who assaults a peace officer has committed an assault, but Parliament has chosen to say that, if anyone assaults a peace officer, it will be a discrete offence. We do not do that when it comes to intimate partners. Given what this report tells us, it is something that I believe the House should do. When we look at intimate partner violence as a leading element of homicides, which I believe from my criminology days was about 50%, that is something we should be addressing.

I will now get to some of the recommendations in this report. Recommendation 1 talks about acknowledging the significant harms and that these harms are not captured in the code itself. Recommendation 2 makes a further statements to that. Recommendation 3 talks about calling on “the federal government, the provinces and territories to implement measures to combat the challenges presented by the justice system for victims of coercive and controlling behaviour and intimate partner violence”.

What we often see is the cycle of violence continuing through what is often called secondary victimization. The primary victimization is the offence itself. The secondary victimization occurs based on that person walking through the justice system. Far too often, victims of intimate partner violence are having to navigate the justice system on their own.

I want to recognize victim services workers. They are often volunteers, some of them paid and paid far too little, who work for police organizations, especially in small towns. Those victim services workers are invaluable. They are so helpful to people in these settings, by attending courts. The amount of work they do and the quality of work they do has to be recognized. They are often the unsung heroes, when it comes to victims getting to court. They are often there for marginalized people, for vulnerable people and for people who are experiencing coercive control on a daily basis.

At the end of the day, we all have a role to play. My view was that when an intimate partner violence file came across my desk, I would try call the victim as early as I could, because this is simply a different type of offence. The victims are incredibly vulnerable. They are most vulnerable after a breakup, and when there is a no-

contact condition, that could lead to significant violence between them.

Recommendation 4 talks about increasing funding and adequate levels of support and counselling.

• (1310)

I am not sure if my colleague from Cumberland—Colchester has already tabled his bill but, if not, I believe he will have a forthcoming bill about whether we should be taxing counselling services.

To me, counselling services are already expensive. I imagine people pay anywhere between \$100 and \$300 an hour for a counsellor. If we are going to address trauma at its root, that addressing should be done in a manner that is affordable. The government should not be getting in the way of that by adding costs to it. These events themselves can often be traumatic, not only traumatic at the time but also, as I said, in the process that a person goes through.

This leads me to recommendation 5, which talks about training, and that training being trauma-informed. We have the provincial legislation I referred to, but we do need to talk about this when it comes to training. Judges must be trained.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his continued advocacy for victims of crime, but also for his service to the people of Kamloops when he was a Crown prosecutor.

He brought up a lot of very good points. One of the issues I want to bring up is that the government just released its departmental plans for the coming year. These plans set out the priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. The Correctional Service of Canada, in its actual targets, put a lower target for the percentage of offenders with a residency requirement transitioning without revocation or new charges. It actually set a lower goal, so a higher incidence of repeat offences. It set the rate of convictions for serious offences and lowered its target from previous years. For the percentage of offenders on conditional release reaching sentence expiry date without revocation or new charges, again, for next year, the department has set a lower target.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the government actually setting lower targets for protecting Canadians and protecting victims of crime.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, I obviously have not referred to the report, but my colleague is often an expert on this. At the end of the day, we have to recognize that this type of offence is not going away. During the pandemic, it escalated. Any sort of mentality that we are instantly going to bring down the occurrence of offences, in my view, is not backed by anything I have seen at this point. I know that people often bring up sentencing and there are divergent viewpoints about that.

Routine Proceedings

I can say this much. It really is disheartening for an outsider to see somebody who has been victimized as an intimate partner and see an unjust sentence levied when that intimate partner has so clearly been victimized.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, at the justice committee, where the hon. member and I both serve, we have heard from witnesses, people who work with female victims of crime, and we have heard from more than one witness that sexual assault goes largely unreported. Of those that actually get reported, even fewer go to trial. We have heard from witnesses, from victims of sexual assault, that going to trial is like being on trial themselves, being cross-examined. Of course, we support the presumption of innocence, but this is very traumatizing for people who have been victimized once already. They are being revictimized.

I would like my colleague's comments on that.

• (1315)

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work on the justice committee.

The Criminal Code is really quite convoluted when it comes to sexual assault of intimate partners. In Canada, we have a rule against the twin myths, although I do not have time to get into that. It certainly does not make it any easier on victims. I have had victims literally crying on the phone, asking “Can't you just deal with this so I don't have to go to court?” or “Can't you just get a peace bond?”, anything to avoid it, because they fear the system so much.

We have to find a balance that recognizes the presumption of innocence but also takes a trauma-informed approach to victims of sexual assault. In the past, it was so frequent that we thought about sexual assault as happening perhaps in relationships that were very new or when people were not married. We are in fact seeing more and more reports of sexual assault in long-term relationships. One of the most horrific sexual assaults I ever prosecuted involved an intimate relationship of some time. Seeing what that victim had to go through, and I believe she had to testify twice in the trial because of pretrial applications made by the defence, I believe this is an area that we, as a Conservative government, would address.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know we are talking about intimate partner violence, but my question is about some of the measures we have seen from the government as it relates to bail changes and the way the laws are being modified to make it easier for those who are convicted of crimes with firearms, for example, to get away with lower sentences.

I am curious about the member's opinion as to how some of those changes that are being made by the government would impact some of the issues he was speaking about before.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, the member asked about bail and firearms. I probably only have time to deal with one, so I am going to pick bail because that is a really significant issue.

In that case, it is actually a lack of action by the government. There was one action, which was to create a reverse onus. I believe it was if a person had a previous intimate partner violence offence; I would have to check that. What I am being told by people on the ground, including my wife, is that these no-contact offences are not

being treated seriously. By no-contact, I mean that a person is released on a release order or their promise, perhaps at the scene, not to have any contact with the victim. The penalties that often accompany those types of offences are minimal.

If we want to stop intimate partner violence, and we talk about the cycle of violence, what are we communicating when we go easy on breaches of bail? The cycle of violence is perpetuated. If we say “Don't contact the victim” and they contact the victim, there is no meaningful consequence. That must end.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech and his responses to many questions from across the political spectrum.

We can change the laws all we want, but we need to have the mechanisms and institutions available to support women and children, in particular, who are caught in situations of intimate violence. I am thinking of women's shelters. In Alberta, in my riding, we had the first women's shelter built since 1984. Without these critical resources coinciding with changes in laws, I do not think we are going to see a reduction in intimate partner violence.

I wonder if the member could give me his thoughts on the importance of building an ecosystem that fights intimate partner violence in this country.

• (1320)

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, this is an excellent question.

In my experience, one of the reasons why people go back to their abuser is economics. That is what it is. The partner was the person who brought home most of the money, or they simply cannot afford to live apart in two residences. What does that do? It brings two people together, back into what was an otherwise toxic relationship.

I could not agree more. There need to be more services for people, particularly women, particularly marginalized and indigenous women who are themselves the victims of intimate partner violence. Far too often we see, to borrow the member's term, an ecosystem set up that does not prevent future offences but actually fosters future offences because the two parties invariably get back together, whether it be for emotional reasons, economic reasons or geography. That is something we need to address. I thank the member for raising that very salient point.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, at the justice committee, we are currently studying bail reform, largely instigated on account of violence against police officers. Just a few months ago, Constable Pierzchala was murdered by a person who was out on bail. One of the charges was relating to inter-partner violence. I wonder if my colleague would have a comment on that.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, before I begin, our condolences go to Constable Pierzchala's family and anybody who has suffered from his passing.

It is not uncommon to see intimate partner violence joined by other offences. That is one thing that makes it so difficult. It can be a stand-alone defence. There could be a doctor who is alleged to have done this, or a lawyer, like me, or anybody. It spans all different socio-economic circumstances.

When I say “like me”, I mean I am a lawyer, not that I do these things. That is what I mean by that, because my colleague—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, we are out of time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights examined the issue of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships to explore the possibility of considering such behaviour to be a criminal offence. This was done in connection with Bill C-247, which was introduced in 2020. Members will recall that that bill died on the Order Paper when the government called an election that never should have happened because it did not change the make-up of the House whatsoever.

The purpose of Bill C-247 was to add to the Criminal Code proposed subsection 264.01(1), which read as follows:

Everyone commits an offence who repeatedly or continuously engages in controlling or coercive conduct towards a person with whom they are connected that they know or ought to know could, in all the circumstances, reasonably be expected to have a significant impact on that person and that has such an impact on that person.

We are talking about a hybrid offence that would carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison. It was proposed that the justice committee carry out a separate study to consider coercive behaviour within the meaning of what was then Bill C-247.

It is important to be very careful when discussing intimate partner violence. It is a very delicate and sensitive subject. Violent or coercive behaviour has no place in intimate relationships and should never occur. We all know that the goal of eliminating it completely will unfortunately never be achieved. It will always exist to some degree, which is why solutions must be carefully thought out before we write them into any legislation that would amend the Criminal Code. We must help victims as much as possible, but we must help them in the right way. Drafting legislation that properly reflects the intent of Bill C-247 is an extremely complex exercise.

The report illustrates this quite well. Witnesses and experts have many reservations and have suggested a number of changes. Penalties for coercive behaviour cannot be set out in just a few clauses,

as much as we would all like that to be the case. Some countries already have these or similar tools in their criminal codes. It would perhaps be wise to study their systems more carefully and try to understand how these ideas could be transposed and adapted here.

The Criminal Code is a set of laws that create limits for what is and is not acceptable in a society. These laws can evolve over time, and they differs from one place to the next. We can draw inspiration from foreign laws, but we cannot simply copy them. That is a shortcut that could go awry, although it might be done with good intentions initially.

The Criminal Code already has provisions for people who are victims of violence. Even so, the problem is that women are generally reluctant to report. As my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo mentioned, there are also evidentiary challenges when witnesses cannot be convinced to follow through with their testimony to get someone charged because they still have an emotional connection to that person.

The other problem, in the case of psychological violence and coercive behaviour, is that victims may not realize they are victims until they are really trapped. Another thing to consider is that people who behave coercively do everything they can to isolate their victim. Without their network, victims find it very hard to report this behaviour, especially when their self-confidence has been eroded. Slowly but surely, a web is woven around the victim. This can happen to anyone, no matter their gender, age or social class. There is no such thing as a typical victim, no model that makes it easy to identify these victims from the outside.

A lot of awareness raising and prevention need to be done before we can come up with legislation that is comprehensive and effective. That is one of the recommendations in the report. It also talks about raising judges' awareness.

It is important to note that the Government of Quebec plays a lead role in many ways with respect to public awareness and prevention. In Quebec, things are networked, and resources are inter-linked: education, health, social services, justice and public safety.

• (1325)

We have used the team approach for quite some time, which leads me to share my own concerns about the steps mentioned in the debate on this report.

Criminalization comes up over and over again. That is what is behind the creation of a Criminal Code section, but we do not talk enough about rehabilitation or even assistance. That may not be unusual because, as I just mentioned, on our side the assistance would be provided by the Government of Quebec and the provinces, which are responsible for social services.

I would like to address the fact that the bill says barely anything at all about striking a balance between criminalization and rehabilitation. There is also very little mention of it in the report.

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Both the victims and their assailants need help, but Bill C-247 did not mention the balance that needs to be struck. There was no mention of the possibility of providing help and upstream prevention.

I would like to conclude my speech on a positive note because all the work that was done by the committee is still very important. This work needs to be a precursor to a deeper, more tangible reflection on the opportunities available to us to try to legislate on this type of behaviour and, ultimately, help the people who are the victims of it directly or indirectly. That is really its primary objective. These victims are also often collateral damage and we need to think of them.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I ask for unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the motion to concur in the first report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, presented Thursday, April 7, 2022, be deemed concurred in.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes has a point of order.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, members of the official opposition look forward to speaking to this important report further and have more to say.

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[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from December 2, 2022, consideration of the motion that Bill S-224, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill S-224, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding trafficking in persons. I want to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin people.

The bill came to us on October 18 after having passed the other place; it proposes reforms to the definition of “exploitation” for the purposes of the Criminal Code's human trafficking offences. The

bill seeks to protect victims and to hold human traffickers accountable. These are laudable and pressing objectives.

Human trafficking is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable, and it is often described as a modern-day form of slavery. It involves recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or control over the movement of persons for the purposes of exploitation, typically sexual exploitation or forced labour. Human trafficking devastates victims and survivors, as well as their families, their communities and society as a whole.

In Canada, reported human trafficking data primarily relates to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Traffickers seek to profit off the sexual exploitation of others, treating victims as commodities to be used for the traffickers' financial gain. Between 2010 and 2021, the large majority of individuals accused of trafficking were men, most commonly between the ages of 18 and 24. While we know that anyone can be targeted by a trafficker and become a victim of human trafficking, 96% of police-reported victims between 2010 and 2021 were women and girls.

Almost one in four, or 24%, of the reported victims, were younger than the age of 18; half, 45%, were between 18 and 24 years old; and one in five were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old. Moreover, women and girls were more at risk of being targeted by a trafficker when impacted by factors like poverty, isolation, precarious housing, substance use, a history of violence, childhood maltreatment and mental health issues. In short, traffickers look for young women and girls in precarious situations and target these individuals for financial gain.

[*Translation*]

We also know that indigenous women and girls are disproportionately represented among victims or those at risk of becoming victims of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation. The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls notes several intersecting factors that increase the likelihood of being targeted by a trafficker. Those include systemic racism, violence against indigenous women and girls, intergenerational trauma linked to colonization, the lack of access to social and economic resources and colonial assimilation policies.

[*English*]

Traffickers likely target victims who experience these types of risk factors. The majority of victims are trafficked by someone they know. For example, nearly one-third of victims have been trafficked by a current or former intimate partner. In fact, some traffickers target and romantically pursue potential victims with the specific intent of exploiting them.

Traffickers will go to a great extent to keep victims isolated and unable to seek help. They often separate victims from those who could help them, hide them from the public, ensure they do not have access to support and may force victims to commit crimes while being trafficked, convincing them that they will be arrested if they try to seek help.

We also know that victims may be unwilling or unable to seek help for a number of reasons, such as distrust of authorities, which is often created or fostered by the traffickers themselves, or because victims are fearful, ashamed, not aware of their rights in Canada, experiencing language barriers, or have a desire to protect their traffickers.

After being trafficked, victims may experience post-traumatic stress and memory loss as a result of the physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse they were subjected to while being trafficked. Many victims have both physical and psychological scars from being trafficked.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

It is crucial to support victims and bring their traffickers to justice. I am reassured by the fact that the Criminal Code contains a strong legislative framework governing human trafficking that includes a specific offence of trafficking in persons, including trafficking in adults, trafficking in children, receiving a material benefit from trafficking in persons, and withholding or destroying identity documents to facilitate the commission of this crime, with maximum penalties of up to life imprisonment. Because human trafficking cases are complex, other offences may be used depending on the facts of the case, such as forcible confinement, assault, sexual assault and uttering threats.

[*English*]

Bill S-224 would strengthen this framework. I agree with the bill's sponsor that we must continue to reflect on how we can ensure the most robust legislative framework possible, and I am grateful that we now have the opportunity to do just that.

That brings me to my main concern with Bill S-224. The bill would repeal the Criminal Code's existing definition of exploitation, resulting in prosecutors no longer being able to rely on that definition in appropriate cases. The current definition of exploitation focuses on the impact of the trafficker's conduct on a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances.

I note that the existing definition was first enacted in 2005 and thus we have 17 years of jurisprudence interpreting it. I am pleased to be able to report that the definition has been interpreted broadly, as I have already noted, applied to human trafficking cases that have involved purely psychological forms of coercion. This is critically important because human traffickers often target victims due to their vulnerabilities, which make them easy to manipulate without the need to resort to more violent tactics. In particular, both the Ontario and Quebec courts of appeal have found that under such an existing approach prosecutors do not need to prove that the victim was actually afraid, that the accused used or threatened the use of physical violence or even that exploitation actually occurred. Prosecutors need only to prove that a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances would fear for their safety, that the accused engaged in psychological forms of coercion and that the accused either intended to exploit the victim or knew that someone else intended to do so.

If Bill S-224 were amended to add the proposed definition of exploitation as an additional definition that could be used in appropri-

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ate cases, prosecutors would have an additional tool to assist, ensuring that traffickers are held to account. Such an approach would strengthen the existing criminal laws in response to human trafficking without removing any of the existing tools that have been successful in achieving the critical objective of ending this heinous crime.

Since 2005 when human trafficking offences were enacted in the Criminal Code, Canada has continued to demonstrate leadership in combatting human trafficking. For example, in 2019, the Government of Canada launched the national strategy to combat human trafficking. The strategy is led by Public Safety Canada and is a five-year whole-of-government approach to addressing human trafficking. It frames federal activities under the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership.

The objectives of Bill S-224 are laudable and I share the sponsor's concern about the serious impacts that human trafficking has on victims. I welcome the opportunity to study the bill.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, before I begin my speech, I want to commend the hon. parliamentary secretary for giving so much of his speech in French. That takes effort and the results speak for themselves. I want to congratulate him on that.

This bill “amends the Criminal Code to specify what constitutes exploitation for the purpose of establishing whether a person has committed the offence of trafficking in persons.” As my hon. colleague from Saint-Jean said a few sitting days ago, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill.

It is imperative that we discuss all of the tools that could help authorities combat this scourge, which is getting worse with population movement and the growing number of refugees. This bill also responds to the demands of several human trafficking survivors' groups and would make the definitions of exploitation and human trafficking more consistent with those set out in the Palermo protocol, which Canada signed at the beginning of the millennium.

The bill is very simple but very important. It removes a phrase from the Criminal Code so that an accusation under these provisions must be based on the fact that the victim believes that a refusal on their part would threaten their safety or the safety of someone known to them.

According to the International Justice and Human Rights Clinic at the faculty of law at the University of British Columbia, asking victims to demonstrate that they have reasonable grounds to fear for their safety may be an obstacle to obtaining convictions for human trafficking.

Private Members' Business

Elements of the offence of human trafficking are more difficult to prove than those of other similar offences. For example, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which prohibits human trafficking, does not require the person involved to prove that they fear for their safety. This standard is no longer appropriate.

Let us look at the chronology of legislation against human trafficking. In 2002, Canada ratified the Palermo protocol, a “protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime”.

Article 3 clearly defines trafficking in persons as follows:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs

That is the definition.

That is how human trafficking came to be added to the Criminal Code in 2005. The Canadian definition, however, is different from the Palermo Protocol definition in that the issue of consent or the victim's sense of safety is taken into consideration. Thus, the victim must prove that they were in danger if they refused to be exploited.

In human trafficking cases, regardless of whether the victims were initially willing or felt safe, victims should never have to justify the circumstances under which they were lured into the situation in order to prove they were trafficked. Human trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation, as we have already heard. Traffickers exploit their victims in many ways, including for forced labour. It is important to remember, for example, that even if victims did consent to come to Canada, they did not consent to the forced labour or sexual exploitation to which they may have been subjected afterwards, especially if they end up being dependent on someone because of isolation, lack of resources or language barriers.

Section 118 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, passed in 2002, makes it a criminal offence to “organize the coming into Canada of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception or use or threat of force or coercion”. Although human trafficking and human smuggling are two different concepts, the act also prohibits human smuggling into Canada.

• (1345)

In 2005, Bill C-49 added three offences related to human trafficking to the Criminal Code, as well as a definition. The offences include trafficking in persons; receiving a financial or other material benefit from the commission or facilitation of trafficking in persons; withholding or destroying a person's identity documents, such as a passport, whether authentic or not, for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking in persons; and exploiting another person in the context of trafficking in persons offences.

In 2008-09, the first case involving a charge of human trafficking under the new law was ruled on in adult criminal court.

In fall 2008, a 20-year-old woman went to Peel Regional Police to report that a 22-year-old Ontario man named Vytautas Vilitis was using intimidation and threats to sexually exploit her. She said that she made \$10,000 for him in just a few weeks through online Craigslist classified ads. She added that he took her phone calls, set up her “dates” and kept track of her appointments, so he knew how much money she owed him each morning. It was not until he threatened her for not leaving all the cash out for him one morning that she reported him to police. Vytautas Vilitis pleaded guilty in April 2009 to charges of human trafficking and receiving a material benefit from human trafficking.

He was convicted under both provisions and was the first person in Canada to be convicted for benefiting from human trafficking. In 2010, another section was added to the Criminal Code, setting out a mandatory minimum sentence for persons charged with trafficking of persons under 18. That was Bill C-268.

In 2012, the Criminal Code was amended to allow the prosecution of Canadians and permanent residents for the offence of trafficking in persons committed outside Canada, and added factors that judges may consider when determining whether exploitation occurred. That was Bill C-310.

In 2015, mandatory minimum sentences were imposed for the main trafficking in persons offence, receiving a material benefit from the proceeds of child trafficking, and withholding or destroying documents to facilitate child trafficking. Bill C-452 was put forward by my political party.

In 2019, the Hon. Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, released the national strategy to combat human trafficking 2019-24. With \$75 million in funding over 6 years, this strategy followed the Palermo protocol. The national strategy to combat human trafficking 2019-24 was adapted from the previous five-year plan.

It was adapted due to some deficiencies identified during policy assessment, namely that most of the resources were being allocated to the fight against sexual exploitation whereas forced labour is a growing issue. This is nothing new, but it is being increasingly recognized and discussed.

Bill S-224 is part of a long legislative quest to combat human trafficking, which is extremely important. In closing, I would like to paraphrase author Ralph Champavert and say that the stigma of human trafficking will disappear when the sun of human dignity rises in all hearts.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this private member's bill because I think there is no one in this chamber who would disagree with the concern that trafficking in persons is a serious problem in Canada. New Democrats will be supporting this bill and sending it to committee for further study, but we have some cautions here in this debate.

The first of those, of course, is that quite often one says trafficking in people, presumably they are talking about trafficking for sexual purposes. That is a serious problem that we need to address but trafficking also has many other forms in Canada. The one that tends to get neglected the most is forced labour. We have people who were brought here from outside of the country who are forced to work in terrible conditions at less than minimum wage and are deprived of their opportunities to pursue other ways to make a living or to get their rights recognized in Canada. When we are talking about this bill which intends to amend the definition of trafficking, we have to make sure at committee that whatever definition we ultimately adopt covers the full range of those nefarious practices of trafficking from sex trafficking to forced labour and everything in between.

My second caution is that if we are, as this bill proposes, changing the very definition of trafficking, we have to be very careful not to have unintended consequences from making a change in the definition. Here I am reflecting the views of the Canadian alliance for sex workers, who are very concerned that changing this definition will have unintended consequences on sex workers, which will make their working conditions more difficult and less safe.

At committee we are going to need to hear from those who are most impacted by this possible change to the Criminal Code. That will include sex workers. We will also need to hear from advocates for those who have been subjected to forced labour. The committee is going to need to take its time in making sure we can get those witnesses who have real life experience of trafficking to bring to the committee, to make sure we do not inadvertently, by changing the definition, exclude people from the definition who should be covered or cast the net too widely and include too many people in that definition of trafficking.

I have said this before on this bill, and I will say it again, that we know what actually works in combatting trafficking. That is additional enforcement resources. Many police forces simply do not have the resources available to devote to trafficking cases that they would like to have and that they need. Many municipal forces have established special units to deal with trafficking. Those provinces that have provincial police forces have done so, but quite often they lack adequate resources. We need to pay attention in talking about a narrow definitional change in the Criminal Code, to this question of the resources for enforcement, because we know that is very effective.

The second thing that is very effective in combatting trafficking is providing resources at the community level so that those who have been trafficked or are being trafficked can escape from the trafficking and providing safe passage for them out of those situations. Again, that is largely a question of resources for those com-

munity-based organizations that provide those services and those exit ramps for those who are actually being trafficked.

I do believe it is a complex situation that is being addressed by a very simple bill, so it is going to behoove the justice committee to take a lot of time to make sure, as I said, that we actually cover the full scope of trafficking in Canada and that we do not inadvertently include people who have not been trafficked in that definition, and that we hear from those who will be most affected by those changes at committee.

With that I will conclude my remarks for today. We will be supporting sending this bill to committee.

• (1350)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am excited to add my voice to this debate on Bill S-224 as well, and I want to acknowledge the hard work of the sponsor of this bill, Senator Ataullahjan, who worked hard to steer it through the Senate, and the MP for Oshawa, who has been working hard with stakeholders and survivors to advance this bill, since 2019 actually. Both of these members are members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, an organization of which I am one of the co-chairs. I want to thank all of the folks who are members of that organization for their help as well.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery that turns people into objects to be used and exploited. It is vicious, it is profitable and it is growing here and around the world. I often say that human trafficking is happening within 10 blocks or 10 minutes of where one lives. Even in my large rural riding in northern Alberta, we have had human trafficking cases as well. We know that the vast majority of human trafficking victims in Canada are female, young and indigenous. The reality is that anybody can become a human trafficking victim, so this is a critical issue.

There are many survivors, frontline organizations and law enforcement people working to bring justice for victims and stop human traffickers, but our human trafficking offences are not accomplishing what we want them to do. Here in Canada, we are not fully aligned with the Palermo protocol that Canada signed over 20 years ago. Specifically, within the human trafficking offences in section 279 of the Criminal Code, there is a definition of exploitation that states:

a person exploits another person if they cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide... the labour or service.

The problem with this definition is that it places the burden of the offence in the mindset of the victim rather than in the actions of the trafficker, as the Palermo protocol calls for. The actions that traffickers use are threat of the use of force or coercion or threats to other people. They use fraud or deception or the abuse of power or the abuse of vulnerability to enslave another person.

UBC law professor Janine Benedet testified at the committee and said that the challenge with the existing definition of the Criminal Code is that:

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we've adopted a definition that is much narrower and much harder to prove than the definition of trafficking that you will find in the Palermo protocol.

The definition of exploitation in Canada requires a proven threat to safety, and does not extend to keeping someone in prostitution through the exploitation of a condition of vulnerability, which is part of the Palermo definition.

...police and prosecutors are shifting trafficking cases over to these other offences, because it's so difficult to actually prove the very narrow and strict definition of trafficking [that is in our law].

As I have stated before, the burden of proof should never be on the mindset of victims, many of whom are not even initially aware that they are being trafficked. Police officers have told me over and over how they have met victims whom they know are being trafficked, but because the victims do not live in fear of their traffickers, the officers' options are very limited. I have met with survivors, NGOs and law enforcement across Canada, and the one issue that comes up at every meeting is that we need to be in full alignment with the Palermo protocol. This bill is critical to Canada's efforts to target and apprehend pimps and traffickers.

To emphasize the difficulty in securing convictions over existing trafficking offences, I want to share the conviction statistics from Stats Canada, which notes, "Less than half of detected incidents of human trafficking result in the laying or recommendation of charges." For a 10-year period, between 2011 and 2021, the majority, 81%, of completed adult criminal court cases involving at least one human trafficking charge were stayed, withdrawn, dismissed or discharged. During the same time, only 12% of these cases resulted in a guilty decision. Putting it another way, only one in eight completed human trafficking cases resulted in a guilty decision.

Finally, every human trafficking case is half as likely to result in a finding of guilt as a case involving sexual offence or a violent crime. This is tragic. Canada is failing the victims of human trafficking and our law enforcement officers, who work so hard to investigate and apprehend these traffickers. This is not a new problem. Survivors and NGOs have been speaking out about this for years.

• (1355)

Back in 2014, a report entitled "Ending Sex-Trafficking In Canada" from the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada recommended our alignment with the Palermo protocol, and every year, the U.S. trafficking in persons report, on its file in Canada, urges Canada to amend its Criminal Code to include a definition of trafficking as exploitation as an essential element of the crime consistent with international law.

The Conservative Party of Canada has had this in our platform since 2019, and a few years ago, the Alberta government launched a nine-point action plan to combat human trafficking. The implementation of that was spearheaded by my friend Paul Brandt, who chaired the Alberta Human Trafficking Task Force. He has done an incredible job. The first priority of the action was to adopt the Palermo protocol definition of trafficking.

Canada needs to do much better in its fight against human trafficking, and the bill is an important start. The tragic reality of human trafficking is that it has not been a priority for this government. For example, bills such as Bill S-224 and Bill S-211 are the result of individual MPs and senators who worked hard to address the gaps experienced by survivors and stakeholders.

A lot of work has been done to support this and has been driven by the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery since we launched in 2018. Our goal is to ensure that Canada is free from all human trafficking and to increase awareness around that. We have four co-chairs, one from each official party, and we recognize the immense value of working across political lines to combat human trafficking. That is why, three years ago, we were able to get the House of Commons to finally recognize February 22 as Human Trafficking Awareness Day.

However, when we look at the legislation that the government has introduced over the past eight years regarding human trafficking, it is taking Canada in the wrong direction. Government legislation has blocked consecutive sentencing for traffickers after it has been adopted by Parliament. It reduced some of the human trafficking offences to hybrid offences, meaning that traffickers get away with as little as a fine. More recently, the Liberals have extended house arrest to some human trafficking offences. Who benefits from all of these changes? It is pimps and traffickers. I would also note that the government allowed the national action plan to combat human trafficking to expire in 2016 and refused to bring forward anything for almost four years until weeks before the 2019 election.

The Liberals' 2019 national strategy to combat human trafficking says a lot of good things, but it is just that: It says a lot of good things. Unlike the Conservative Party national action plan, the strategy has no targets and no measurables. That is why, four years after it being announced, the survivor-led advisory committee on human trafficking has still not been set up. The voices and lived experiences of victims and survivors are essential for this success. I am hoping that we can get that set up soon. Canada must have a zero-tolerance approach to human trafficking that centres on the voices of survivors.

While we often talk about sex trafficking in Canada, we know that forced labour is also very tragic and happens here in Canada. Victims of forced labour can be found in restaurants, the agricultural industry, the mining sector, live-in caregiving situations and manufacturing. Just two weeks ago, the York Regional Police announced that 64 men and women from Mexico were trafficked to work in Ontario. I want to thank the police for their hard work on these things and the officers who apprehended these traffickers and rescued these victims.

Around the world, now more than ever, there are more than 50 million people in some form of slavery, which is up from 40 million pre-COVID. It is more than the population of our country, and more than ever in human history. Worldwide, slavery is a multi-billion dollar industry that generates more than \$150 billion annually. This is why I am so pleased to support the bill before us today so we can end human trafficking here and around the world.

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Oshawa has five minutes for his right of reply.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, as my colleague said, many people have been working on this for a long time. He mentioned 2019, but it has been going on a lot longer than that.

I want to take this opportunity to thank certain key people: Senator Ataullahjan, who brought this forward in the Senate; Senator Boisvenu for his advocacy; and colleagues here in the House, who took time this afternoon to speak to this bill, especially my colleague from Peace River—Westlock and the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

I want to thank key staff members, Rhonda Kirkland from my office and Joel Oosterman, as well as many stakeholders, including Holly Wood from BRAVE, the Durham Regional Police and all the victims, victims' groups, moms and dads, survivors and workers. Of course, I also want to thank my constituent, Darla; through her courage, her story of human trafficking across the Canada-U.S. border became one of the great motivations for this bill. Instead of allowing the experience to define her, Darla brought it to the attention of her community leaders.

This bill, although a small step, is a step in the right direction. We need to move towards modernization and change. Instead of seeing a decrease in human trafficking, this modern-day slavery, we are indeed seeing this practice expand. Things are getting worse. We are hearing more and more about human trafficking. Police data indicated that human trafficking increased elevenfold between 2010 and 2016. This is why the bill needs to pass as soon as possible.

The bill's purpose is to align Canada's Criminal Code with that of the 2000 Palermo Protocol. It removes the unfair burden placed on exploited individuals, who must prove under current Canadian law that there is an element of fear in their abuse in order to obtain a conviction in court.

Again, let us pause on this very point. There is no debate about it: A horrible crime of human trafficking has occurred. However, under current Canadian law, the victim is required to prove fear in order for a conviction to occur. This is absurd and backwards. The

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victim should not be forced to prove their state of mind. For example, if there were absolute proof of a human trafficking crime, would the offender be convicted if fear could not be proven? That is absurd.

Everyone agrees that we should not treat human trafficking victims so differently. Things need to change, and time is passing. The Palermo Protocol was adopted over 20 years ago, and Canada signed it then. This bill makes a very small change, and I want to read it into the record:

For the purposes of sections 279.01 to 279.03, a person exploits another person if they engage in conduct that

(a) causes the other person to provide or offer to provide labour or a service; and

(b) involves, in relation to any person, the use or threatened use of force or another form of coercion, the use of deception or fraud, the abuse of a position of trust, power or authority, or any other similar act.

This is a very short amendment.

It has been over 20 years. Let us make the commitment today to pass the bill, which I think every member could get behind. The statistics are ominous. Human trafficking generates \$32 billion annually, with over 40 million victims every year. Fewer than 8% of perpetrators charged with human trafficking have ever been prosecuted. Few perpetrators are even charged with the crime.

Human trafficking is happening today within 10 blocks or 10 minutes of our home, as my colleague just said. Traffickers search out young people who are homeless, addicted or traumatized: our most vulnerable.

This is the story of so many victims and survivors. I am standing here today for Darla and all the vulnerable individuals who are facing or have faced the crime of human trafficking. I am so proud and optimistic, listening to the speeches of my colleagues here in the House; it appears that the bill will get its day in committee. We are open to hearing from experts to see if we can make the best bill possible.

Everybody is in agreement that we have to abolish modern-day slavery. We need to urgently address the accelerating increase of human trafficking in our communities. I look forward to moving the bill to committee and fulfilling a promise of 23 years, a promise to victims and survivors, and a promise to Darla.

• (1405)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion.

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[*Translation*]

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.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the division stands de-

ferred until Wednesday, March 22, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*Translation*]

It being 2:09 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 20 at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

I wish everyone a good week in their ridings.

(The House adjourned at 2:09 p.m.)

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