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Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 40(1) of the Access to Information Act, the Information Commissioner's report for the fiscal year ended March 21, 2023.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled "Grocery Affordability: Examining Rising Food Costs in Canada".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Let me recognize the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. He brought the motion to the committee, and we unanimously agreed to move forward. It was a great illustration of cross-partisan support. I would like to recognize him here in the House. I

like having him sit on this side; maybe we should get him over here.

While I have the opportunity, I want to note Nick Taylor, who won the Canadian Open in golf since 1954. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate him here in this place.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table the supplementary opinion of the Conservative Party of Canada for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food's report on food price inflation.

While we appreciate the work done by the committee and the study for this report, we believe more information must be made available to Canadians in terms of the Liberal government's policies and its contribution to food inflation in Canada. It was made abundantly clear throughout that the Liberal members of the committee purposely avoided discussion or inclusion of politically inconvenient facts and recommendations related to the carbon tax, out-of-control spending and inflationary deficits, which drive up the cost of goods we buy, including essentials like food and fuel.

We understand that food loss and waste come at an enormous economic cost to businesses, society and the environment. The Conservatives recommend that the Government of Canada remove the carbon tax; complete a comprehensive study on the economic impact of the carbon tax and clean fuel regulations; study how increases affect the cost of food production, the price of food and the entire food supply chain; and immediately reverse its policy on front-of-package labelling.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, two reports from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as the mighty OGGO.

I table the seventh report, in relation to Bill C-290, an act to amend the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. The committee has studied the bill and, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(1), requests a 30-day extension to consider it.

I also table the eighth report, in relation to the motion adopted on Wednesday, May 17, 2023, regarding the consideration of Bill C-290, an act to amend the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred.

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 14, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

LIAISON

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 107(3), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Liaison Committee, entitled “Committee Activities and Expenditures: April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023”. This report highlights the work and accomplishments of each committee, as well as detailing the budgets that fund the activities approved by the committee.

It is a very thorough document outlining the work of the House and its committees for the last year. It is a very important document that I would encourage all members of the House to look at.

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• (1005)

CANADA PHARMACARE ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-340, An Act to enact the Canada Pharmacare Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce the Canada pharmacare act, with thanks to the member for Burnaby South for seconding this legislation. He follows in a long line of great NDP leaders, from Tommy Douglas on, who have built and are building our great public health care system.

No one should have to face the impossible choice of paying rent or filling a prescription, yet every year millions of Canadians go without their prescription medications because they cannot afford them. This legislation would establish a framework for universal, comprehensive and public pharmacare across Canada.

It is modelled on the Canada Health Act and based on the recommendations of the Hoskins advisory council. Like the Canada Health Act, the Canada pharmacare act specifies the conditions and criteria for provincial and territorial prescription drug programs to receive federal funding. This includes the core principles of public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability and accessibility.

After decades of delay, Canadians cannot afford to wait any longer. It is time to add medicine to medicare. I call on all parliamentarians to support this long overdue initiative.

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

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[Translation]

INQUIRIES ACT

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-341, An Act to Amend the Inquiries Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is bigger than those in the spotlight at the moment. Current events are a good example of how frequently democratic institutions have come under attack during this Parliament and since the Liberal regime came to power.

One of the most important elements of democracy is, of course, accountability. When accountability is lacking, there are statutory tools that task people with setting up commissions of inquiry. This latest situation is an extreme example, of course, and it could benefit from this act, but beyond that, institutions must be strengthened.

Accordingly, the purpose of this bill is to ensure that, from now on, when a commission of inquiry is set up under the Inquiries Act, Parliament will determine who the commissioners of such an inquiry will be. I think getting this process under way now is essential, not only so it can help with the current conversation about a commission of inquiry into Chinese interference, but also so it can benefit democracy in the long term.

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

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[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, presented to the House on Wednesday, October 19, 2022, be concurred in.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

We have a housing crisis in this country. To restore affordability, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has reported that we need 5.8 million homes by 2030. That works out to 760,000 new homes per year until 2030 for us to restore affordability. The best we have ever done in Canada is to build about 260,000 units of housing a year.

We are now faced with this massive undertaking and all the challenges that go with it to get these units built, whether it is the labour shortage, the skilled trades shortage or, of course, dealing with all the different levels of government involved in the housing space. Municipalities are on the front lines of the housing crisis, and the provinces are very much on the front lines as well.

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As for the federal government, some years ago, the Prime Minister, with great fanfare, launched this national housing strategy, describing it as a transformational housing plan and saying the federal government was back in the housing business. All we can see today is that rents have doubled, home prices have doubled and mortgage rates are skyrocketing. People's variable rate mortgages, and I happen to be one of them, have skyrocketed in a year. There are an awful lot of Canadians who do not have a variable rate mortgage who will be going to the bank maybe this summer or fall, and they are going to find out they cannot afford their house anymore. That is all in the midst of a housing crisis where we need to build 760,000 units a year to restore affordability.

We have a government that is long on talking points and long on photo ops but very short on delivery. We do not see a lot of ribbon cutting for new housing. Frankly, we do not need to see any ribbon cutting to know that the situation is only getting worse. Members could ask a student in Toronto if they can find a place to live. Covenant House Toronto reports that a huge number of people living there are students at local universities and colleges. That is completely insane in a country like Canada.

We have heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about young people being stuck in their parents' basements because they cannot find a place to live. They have done everything right, they have a good job and they cannot find a place to rent or maybe even buy one day. We need literally all levels of government working together to solve this crisis, and we need to hold those on the front lines accountable for what they are or, in most cases, are not doing to make housing more affordable.

We have heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about holding municipalities to account. He talks about firing the gatekeepers. He is absolutely correct. As a former mayor, and before that the chair of the planning committee in Muskoka, I am quite used to dealing with vested interests on expensive waterfront properties, but also vested interests in the urban towns of Muskoka. Pushing for higher density in some of these smaller communities is not always easy. I talk a lot about the challenges we see in larger centres, but they also happen across the smaller communities in this country.

As mayor and as chair of planning, I always fought the good fight and made sure that we had more density and more homes built. The Leader of the Opposition, and hopefully the soon-to-be prime minister, will challenge all municipalities and all cities in this country to make decisions to increase density, particularly when the federal government is on board and assisting larger centres with massive investments in transit infrastructure, for example. It is insane to me that the federal government is happy to support municipalities with transit infrastructure, with dollars for new SkyTrain stations and new subway stations, but it does not require the land around those stations, the land around the multi-billion dollars transit infrastructure, to be pre-emptively rezoned for high-density residential housing.

This makes sense. It makes sense for the public investment of federal dollars. It makes sense for the public investment of municipal dollars as well. It is a green way to live, as higher density is better for the planet. Frankly, it is better for the municipalities as well.

● (1010)

A lot of people do not realize that single-family detached residential homes do not actually pay enough tax to cover the cost of the services the families who live in those homes demand. Municipalities need higher density residential housing. It makes more sense fiscally. It is more sustainable. As the Conservative Party, we are calling on municipalities to get on board and for everybody get on the same page to work together to increase the density of our urban centres for the sake of the planet and for the sake of young people who are desperate to get started in their lives and maybe start a family one day.

The housing spectrum is a continuum, and people move through that continuum as their needs change and adjust. Right now, the biggest gap or the biggest blockage in that continuum of housing is purpose-built rentals. We know that purpose-built rentals have not been constructed in a meaningful way since the late seventies. That is because the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau had an ideological problem with the tax treatment for the construction of rental units, as it thought it was making landlords rich. As a result of that change in policy, purpose-built rentals stopped getting built. Members will notice, if they go around any of the larger centres such as Toronto or Vancouver, or even smaller cities such as Winnipeg and Halifax, those purpose-built rentals are starting to get pretty old. We need some major investment in those rentals because they are all over 50 years old now, and they are getting pretty tired.

Therefore, along comes the condo construction business because the developer does not have to carry the capital costs of a rental building, so condo owners start buying up condos and they start renting those out. CMHC changed the rules so people can put 5% down, not just on their first home but maybe on their second and third as well. In many ways, we should be really grateful, frankly, that this happened because the vast majority of landlords in this country now are families who maybe bought a second property and tried to fill a gap. However, it is not enough. We need more purpose-built rentals in this country, and we need a federal government that is working with provincial governments and municipalities to make sure that the private sector is incentivized to build specifically what we need.

● (1015)

With trillions of dollars of investment required in the housing space in this country, there is no way government can do it all on its own. Every nickel of government spending at this level should be focused on those most vulnerable in our society, and we should get the private sector on board to build everything else. The biggest gap is purpose-built rentals, so a federal government working with provincial governments and municipal governments could work with the private sector stakeholders to direct them to build those purpose-built rentals.

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Freeing up space in rentals would free up movement within the housing continuum to bring the market back into equilibrium. People could then move through. Adult children would not have to live in their parents' basement anymore. They could go through this transition more naturally into a rental property and then maybe buy their first home. Then folks who are aging and do not really want to stay in their big house anymore, as they need something smaller, would have something they could move to as well. The flow of people moving through housing in this country can happen again.

However, it is not going to happen without federal leadership, which we are not seeing from the current federal government. We have a Minister of Housing who does not really believe that the situation is a crisis, and we have a Prime Minister who loves photo ops, announcements and speaking points, but none of them really seem to know how to get the job done.

That is why Conservatives are focused very much not only on talking points, but also on real results, and on making sure that municipalities are working in lockstep with the provinces and the federal government to ensure that we close the gap with purpose-built rentals and make housing more affordable again. Once we fix housing in this country, we can literally fix everything. The absolute foundation of our society and our economy is housing, and we are failing right now. I am sorry, but the federal government is failing right now.

Therefore, as Conservatives, we have proposed some very common-sense ideas. It is common sense for the common people to hold other levels of government to account to make sure that every nickel of public investment is creating results, not just photo opportunities.

• (1020)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, housing affordability is a major problem in Canada. In my riding of Nepean, we have 98 affordable housing units built by the Multifamily Housing Initiative. We have another 47 units being built at the Christ Church in its Bells Corners location. We have Ottawa Community Housing, which will start building new units of affordable housing.

Canada has grown in population. In 1980, it was around 24.5 million. In 2023, it is 38.8 million. However, the housing starts in 1980 were just 130,000, and in 2020 it was just 213,000. In fact, the ratio of housing starts to population growth has reduced from 0.55 in 1980 to 0.3 in 2023. The supply, in my view, is the major problem, and the biggest problem for the housing start supply is the regulations at the city and municipal levels.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague for his comments on that.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is quite correct. A big part of the problem is municipal regulation, and frankly, it is not so much even the regulations.

When I was mayor, we made the rules a little tougher to develop in Muskoka and Huntsville particularly, and the development community was okay with that because, at the same time that we made the rules a little more restrictive, we also made them clear. We made the guidelines very clear, and then we applied them evenly. There is no shortage of examples of a municipal councillor getting a little scared because their neighbours showed up and were upset,

so the councillor gets worried they might not win the next election, but I made it very clear to those councillors that we could not change the policies on the backs of an application, and that is because investment likes stability.

As such, we applied the rules evenly, and then we made decisions. What is really wrong at the municipal level is that local politicians are afraid they might not get re-elected, and they delay and delay. It is criminal that someone can come in and ask for a rezoning application to rezone a piece of land to what is on either side of the property, and it can take three years. That is wrong, and it is making housing too expensive.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, with whom I sit on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, for moving concurrence in this report.

At committee, we produced a few reports on housing. One is recent and could be submitted to the House. It deals with the financialization of housing. I would like to have my colleague's opinion. I think there is a lot of emphasis in that report on the fact that it is important that the national housing strategy make every effort to support affordable housing. There is a housing crisis and it must be feasible to provide support.

Does my colleague agree that the measures and programs under the national housing strategy need to be strengthened in order to prioritize the idea of affordable housing?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, yes, I would agree with my hon colleague's comments that the national housing strategy needs to be strengthened, but the problem with the national housing strategy is that it is not really national. It is the Liberal plan. We need to be working with all levels of government to make sure we are all on the same page of the hymn book, and we are not right now. Efforts by the federal level can be easily wasted because a municipality just delays too much. We all need to be working from the same page.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is a housing crisis from coast to coast to coast. In my own riding, Vancouver East, we had one of the largest homeless encampments, and when the encampment came about, there was neither a plan nor housing available to put people in. Consequently we were just moving people from one homeless space to another homeless space, which does not solve the problem.

Part of the issue of the unaffordability of housing is the fact that people are treating housing as a commodity. They use it as an investment tool instead of recognizing that it is a basic human right. Would the member support the call for what the housing advocate is recommending to the government, which is to treat housing as a basic human right and not a commodity?

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• (1025)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. Her record on the housing file is well known. However, where I fundamentally disagree with her is on the fact that, when the federal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau got out of incentivizing the construction of purpose-built rentals, which I spoke about earlier, the private sector picked up the slack. Mom and Pop bought a second place, maybe because they had a little money to invest, so they did.

If that is the financialization of housing, then yes, I guess it is, but without them doing that, there would be no rentals at all. Therefore, we need a federal government that is focused on what needs to be done on so that we can get more rentals built, period.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for those who are watching this morning, we are seized with in Parliament the recommendations of a report that relate to building housing.

My colleague for Parry Sound—Muskoka just outlined some of how we could potentially build more housing in Canada. What I would like to do this morning is hopefully, for everybody who is here, outline why, with stories from my community and a personal story

If members look at CBC News this week, there is a story, which was posted on June 8, entitled “‘Kind of dehumanizing’: What it’s like trying to find a decent place to rent in Calgary these days”. In January of this year, Calgary saw rents increase by 22%, which was the largest increase in the country. Now, if we look at my riding, there is virtually nothing to rent that is under \$2,000, unless one is looking to rent a room.

We can think about somebody, such as a single person, who is trying to find a room, but they cannot find it and then their rent is increased by 22%. It is pretty crazy. It is dehumanizing. When people talk about crime and that we need to address it, or that we need to address addiction, if we are not affording people the dignity of a safe place to live that they can afford, we are never going to address those problems.

I want to speak today to my colleagues in the government to implore them that they have to use their jurisdictional power to lean on municipalities to make right and just decisions for building housing. I also want to implore to my colleagues in my own city that they also have a responsibility to look beyond pandering for NIMBY votes to do the right thing to change policies so we can build housing.

I will start with a personal story. When I went through a divorce about a decade ago, so this was when rent was still reasonable in Canada, I had a hard time finding a place to live. I was going through an extremely emotional time. It was really hard, and I had to figure out how I was going to pay the bills. Right now, in every part of our country, there are women like me who are making choices of whether or not to stay in a relationships based on whether or not they can find a place to live. That is the reality of this situation. There are also people with families who are trying to figure out how they can come together in a very small living space because they cannot afford to live separately, and in those situations, nobody wants to rent to them.

When we are talking about homelessness today, I think all of us have this sort of Hollywood notion of what homelessness means. However, we are now living in a country where homelessness is pervasive. It is across every demographic and every gender, and it is in every one of our backyards. When I hear colleagues or supporters say things like “Well, we just need to look at brownfield development”, I wonder if they are kidding. These are our neighbours. These are our fellow humans. There is also who say, “I think those townhomes would change the character of my community”. I live in a multi-family unit in Calgary, and I rent. I live surrounded by people from new Canadian communities, families from all different walks of life, and I live safely and happily. Do members know why? It is because we all have a place to live and a roof over our heads.

Will housing change the character of a neighbourhood? Members can bet it will. It would make it more just, more equitable and give people a sustainable future. When I hear from municipalities, as my colleague for Parry Sound—Muskoka talked about, “Well, we need to consult for another three years on whether or not we could have an extra parking space here and there”, I think it is fundamentally the wrong approach. It is an inhumane approach that does not recognize the national crisis we are in and the hopelessness that our shared constituents feel. Again, it is reaching out to people. It is pandering for votes from people who only had the privilege of getting into the housing market at a time when housing was affordable, and that is rapidly changing.

• (1030)

In Alberta, we do not have rent control. What that means is that people may be renting from people who have bought an investment property on spec, on a variable rate mortgage, and cannot afford to pay that mortgage with the rent they were charging. That is why we are seeing 23%, 24%, or 30% increases. Do members know what it means to have a 30% increase in someone's rent in a year? It means they are homeless; that is what it means.

I am sorry, but at this point, when we cannot house our families, an esoteric debate about parking is ridiculous. I am saying this as a Conservative. Everybody needs to wake up. The federal government has its onus of responsibility to ensure that it is not funding the bad behaviour of municipalities that cannot figure this out, because when the federal government does that, it is actually incentivizing and empowering NIMBYs. I know that, for people in communities who have lived there for a long time, change is something that we have to bring them along with. I get that, but that is what we should be doing. We should be making the case that, if people are concerned about a stabbing that happened on the LRT yesterday or an increase in addiction, we have to find people places to live. How we change the character of our communities for the better and stop them from descending into crime, poverty and hopelessness is by building more houses, period.

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I know, and I believe firmly in my heart, the compassion and caring of the people in my community who, even though they may have concerns about building townhomes, will come along when leaders stand up and ask them to please come along with us because there is so much at stake for us not to do that. However, leaders have to stand up and do that first. I am standing up here and I am proudly saying we need to build more houses. We need to look at every idea.

We have to work across different levels of government, but it has to start with the federal government's acknowledging that what it is doing is not good enough. When I see the Minister of Housing stand up in the House of Commons and I hear him use rote talking points, I see his colleagues cringe behind him. It is an acknowledgement that the course the government is on is not fast enough. It is not good enough and it is not leveraging that pressure and that incentive on municipalities. NIMBY cannot be how we build houses. NIMBY cannot be our housing policy anymore. That is what our party has been saying. This is at crisis-level proportions. Everybody in every place in the House has a story like the one I just read. This is not just one part of our country; it is every part of our country.

I just want to emphasize the anxiety that people are feeling right now because they do not know whether their landlord is going to sell their townhome. That is the other thing; in a rent control situation where mortgage rates are super high but the housing prices are staying high and there is no more stock coming in, people are going to sell. The level of affordable housing stock is going to continue to decrease. Come on; we have to get our act together. This report has some recommendations, but it does not get to the heart of the matter, which is that, as leaders, we all need to wake up to the anxiety, the panic that people are feeling about where they are going to put their families. How can somebody go to work, go to school or do anything productive without a place to live? That is what we are dealing with here.

From the bottom of my heart, I implore my colleagues in the federal government to talk to the Minister of Housing, to say, "Hey, bud, the talking point binder? Scrap it. My community, we have got to do better." When we stand up in the House of Commons and say we are investing, if investing means that the housing stock is not getting to where it needs to be, then things have got to change. That is what we are arguing for here this morning.

This is too important for us to screw up. We have to understand and be compassionate toward people who are making life decisions not out of want or desire but because they have to, because they do not have a place to live. That has got to change. I hope we can all work together in this place and do something that actually reduces this anxiety because the rent is too high.

• (1035)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's speech was very personal and compelling. I cannot imagine there is a member of the House who does not feel the same way about this being a crisis and about the need to work on it. This applies to constituents in my area as well.

However, attacking municipalities and saying it is all their fault is not the correct way to go either, in my opinion. We do, for the first time, have a national housing strategy. Part of that is a housing accelerator fund and a rapid housing initiative, working in concert with the municipalities. Often I hear across the way, and from many people, that this is about jurisdiction. Certainly in Alberta and Quebec, we are not to interfere with anything the provinces have jurisdiction over.

I noted in your speech that you talked about your concern that Alberta does not have rent control. Are you advocating for the federal government to get involved in provincial jurisdiction in Alberta, for example, to ensure that there is rent control for people like yourself and others who are facing rental property rent increases?

The Deputy Speaker: I remind members to run their questions through the Chair. Even though I would love to answer some of those questions, I cannot, so I will let the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill answer.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right; it is not all the municipalities' fault. It is her government's fault. It has had eight years and has spent hundreds of billions of dollars, and all it has to show for it are anxiety and panic among people who cannot afford rent. It is not just because of the lack of affordable housing, and that is a big part of it, but it is also because deficit inflationary spending has increased interest rates so much that people are selling off affordable housing stock because they cannot afford to pay the interest rates on their mortgages. This never used to be a problem under a lack of rent control.

My colleague opposite stands there and is not being introspective. Yes, there is a fault of municipalities. I am going to be the first one to say it, and I dare her to have the courage to say the same thing. There are people on my city council who share my political persuasion and who need to hear this message, and I am going to stand up and say it. I have not heard a single Liberal do the same thing, and that is the problem here. The federal government is rewarding municipalities that are not building houses fast enough and are not changing regulations fast enough.

Problem one and problem two are that Liberals have created this economic condition by spending out of control. People's lives are worse and interest rates have gone through the roof. Any backbencher in the Liberal Party who does not look at themselves and look at their cabinet has a big problem and is part of the problem too.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this debate is timely. Just this morning, at 9:45 a.m., I received a communiqué from the Abitibi—Témiscamingue CEGEP.

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It states that, in the midst of a housing crisis, applications for residence at the CEGEP have never been as high. The college is therefore calling on everyone to find additional apartments or rooms to rent to put a roof over the heads of the future Abitibi—Témiscamingue workforce. It also states that, as part of a short-term approach, several options have been proposed by the organization, including an internal call to members.

We have reached that point. This has major repercussions on the development of all our communities, particularly when it affects the education of youth and access to housing. I would like to know what recommendations my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill is personally making and what recommendations are made in this report to ensure we can finally get our heads above water and make housing more accessible.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, my colleague just described a situation that is endemic across the country. The housing crisis is affecting everyone. There have also been many stories in the news of universities and colleges across the country where students cannot go anymore because they cannot find a place to rent. There were stories in the news about the deplorable living conditions students were facing. This week, there were stories as well about how new Canadians, people who have moved to Canada from other jurisdictions around the world, have said they cannot stay here because it costs too much live. We are literally turning people away who should be part of our workforce, and they are suffering indignities because they cannot afford to live.

My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka outlined recommendations. This is a systemic problem. It comes from the fact, within our scope here in the House of Commons, of a housing strategy led by a federal government that is not delivering. If it were delivering, we would not be having this debate. The proof is in the pudding here.

The government has to, for solution one, acknowledge that there is a problem and that what it is doing is not working. Number two is that we need to make sure government programs are not rewarding municipalities that are putting in place regulatory processes that preclude housing from being built at the rate it needs to be built. Number three is that we need to have compassion in this place and understand we all have a responsibility to push the federal government and hold the federal government to account on its lack of success, and ask it to do better. That includes the backbench in the Liberal Party.

• (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say it is a pleasure to be able to rise and speak today, but I was actually expecting that we would be debating Bill S-8. Bill S-8 deals with sanctions on foreign nationals.

A member from the Conservative Party yells, “Surprise.” It is no surprise. This does not surprise me. What it does is really, once again, just demonstrate the Conservative Party of Canada’s lack of respect in terms of what Canadians expect of legislators, which is to be able to deal with issues that are important.

Today, the Conservative Party says, “Well, housing is an important issue.” Yes, we concur. There is no doubt that housing is an important issue. In fact, we have been dealing with this issue for years now, unlike the Conservative Party. The reality is that this is just an attempt at a filibuster coming from the Conservative Party. It is interesting that Conservatives say housing is an important issue, yet they had 10 opposition days when they could have decided on the kind of vote or question. They could have had the “whereases” explaining the issues. Out of the last 10 opposition days, what did they choose? They chose to talk about the price on pollution, opposition day after opposition day. Now they try to say, “Well, know what? We are concerned about housing.” Where was that concern on opposition days? It did not exist. That was the reality for the Conservative Party, but today it says it does not want to address the government legislation, so what it will do is bring in yet another concurrence report and will say it is about housing. This way, government members and other opposition members will say that housing is an important issue and that we should be debating it today. I would argue that we could have been debating from an opposition perspective on many of the other opportunities by which the Conservatives could have brought it forward.

Let us talk about hypocrisy. I think most Canadians would be somewhat surprised that, during the 90s, we had the Charlottetown accord, and, within the Charlottetown accord, we had every political party in the House of Commons ultimately advocating that Ottawa should not be playing a role in housing, that it was provincial jurisdiction. I know that because I was in the north end of Winnipeg debating Bill Blaikie, advocating that we needed to have a presence in national housing. Only one political party has consistently, over the years, advocated that the federal government play virtually no role in housing, and that is the Conservative Party of Canada. That is the only party. Through the last eight years, as we have been bringing forward numerous housing policies, we have seen the Conservative Party continuously arguing or voting against them. Understanding jurisdictional responsibilities and understanding what role the federal government can actually play in housing is, I would suggest, relatively important. I have not witnessed that from the Conservative Party of Canada, and I do not say that lightly.

I was first elected in 1988. My first responsibility was as the official opposition whip, along with having housing as my critic portfolio. Even through those years, every year I invested a great deal of my energy into the issue of housing. I have seen the rises and the falls of the industry. I understand what it is that the federal government can and cannot do. I also see the lack of interest from the Conservative Party.

Now, Conservatives understand and they see the anxiety that is out there because of issues like interest, because of the demand there is for housing, and now they want to make it an issue and they want to blame everything on Ottawa, as if Ottawa were to blame for the housing crisis. I hate to think what issues and crises there would be if it were not for Canadians’ kicking Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada out in 2015.

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● (1045)

Let us take a look at some of the things we have done in the last five to seven years. In the history of Canada, never before have we seen more money invested into the housing file than by the current Prime Minister and government. We have adopted the first national housing strategy, which not only establishes a framework but also invests billions of dollars into housing. Every region of our country has benefited from it.

If we look at the province of Manitoba and the makeup of housing there, most people would be surprised. It has been a while, but I would guesstimate that we are probably talking somewhere in the neighbourhood of 20,000-plus units that the federal government directly subsidizes every month to ensure that housing is more affordable.

These are the types of commitments that have been made over the years, even by previous governments, to support non-profit housing. This is complemented by the national housing strategy, which is there to support not only expanding the housing stock in Canada, but also to improve its quality.

A good example is a program that I think we underestimate the true value of, which is the greener homes grant. There are homes that are in need of repair throughout our communities, whether urban or rural, in every area of the country. We have a program that provides encouragement for people to fix up their homes. Every time there is a grant issued, a home is being repaired, jobs are being created, the home is becoming more energy-efficient and the quality of Canada's housing stock is improving. This is something we should all be concerned about. At the very least, I can assure members that the government has demonstrated this by bringing forward the program.

There are other aspects. I love the program that deals with the multi-generational home renovation tax credit. I look at the community I represent and the number of families that choose to support their parents, grandparents or children with disabilities as dependents. They are not forced to do it. We are providing them the opportunity of a tax credit to create a special space to accommodate them. Again, this is something that complements the housing stock in Canada. We do not hear about it much, but I think it is important for us to emphasize it. I would suggest that it is part of the solution.

The Minister of Finance, who is working with the Minister of Housing, and is supported by members of this caucus, has recognized the true value of housing co-ops. Housing co-ops are a viable and healthy alternative to buying a home, because they are co-operatives.

● (1050)

I am a big fan of housing co-ops. During the eighties, I played a role in the community of Weston in developing the Weston housing co-op. There is a difference between someone who lives in a housing co-op and someone who lives in an apartment. The biggest difference would likely be the word "profit", but the real difference is that the person is not a tenant; they are a resident.

Once again, under the Prime Minister, we have a government that is committed to looking at ways we can expand housing co-ops. By doing that, we are expanding the housing supply. We can

encourage individuals and groups to look at ways in which housing co-ops can be established, so that individuals will be able to have that joint ownership. That is something we never heard about under Stephen Harper and the Conservatives.

There is the idea of supporting infill housing in a non-traditional way, and that would factor in Habitat for Humanity. I have said this before. Habitat for Humanity has likely done more for infill housing in the city of Winnipeg than any government program has. I suggest that governments, at all different levels, need to support organizations like Habitat for Humanity. It has built hundreds of homes in the province of Manitoba alone, and it is a national organization.

In advocating with other caucus colleagues, we have seen federal support go towards Habitat for Humanity. I do not recall seeing that under Stephen Harper. This is building homes and making homes available for people who would never really get the opportunity to own a home. They do it through sweat equity, as well as the work and efforts of the community as a whole.

It is far better than the infill programs the government used to support during the nineties. I still think we could probably support municipalities in looking at ways of doing that. I think all sorts of opportunities are still there. For the first time in a generation, we have a government that is proactive and is looking to support the industry with things like infill houses.

When listening to the Conservatives, we find they are now saying that they need to pass the blame on to Ottawa or the government, even though the current government and Prime Minister have done far more on the housing file than any other government in generations has. Of the ideas that come from the Conservatives, the only one that comes to mind is in the last election, when they said they would give tax breaks to our wealthiest landlords.

The Conservatives stand up and say that wherever we subsidize or provide funds for public transit, where there are hubs, there should be residential housing, with a higher concentration and density of people. They have been saying this for a while. Of course that should be happening. In fact, it has been happening. It is working with municipalities.

Someone does not have to be a genius to understand the concept of having a hub, where a subway, train or high-speed bus will stop, and the advantages of having towers or a higher density located there. It only makes sense to do that. This is the irony: How much money did the Conservatives and Stephen Harper invest in supporting public transit compared with the current government?

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• (1055)

Once again, where the Conservatives failed, the current government has risen to the occasion. We continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars into public transit. We continue to work with municipalities, in particular, our bigger cities of Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Winnipeg, as well as the east coast, to support public transit. I suspect that we will continue to see higher-density housing where it makes sense.

The Conservatives take an approach in which they have to be negative and hit hard on what they call the “gatekeepers”, which are the municipalities, mayors, reeves, city councillors and so forth, for not doing what they should be doing. I believe, as the government believes, that the federal government needs to demonstrate leadership, as we have, and work with provinces and municipalities, large and small, to ensure that we can build more homes and improve our current housing stock. That has been amplified, given the crisis situation we are in, through programs like the rapid housing initiative. I have seen the Minister of Housing stop into Winnipeg on several occasions. I have made announcements and dealt with press releases in Manitoba, both in urban and rural areas, dealing with things through the rapid housing initiative. We continue to work with the provinces and the municipalities on these types of programs, because they are making a difference.

We need to be able to support municipalities and encourage areas that can be developed in a relatively quick fashion. We have indicated that it is our objective to see the number of new home constructions double over the next decade. In provinces like mine, in Manitoba, we want to see more immigration come into our province and an expanded economy. To succeed in this, it will take all three levels of government working together. That means that, on certain files, it is absolutely critical that there is a high sense of co-operation. I would suggest that housing is one of those files. I can say that we do not get that co-operation if all we are doing is consistently slamming another level of government. Yes, there will be disagreements at times, and there is a negotiating process in many different ways. However, on the housing file, I believe that what is expected of the national government is actually being delivered, especially if one compares us to any other government in the last generations over 50 years. We have shown that we are greatly concerned about this issue.

My colleague asked about Alberta and the issue of rent control. We appreciate that rents are going up in many areas of the country. We are concerned about that, but, as has been very clearly demonstrated, that area is in the provincial jurisdiction. It is great that the member raises the issue here, but she should also be raising it with the Alberta government. As I said, we have a role; we are fulfilling that role, and we are constantly looking at ways in which we can enhance our leadership role, but all levels of government need to be working together in order to properly deal with this crisis. I am confident that we are doing all we can as a national government. However, we are always open to listening to what Canadians have to say on the issue.

• (1100)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member finished by saying that the Liberals were doing all they could to get this under control. It seems to me that they

are missing an essential element, and that is keeping the debt under control. This has led to a ballooning of the inflationary fire.

The Bank of Canada has been forced to raise interest rates, which is having a tremendous impact on homeowners who are renting to other people. They are forced to raise how much rent they charge or else sell their properties.

Does the member not recognize the impact of their policies on housing stocks?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is just it. The Conservatives are more concerned about increasing the anxiety levels of Canadians, causing them to be upset, than they are in the reality of the everyday life we have to face.

We understand that inflation and interest rates are challenging issues. We do what we can to support people, such as providing the first-time Canada housing benefit, a direct subsidy for rentals. The Conservative Party voted against that.

What the member does not say is that we should take a look at inflation rates and interest rates outside of Canada. Comparably, Canada is doing exceptionally well, whether we are compared to our neighbouring countries or to some of our allies. However, that does not mean we cannot do things, and we are doing things. It is unfortunate that the Conservative Party does not support many of those initiatives.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I find that what we are seeing and what we are hearing today to be a bit ironic. On the one hand, a colleague is saying that the Conservative Party is never happy and we never do anything. On the other hand, his party also does nothing, and it never has. My colleague blames us for certain things and then blames others himself, even though everyone is in the same boat.

Can we focus a bit on the report’s recommendations? How many recommendations are there? Did my colleague read the report? Which recommendations is the government keen on or interested in implementing? In fact, it is not the government that should be interested, it is the public that should be central to the government’s interests. There are certain recommendations that the government should follow.

I wonder whether he knows how many recommendations are in the report and whether the government will follow them.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, with respect to my comments, maybe I have somewhat neglected the Bloc members, but let me bring them into the debate.

I suspect that the Bloc is supporting federal initiatives on the issue of housing, and that is a positive thing. I would applaud the Bloc’s approach in recognizing that the federal government does have a role, as the member opposite waves the report. In that report, there are many suggestions on what the federal government should do on housing.

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I am now led to believe, through the Bloc member's question, that the Bloc supports the report, which supports the federal government involvement in housing in the province of Quebec, and that is a positive step forward. At the same time, I would remind the member that, as a government, we have continuously indicated very clearly that we will work with the provinces and municipalities, big and small, to deal with the housing crisis that we face today.

• (1105)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the seeds of this housing crisis were started by the Paul Martin government ending the national housing program. That has led to a shortfall every year of 25,000 affordable housing units, and over time we have reached this crisis point across the country, where people simply cannot afford to live.

I recognize, as the member has pointed out, that the Conservatives were awful at this. During the Harper regime, we saw the housing crisis double, and we saw no initiatives to actually put affordable housing in place.

However, the Liberal government has not moved quickly enough. The NDP has been pushing. There have been announcements about funding, but we are not getting the numbers of affordable housing units built that need to be built to end this crisis.

Would the member admit that the government has not proceeded as quickly, on the scale and scope that is required, to meet this housing crisis?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would not say that, and this is where I differ from the member in my perspective. Maybe I have been around a bit too long, but I was engaged in the Charlottetown accord, and to me that was a pivotal time in Canadian history. I was an MLA in the Manitoba legislature, representing the issue of housing as the housing critic. I was engaged in a town hall and Bill Blaikie was there as well. Bill Blaikie was arguing that the national government did not have a role to play in housing, that the provinces were responsible for it. From my point of view, I classify that as the greatest low point with respect to housing.

Through time, we have seen significant change. We have seen that more and more federal politicians in particular are starting to recognize the value of the federal government not only playing a role in housing but demonstrating leadership on the file. The Prime Minister over the last number of years has demonstrated more leadership on the housing file than any previous prime minister.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I continue to be confused by the party opposite, the Conservative Party, as to what its members actually believe when it comes to housing. They voted against the housing benefit, the rapid housing initiative and the accelerator fund. They actually voted against the right to housing.

Last week, the member for Calgary Centre actually supported his council's NIMBYism. He supported a council that did not want to increase density or eliminate things like parking requirements.

The party opposite seems to be all over the map when it comes to housing. Therefore, I ask my colleague this. Has he sorted through what the Conservative position is on housing?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think I have it nailed down; it is called a bumper sticker.

The Conservatives want to be able to say that there is a housing crisis and blame Ottawa for that. Nothing could be further from reality. As I have tried to illustrate, this government has demonstrated very clearly a solid commitment, virtually from day one when we first came into government, and that it is concerned about housing issues. It has invested historic amounts of money to back up that sense of commitment. Interestingly enough, whenever it is time for a vote related to housing, the Conservatives consistently vote against it.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I found parts of the member for Winnipeg North's speech difficult to hear, particularly when he spoke about historic investments on housing. I will tell the House why.

In my community, homelessness has tripled since 2018. This is a crisis, and in this year's budget there was no new money for housing. The only new commitment was a back-loaded investment in indigenous housing, which is important but way too slow.

If any other level of government were to take a year off from investing in housing, what would the member think of that?

• (1110)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, what I do know is that through the rapid housing initiative many projects have been recently announced to deal with shelters and so forth. As a government, we have invested in shelters. The homelessness issue is a very serious one. Maybe with the leave of the chamber, I could speak for another 15 or 20 minutes to try to more appropriately answer that question. However, we are there to support municipalities in particular in dealing with these issues, and obviously to support provinces too.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to point out that I will share my time with my charming colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

I thank my Conservative colleague for presenting this report to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which proposes accelerating the construction of housing.

Presenting this report to the House enables us to talk about a situation that is of great concern to us. This will not be the first or the last report to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on the subject of the dire need for housing in Quebec and Canada.

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This report dates from October 2022 and is about the housing accelerator fund and the \$4 billion that has been invested. Since then, we have tabled another report, which focused more specifically on the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC. A motion was moved in committee because we wanted to get ideas to determine what the fund would be used to finance. We received around 40 witnesses, several briefs and 17 recommendations.

The point of getting concurrence in this report is to take stock of the 17 recommendations that were made. In our view, the government is well behind in implementing some of these recommendations.

The interesting thing is that, at the very start, the report provides context and cites the Scotiabank analysis that was published in May 2021. It reads as follows:

Canada has the lowest number of housing units per 1,000 residents of any G7 country. The number of housing units per 1,000 Canadians has been falling since 2016 owing to the sharp rise in population growth. An extra 100 thousand dwellings would have been required to keep the ratio of housing units to population stable since 2016.

Even if Canada managed to build them, we would not reach that ratio. That is troubling. The responsibility for building housing, including the affordable and social housing that we consider to be the most important, lies with Quebec and the provinces. The government brought in the national housing strategy, which has become an \$80-billion plan with several programs. It is incomprehensible. How can we make every effort to ensure that the right choices are being made in these housing creation programs administered by the CMHC? That was the question in this study, which included evidence from several witnesses.

However, one question remains, that of the housing crisis, which is very real. We are not talking about supply and demand, or housing built by private companies; the current market is doing that quite well. The concern is how the public funds allocated to the national housing strategy are being used. That is our public money. Does this funding meet the real needs of Canadians, that is, prioritizing social and affordable housing and ensuring that affordable housing remains affordable?

Sometimes, we hear that, thanks to the national housing strategy, some of the housing built by the real estate industry is affordable housing. However, the percentage of affordable housing they build is based on the average income of the population this housing is intended for.

• (1115)

We are way off the mark. If affordable housing is calculated based on the income of a population rather than household income, we are completely off-track. These are all issues that have been discussed and are still relevant to determine whether our strategy is effective in meeting these glaring needs.

This report contains several recommendations, including some that warrant being implemented very quickly. As there is a housing accelerator fund, the first recommendation asks that the government accelerate its implementation. That is self-evident. This first recommendation must have been a wise choice at the time. There are several measures aimed at ensuring that housing remains affordable.

The report includes evidence that is still relevant today. The Conservatives and the Liberals keep passing the buck, but I must tell the Liberals that they are the ones being questioned in the report. Where are the Liberals with regard to the 17 recommendations in the report? Have there been any results? What are the targets? Is it possible to properly monitor all the investments made? Is that improving peoples' lives?

Several witnesses said that, if any administrative burden were added to construction projects on the market, they would not be completed. The government should prioritize solutions such as the construction and renovation of affordable rental housing. It should prioritize off-market housing and stimulate the supply of properties and housing for low- to modest-income households. There should be door-to-door incentives. The government should invest in partnerships with municipalities, the community housing sector and developers to increase the supply of off-market housing.

In our communities, whether rural or urban, there are many co-operatives and not-for-profit organizations that are very familiar with the local situation and local needs. They had good things to say about the rapid housing initiative, saying it was efficient and fast, even though they sometimes did not have time to apply, since the market just keeps heating up.

The government must speed up the process and consider each project individually. There are all sorts of recommendations, programs and funds, but are they getting the job done? How can they do better? The following are significant findings outlined both in this report and in an upcoming report about the CMHC that the government will receive. The Auditor General just said that we are spending funds, but we have no way of knowing who received them regarding homelessness. That is a serious problem. How do we house the homeless?

With its new immigration policies, the government wants to increase Canada's population even more. It does not even realize that we already have problems finding enough affordable housing and that housing must remain affordable so that the entire population can benefit. Its preferred immigration policy totally fails to consider social services and associated social programs such as health, education, community services and housing.

I asked the question myself: Now that the government has reached the mid-point of the national housing strategy, would CMHC and the government like to take stock and shift strategies to assess how, over the next five years, we can raise the bar and meet people's needs?

The housing crisis is a reality, not some intellectual conceit. Social housing and affordable housing must be the priority.

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● (1120)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of things that has become very evident over the last number of years is the federal government's desire to work with provinces, municipalities and other organizations in order to support housing initiatives.

I would ask the member to provide a very concise comment on the position of the Bloc. Is the Bloc today supporting the many federal initiatives that are there to support housing in provinces and territories across Canada? Is the member prepared to clearly indicate that she actually supports those initiatives and would ultimately like to see them expand?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and someone who has participated in a lot of studies, I can confirm that we are not at all opposed to the idea of a strategy to support and assist the provinces. To start, we need a collective effort at all levels of government to build and deploy affordable and social housing. While this is our priority, we also need the programs to be effective.

We are entitled to ask the question when a major \$80-billion investment is made in a policy that fails to produce concrete results. Instead of complicating things, we would even go so far as to say that we may have reached the point where the next step is to directly transfer a percentage of federal revenues to Quebec and the provinces, to let them handle these issues.

[English]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen in the last two or three years here the Liberal government on a \$400-billion spending spree. We have just seen the House pass a \$60-billion deficit budget again. This reckless spending has created inflation, and inflation is creating higher interest rates. I am wondering if the member could respond to the House as to how that is impacting or exacerbating the situation.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. However, I do not agree with his analysis.

Let me be clear: I believe that investments need to be made, even in the most difficult economic times. Investments must be made in the most critical sectors, including health. The current government is not doing enough. It is not meeting needs. It needs to invest in housing and support social and affordable housing. Housing is a fundamental right. Again, money is being spent, but is it delivering the right results? Not necessarily.

We must not throw the baby out with the bathwater. I do not think it is a matter of investment. I believe that it is more a matter of determining whether the investments being made deliver value for money.

● (1125)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in listening to this debate today, it seems like there is not just one elephant in the room, but a whole herd of elephants in the room.

Nobody really wants to talk about the fact that the private market will not produce affordable housing and affordable rental units. What we actually need, as I think everybody in this room is aware, is for alternatives for people that provide secure housing, through co-operative housing or other forms of non-profit housing. I wonder if the member would agree with me that this is the real elephant in the room that we are not talking about, which is the failure of the market system to produce affordable housing.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, these are fundamental questions.

Fortunately, they are questions that come up when we discuss these matters at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and here in the House, when someone dares to ask them, that is.

Our communities are full of non-profit organizations, community co-operatives that do amazing work. We must leverage those groups with Quebec and the other provinces. Our goal can be achieved, as long as the appropriate means are used. My colleague is entirely right.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the saying goes, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again".

This morning, I am pleased to discuss housing, because it is a major problem of our time. It is not important how the topic came up this morning. An hour ago, I learned that I would be speaking for 10 minutes on housing and on the report that was tabled by the committee on which my colleague sits. I am very pleased to speak on this issue, as I believe it is fundamental.

I often say that there are three fundamental issues in this country. They are important priorities.

First, there is the language crisis. We have talked about that. Bill C-13 was introduced a little while ago. We will see if it works, but that is a major issue. French is disappearing across Canada and in Quebec. It is an important problem we will have to continue addressing. We must be vigilant, take action and face the problem.

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Second, there is climate change. I do not think I need to say anything about that. It is a global problem. We saw it recently with the wildfires. It is important. Even if we cannot directly link the current wildfires to the broader climate crisis, everyone knows that they are related. Unfortunately, we have a government across the aisle that has absolutely no idea how to deal with the problem. It continues to spend shamelessly and scandalously on the oil companies. I will say this again: Last year, the oil companies made \$200 billion in profits. It is indecent that this government continues to send money to oil billionaires who will ensure that climate change continues and gets worse in the coming years. It is outrageous.

Third, there is housing, the issue we are talking about today. All of these issues are related. The housing crisis is not an intellectual conceit. I will explain where we are now, what the issue is and what our goal should be. As my colleague mentioned, all other levels of government should also be working on the problem. I agree with him. Everyone should stop whatever they are doing and work on the housing crisis. It is one of the major crises of our time.

According to the CMHC and Scotiabank, in the next 10 years, Canada will have to build 3.5 million housing units. That is astronomical. What we need to deal with the crisis is a Marshall Plan.

In Quebec alone, 1.1 million housing units need to be built in the next 10 years. We know that the private sector will build 500,000 units. If we do nothing, 500,000 units will be built. Condos and houses are being built. There are developers with money who are building housing units. There are people with money who can purchase a \$1-million or \$2-million condo. There are such people, but when it comes to the housing crisis, those are not the ones we are talking about. People with money will always be able to buy things.

We are talking about those most in need, disadvantaged people, indigenous people, women who are victims of domestic violence and single mothers. These are the people we are talking about. Canada has passed a motion stating that housing is a right. Canada admits that housing is a right and that should not be subject to speculation. If it is a right, we must act accordingly. We must take action.

I was saying that in Quebec, the private sector will build 500,000 housing units. This means that in Quebec alone, over the next 10 years, 600,000 housing units will need to be built. We will need to build 60,000 housing units per year to address this problem. How many are we building? What is the result of this great national housing strategy that was launched five years ago?

Let us look at the results of this strategy after five years. It was launched in 2018. Where are we after five years? The outcome is pathetic.

• (1130)

They have renovated housing, according to the CMHC itself. I remember it, because I was in the House two or three weeks ago in committee of the whole. There was the Minister of Housing, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, the head of the CMHC and senior officials. They came up with lots of figures. They tried to be specific, consistent and smart, and they tried to advance the file. It was moving along. How many figures were produced? No one among the housing geniuses across from me on the

other side of the House has contradicted me. No one has challenged the figures that I will give now.

Some \$80 billion have been put into this strategy. What is the result after five years? That would be 100,000 housing units built and 100,000 renovated from coast to coast. I said it in English so that everyone would understand. We are talking about 200,000 housing units across the country. In Quebec alone, we need 60,000 housing units per year.

How does that work? In the last budget, we would have expected people to wake up. They know it themselves. The Minister of Housing admitted it. He knows the figure of \$3.5 billion that I quoted, since he quoted it to me one Monday evening in the House. They therefore know it and are well aware of it. They cannot claim ignorance, because they know. What is being done? What action will be taken?

Now, we know, the great strategy is a failure. Usually, in life, when we try something and it still does not work after three, four, five or eight years, we take action. Year after year, the builds are not there. The issues are not being addressed. The CMHC knows it. Their figures indicate that there will be fewer starts in the coming years. How will these issues be addressed?

Since the Minister of Housing is aware of the situation, I would have expected this year's budget to include significant measures and something coherent. I imagine the minister carries some weight in cabinet; at least, one would hope. At some point, when they were putting together the budget, he could have stood up and said that he wanted the \$20 billion being sent to the oil companies to be allocated for housing. He could have said that. In principle, a minister is supposed to defend his own, his less fortunate and his files. However, there is no plan.

As I have already said in the House this year, it was outrageous to see what was done in the budget. Of the 300 or 400 pages of measures in every area, how many pages were there on housing? One would think there were eight, 12 or 24 pages. No, there was one single page on housing, the major issue of our time. Imagine the complete inaction on this issue, the utter failure to address the problem.

There are solutions. Let us talk about them. There is one solution I prefer. I know that many people in the House know about it and know that it is important; even some of the people in government know about it. It is one of the solutions that almost all housing advocacy organizations across Canada are bringing forward. My colleague spoke about it earlier. It is one of the recommendations in the committee report. The Government of British Columbia has proposed it. It is a housing acquisition project.

We know that it is difficult to build housing at this time. There is a labour shortage and construction costs have spiked. What can we do, then? Let us use existing housing. Let us buy housing and make it affordable over the long term, say over 10, 15 or 20 years. Let us give to our organizations and to people on the ground; let us give to the people who know what the needs are on the ground.

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I am currently touring Quebec to talk about housing. People know what the needs are and are passionate about this issue. If we give them the means, they will address this issue and will work on behalf of those most in need in our society. We have to fund our organizations, those that know the lay of the land, those that know the issue. We could do that with an acquisition fund.

• (1135)

This is what they did in British Columbia. They created a \$500-million acquisition fund to enable organizations to acquire housing and get those units off the market. This is one of the major solutions proposed by all organizations across Canada. This is what needs to happen.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say there is hope for the Bloc, at least on the housing file, as its members are really encouraging the federal government to do more on housing and to deal with the situation, even though as a government we have been more proactive on that file than any other government in generations. I am encouraged by that.

I want the member to expand on his comments. He says we should go out and buy houses. He might be telling us to go into Toronto or Montreal and spend a million dollars to get one unit. There might be 200 units in one high-density block, so one can imagine that we are talking about a quarter of a billion dollars. Then over a period of time, we are supposed to reduce that.

How many housing units does he believe we would be able to buy directly? I ask the member to provide clarification. Is he suggesting that Ottawa go to the city of Montreal and start competing in the private sector and buying up private units? That is the impression he has given. I would like him to confirm that, and if it is not the case, he should expand on what he really meant to say.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Speaker, the federal government is awash with cash. I do not want to go into that debate, but we have to do it. We are going to have that debate. The Bloc Québécois is trying to show, and it will do so over the coming weeks and months, that the fiscal imbalance is still very real. The federal government is using its surpluses to encroach on provincial jurisdictions.

There is money over there. It just needs to be invested in the right place. I am not saying that the federal government should buy houses. I am saying that the federal government should create a program and free up some money so that the provinces can set up programs and take action on housing right away.

[English]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for a very impassioned speech.

I want to refer to a comment made by the member for Winnipeg North. We have heard many times from the Liberal side that there has never been a government that has done more for housing than the current government. I have been around for a long time. I have never seen a crisis in housing like there is right now.

I wonder if the member could comment on why, despite all the so-called efforts from the government, we are in such a bad housing crisis.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right, this is a comedy show. Please tell me the members opposite are joking when they say that they have done the most for housing. Ask anyone who is serious about this issue and they will find that laughable. The crisis has never been so severe.

Just this morning I was reading an article in the *Journal de Montréal* about a 63-year-old couple in Quebec who, for the first time, are going to sleep in their car with their two dogs. They have never experienced anything like this in their lives. There is no such thing as \$1,300, \$1,500 or \$1,800 housing. If there were, it would be directly subsidized by our taxes. Programs are offering affordable housing for \$2,000 a month in Montreal.

To say things have never been better sounds like a tag line for the Just For Laughs Festival.

• (1140)

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought the member's comment about the importance of treating housing as a basic human right was absolutely dead on. However, the government has allowed for the corporate sector especially to come in and treat housing as a commodity, renovicting people, kicking people out, jacking up rent to make a larger profit and displacing people. Should the federal government stop this practice, stop treating housing as a commodity and treat it as a basic human right?

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. I did not have time to address it in my speech.

Financialization of housing is a problem that is getting worse; we can see it. Just to put this into perspective, the federal government withdrew from housing in 1993. At that time, 30 years ago, 0% of the Canadian rental market was owned by private interests, either national or international. That phenomenon did not exist when the federal government was involved in housing prior to 1993. Now it is 23%. That means that 23% of Canada's rental housing stock is currently owned by national, private or international interests. When it comes to the right to housing, these people could not care less. All they want is to make money.

This problem needs to be addressed.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to enter this debate about housing, although, like my Bloc colleagues, I got notice that this would be up about 10 minutes before I walked into the House.

I am always happy to talk about housing. What are we talking about here today? We are talking about the accelerator fund as it relates to the national housing strategy.

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The Conservatives will have people believe that the way to fix the problem is to say to local governments that we need to stop Nimbysism, as though that is the panacea to fixing the housing crisis. I agree we need to make sure communities do not engage in the not-in-my-backyard approach. I absolutely support that. I was a community legal advocate before I got to this place. For all those years, we were fighting for treating housing as a basic human right for people and calling on local governments to ensure that social housing, co-op housing, was built. When we build this kind of housing in a community, it does not make communities worse. In fact, it makes our communities better, as we are supporting each other and ensuring that people have a place to call home and a place they can afford.

On the local government side, the Nimbysism issue that needs to be tackled is not the only issue. It is very interesting to me that the Conservatives are completely silent on an equally significant issue for local governments, that is, the issue of gentrification. What is gentrification? It is basically developers coming in who want to push out existing residents to get them out of a community. They buy up the stock and develop it into luxury condos, and as a result, people do not have safe, affordable homes to live in anymore. That has added to the housing crisis, no question.

I was on the ground in the community watching that take place. In fact, that was one of the reasons that propelled me into electoral politics, along with the federal government in 1993 cancelling the national affordable housing program. What was the effect of that? Canada, after all those years, lost more than half a million units, which is an underestimation, of social housing or co-op housing that could otherwise have been built had the national affordable housing program not been cancelled by the federal Liberals.

I should add this by way of context. Before the national housing program was cancelled in 1993 by the federal Liberals, the Conservatives were in government. What did they do? They gutted funding for the national affordable housing program significantly. The dip in the development of housing went down so deep that it was devastating to see on the ground. I was working as a legal advocate helping people find housing and have their basic rights honoured, and then in one fell swoop, the situation got so bad that people in our community were rendered homeless literally overnight. We were seeing that on the ground. Then we saw gentrification coming in and pushing people out so they could not stay in the housing they needed.

What is happening today with that gentrification process? As it happens, we are now seeing corporations coming in, and not just on the development side. They are also sweeping up existing affordable housing stock. If we look at some of the websites for real estate investment trusts, for example, we see they explicitly say what their purpose is. Their purpose is to purchase up what they call “undervalued assets” or “undervalued properties”. That is the lowest-cost housing in the private sector. They buy up this housing stock, and then what do they do? They renovate people. They push people out and they jack up the rent. We saw rents go up from what was affordable, like \$750, for example, to \$2,500. That is the trend we are seeing. We are seeing rental increases expand and increase exponentially.

• (1145)

In the face of all of that, when the federal government walked away from housing, we started to see the private sector swoop in and purchase this affordable housing stock. We saw those numbers increase steadily. The federal government aided and abetted that process by giving the sector preferential tax treatment. These real estate investment trusts do not pay the corporate tax rate even though they operate as though they are corporations. When they do not pay the tax rate, it only encourages them to get into that market to displace people. Not only that, CMHC, the government's own agency, also helped them finance their projects with mortgage insurance, low-interest loans, and so on. It helped finance the corporate players in displacing tenants and jacking up their rents. That is what is happening. We saw this escalation in the crisis we are living in today in our communities, where people cannot access safe, secure and affordable housing.

If we listen to the Liberals and Conservatives, they will barely talk about the fact that housing is being treated as a commodity. They will not even acknowledge the fact that this special tax treatment needs to stop. Why are real estate investment trusts getting this special tax treatment?

Just for context, over the years the seven largest real estate investment trusts, as a result of this special tax treatment, did not pay taxes into the general revenues of the federal government to the tune of \$1.5 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer just did another report to indicate that over the next four years taxpayers in Canada will lose another \$300 million. That is a gift to the corporate sector to renovate people, displace people, jack up the rents and escalate the housing crisis. Why on earth would we do that? The Liberals and the Conservatives allowed that to happen and are all silent about it. They say that they cannot talk about it because the private sector has a role to play. Yes, it does. I will tell members what role it has to play: to stop displacing people, renovating people, jacking up the rents and escalating the housing crisis that we are faced with today. If it does not come to the table willingly, the government has to take action. That is what the NDP has been calling for.

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I came from a municipal government, a provincial government, and I am now here at the federal level. When I was at the provincial level, the federal government had walked away. B.C. and Quebec were the only two provinces that continued to do housing on their own without the federal government. I will tell members what British Columbia did. We took our resources and leveraged money from the non-profit sector, some of which had land, and the faith communities, some of which had resources. We leveraged that. We went to the local governments and said that we the province would work in partnership with them to build social and co-op housing for the community if they gave us city land for free. We also said to the developers that if they wanted a rezoning done we wanted them to also provide a community return. In fact, city council could consider upzoning a project on the proviso that they also built social housing. We the province partnered with the private sector in doing some of that and instead of building one building, it built two. It paid for the construction, and then the province came in and provided the subsidies to operate those projects. Instead of the 700 units that we would have built with the federal government's funding, we moved that number to 1,200. Then we moved it to 1,900. Under the NDP, we leveraged and worked in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors and the local government when the federal government walked away.

• (1150)

It is so important for the federal government to play a real leadership role. Yes, they did announce a national housing strategy in 2017, but that strategy has not worked in developing the necessary housing.

It is not just me who is saying it. There is actually a full report from the Auditor General indicating that the federal government does not even know what kind of housing it builds. It has no idea what the level of affordability is for the units that were built.

CMHC, at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, came to the committee to answer some questions. It actually said that it does not track it. What exactly is it doing if it does not track the affordability of the housing units that it funds? It says, oh, it is not its job. It is infrastructure's job. It is someone else's job.

I thought I heard the government say that it takes a whole-of-government approach to address the housing crisis. Why are they all asleep at the switch? Nobody is taking responsibility and all of them are saying, no, not me.

In the meantime, what is happening? The sad reality is this: people are losing homes. People do not have access to housing. People are displaced. People are living in tents. Come to my community in Vancouver East, in the Downtown Eastside. The crisis is right there before our eyes.

Do not tell me that they are getting to us, that it is going to take 10 years. The government's own homelessness targets are to reduce homelessness by 50% in 10 years. Yippee, that is going to work for the people who are sleeping on the streets right now.

Not only that, it is not even going to meet that poor target. That has been established, not by the NDP but by the independent officer

of the House. That is what is going on, as to the magnitude of the crisis.

In the meantime, we have the private sector coming in, buying up low-cost rental apartments, sweeping them up and then pushing people out.

Just to put this into context, for members to think about this number, for every one unit of social housing or co-op housing that is built, we lose 15.

How can we make up for that loss? The only way one can do it is to stop the commodification of housing, the profiteering of housing. Put a moratorium in place for the financialization of housing. Create an acquisition fund for the non-profit sector in land trusts, so they could be the ones to go into the market to buy the private housing that is coming onto the market and to retain it, so that we can hold onto the stock for the community. Put people before profits. That is what we need to do.

I would also add that there are other measures we need to put in place. There is zero justification whatsoever for CMHC and the government to help finance these corporate players who are coming in to displace people. If we are going to partner with them, and we can, as I am not saying we should not, there has to be a return tied to it.

There has to be a no-displacement policy in place. There has to be affordability tied into it so that when they get something from the taxpayers, whether it be insuring their mortgage or any of the benefits that they get, they need to give a return back to the community. We also need to ensure that there is a level of affordability, so that the rent they charge the tenants needs to be below market.

We have to make sure that this is held in perpetuity, so that it is not just a one-time thing. We need to put these measures and policies in place for a return.

One does not get access to taxpayer funds and support doing harm to the community. There has to be a return to help the community, to support the community. In the case of housing, there have to be these measures of no displacement, of affordability in perpetuity, as an example.

• (1155)

There is another thing that would help a lot. Do members know how many tenants I talk to who do not even know who their landlord is? These corporate players hide behind numbered companies because the truth is they cannot show their faces. They do not want people to know that they are the ones who are actually jacking up the rent and displacing people.

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We need to ensure that there is disclosure of all landlords. There should be information in public records so people know who their landlords are. People have the right to know who they are renting from. That is another measure that the federal government can take.

We need to stop the preferential tax treatments, stop giving them a benefit, make them pay their fair share and invest that money in the development of true social and co-op housing. That is what the NDP would like to see.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my first speech in this House involved a compliment to the hon. member for the great work that she has done in the Downtown Eastside in representing a constituency that has a lot of challenges. I do not disagree with anything that she said, but I wanted to introduce two aspects and get a reaction to them.

One is the zoning and the difficulties that people have getting cities to actually approve developments. Second is the reticence of municipal governments to increase property taxes on existing residents, which leads to the piling on of development cost charges on new buildings that only serve to jack up the price for people who are buying those units.

Can she comment on both of those?

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to the answer, can the hon. member make sure her cellphone is not near the microphones? The interpreters were saying there was a noise.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, my phone is not near the microphone.

On the issue around local governments making decisions with re-zoning and the question around nimbyism, that is a real problem. I think local politicians just need to take a deep breath and say to those communities, as I did when I was a municipal councillor, we need this housing done.

Any time we had social housing development come forward, I voted for it and I spoke for it vociferously because it is the right thing to do. It is important for an election, for people to support politicians who will get the job done. The government can use incentives and disincentives to motivate that process as well.

On the question of development cost charges, the development cost charges are fees that are necessary. Let us be clear that the developer will work out its pro forma and determine what it can and cannot do. Local governments can look at that issue as it ties to the zoning. Literally by the flick of a pen and by signing that signature, the government is giving money to the developers. What is the return? The return is also in community amenities, whether in green spaces, social housing or other community amenities that are necessary.

Let us just remember this: Developers should not get a free pass. They should pay their fair share. Let us make sure local governments know the strength and power that they have in yielding that return to the community.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech.

Fundamentally, we agree. The housing crisis has reached catastrophic levels. We need to build 1.1 million housing units over the next 10 years. That is how many units it was determined we need. However, in the last five years, the federal government managed to build only 200,000. We agree that this is a disaster.

I agree with my colleague, and I want to commend her. Her speech dovetailed with those of my colleagues. She spoke about how renovation is bad and how certain landlords prioritize profit over tenants' well-being. She is totally right.

Why then is she supporting a government in exchange for its support on another matter, dental care? Is dental care really worth abandoning the housing crisis for?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad the member asked the question. Dental care is absolutely essential, because it is part of our health care system. However, the NDP did not just ask for dental care; we absolutely asked for housing investments as well. The NDP is not in government, although I know people think we are. However, we are leveraging our power to push and to force the government to take action.

With respect to the housing file, while we asked for the government to provide, for example, a permanent program for the rapid housing initiative, to inject funds into the co-development fund and a number of other measures, what we were able to get out of all our asks with respect to housing was the investment in an urban-rural northern housing strategy. In budget 2022, we were able to secure \$300 million; in budget 2023, we secured \$4 billion over seven years. Finally, for distinction-based funding for indigenous communities, we were able to secure \$4 billion over seven years in budget 2022.

Is it enough? No, it is not. Are we going to continue to fight for more? We absolutely are.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passion for fighting on the issue of housing.

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In Timmins right now, a community of 45,000 people, we have almost 1,000 homeless people. This is creating a serious social crisis and a policing crisis, as well as exacerbating the opioid crisis. We have no place to get people into safe housing. We have no support for single moms. What we need is mixed housing and co-operative housing of the kind that built much of the community housing that we have in our region, which is sustainable for families. We see the Liberals making lots of promises with respect to housing, but we are not seeing it on the ground. What does my hon. colleague think about the need to guarantee that we have mixed co-operative housing in all our communities, whether it is in northern Ontario or in downtown Vancouver, so we can maintain sustainable communities and people can live humane, decent and hopeful lives?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that we need the federal government's leadership. The federal government used to develop social housing and co-op housing; it did so really well. We used to provide subsidies to ensure that rent was low. We would partner with the local governments, the provincial governments and the non-profit sector. That is what we need to get back to. Right now, the program that the federal government has in place is ineffective; if we truly hope to treat housing as a basic human right, the government needs to make more investments into housing to address the housing crisis.

• (1205)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly respect and recognize the member opposite's passion on this file.

Let us also talk about a lot of the good things we have done as a government, whether it is through the billions of dollars of national housing strategy investment, the rapid housing initiative, the co-investment fund, the accelerator fund or the Canada housing benefit. These are programs that the NDP, the party opposite, has supported.

Given the fact that the member was a former cabinet minister in a provincial government, though, could she speak about the provincial role in housing, the vital role the provinces play and how we need the provinces to step up to the plate to help us help them?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the provinces obviously have a role to play; they need to do so, although some provinces choose not to. However, of the provinces that do play a role, in the case of British Columbia, for example, the NDP B.C. government actually created an acquisition fund to buy up housing stock that came onto the market to house people who are homeless and do not have access to housing. We wanted the federal government to partner with us. Would the federal government do that? No, it would not.

Right now, in my riding, there is a site, 105 Keefer Street, where a developer wants to build luxury condos in a low-income area in Chinatown. The community wants the federal government to partner with the provincial government and the city government to do a land swap. Then, we could take that site to develop social housing to meet the needs of the community, particularly for seniors living in Chinatown in deplorable housing conditions. That is what we need the federal government to do to be a true partner at the table.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the member for Vancouver East for

matching, in her ferocity, the depth of the housing crisis that we are in across the country. I also appreciate that the member spoke specifically about the deep issues with respect to the financialization of housing and the work that we have both been doing when it comes to addressing that, through getting rid of the tax exemption for one specific type of corporate landlord: real estate investment trusts. As the member referenced, this is a pretty simple, reasonable measure to redirect \$300 million over the next five years to build the affordable housing we need. That report came out months ago. The member has been here longer than I have. Could she reflect on why it is that, months later, such a reasonable measure still has not been followed through on?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, if I were the minister of housing, we would have taken action long ago. In fact, I would not have eliminated the national affordable housing program back in 1993, which caused the escalating problems of the housing crisis that we are faced with today.

I cannot speak for the Liberals on why they would not take these measures. The only reason that I could guess at is that it is because of those very insider friends that they have. Perhaps that is what is immobilizing the Liberals from taking action.

The other possibility, of course, is that, here in the House of Commons, the Minister of Housing is using housing as an investment tool. Perhaps he has a blind spot in looking at the true situation as it is and making sure that housing is not treated as a commodity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House to speak to the report tabled by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. It is also a privilege to be the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, because we know that the housing problem is a concern today and has also been a long-standing concern for many of us here in the House and for many Canadians across the country.

It was certainly a concern for me, my family and my mother. For a long time, I lived with my disabled brother in a third-floor apartment. I often had to carry my brother on my back up three flights of stairs, set him down in the hallway of our small two-bedroom apartment, and then go back down for his wheelchair and carry it up to the third floor, in a building that was not designed for persons with disabilities who need accessible housing. I lived in low-rental housing, where the rent is set at 25% of the household income, because my working-class family could not afford to pay for housing at market prices.

My story would be familiar to many Canadians, especially in my riding. The government recently invested in my riding, including in projects to help people experiencing homelessness. For example, the organization L'Anonyme has a unique and innovative program for making rooms available to people experiencing homelessness. Les Auberges du coeur is a shelter network that gets young adults off the street and into a suitable apartment, with the community support they need. There are numerous similar examples across the country, such as the project recently implemented by Señákw in Vancouver, in the home province of my colleague who just addressed the House. It is a 6,000-unit project in which \$1.7 billion was invested thanks to the national housing strategy.

We have invested in recent years. Critics claim that we have not built enough housing units, but we have made sure to renovate many units to maintain affordability. We recently announced that 58,000 housing units in Vancouver would be renovated thanks to a \$1.3-billion investment. Just last year, we also announced that 4,000 units in Montreal would be renovated. These are units that are currently boarded up and inaccessible to families. To maintain affordability, it is just as important to renovate as to build.

Many of us have mentioned that each order of government has a role to play in housing. It is a shared responsibility. I used to be a city councillor for one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Montreal, Saint-Michel. The neighbourhood had one low-cost housing complex known as Habitations Saint-Michel-Nord. In our first two or three years in power, our government invested in the “Saint-Michel plan” to remodel the entire complex in order to give these families a decent place to live.

Responsibility for the project was shared with the municipality and the province. We cannot do it alone. The federal government does not have a magic wand. It takes leadership, and that is exactly what we provided with the national housing strategy. However, insulting the municipalities and calling them incompetent is certainly not going to get more housing built. We need to sit down with all stakeholders, including the different orders of government, community organizations and the private sector, to make sure that we are working not only on social and affordable housing, but also on the entire housing spectrum. We need to consider the most vulnerable, as well as those hoping to purchase a property.

I have a 22-year-old daughter, and all I hear from her is that it is impossible for her to get on the property ladder. Right now, the generation gap between our children and the people who bought property years ago is immense. We need to make sure that people have shelter and do not have to live in the street, but also that young families can buy a home. Between the two ends of the spectrum, we must ensure that there is social and affordable housing for everyone. Offering funding to build and renovate housing is one thing, but this is the first time that a government has introduced legislation on the right to housing.

• (1210)

We do believe that having a roof over one's head is a human right. We wrote that right into law through the act that created the position of federal housing advocate.

Our government is ready to be held accountable for the actions it is taking through the national housing strategy. However, a federal

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housing advocate does not necessarily create a right in the provinces and municipalities. How can we work with the provinces and municipalities so that they also take measures that will protect Canadians, especially tenants?

As I have said, we have put in place measures concerning the right to housing, including the federal housing advocate. However, we particularly want to work on the issue of renovations. Speculation is making it all too easy to force people out of their homes to financialize housing.

I should take this opportunity to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Nepean. I want to thank my colleague for reminding me.

No one should lose their home, and no one should lose an affordable home because of housing financialization. The measures we want to take and work on will require collaboration with the provinces. As we know, housing is a provincial jurisdiction.

Several of my colleagues have spoken about the various programs under the national housing strategy. The committee report mentioned the housing accelerator fund for municipalities. This program aims to increase the housing supply by 100,000 new units across the country. We want to be sure to give to municipalities—which I hope will no longer be called “gate keepers,” “incompetent” and “woke”—the means to be real partners and work together with various levels of government to build more housing. What does that mean?

That means that if the municipalities want to access this fund, they will need to increase housing density and ensure the sustainable development of units and their affordability. Through the CMHC, the government will give money and invest in these municipalities based on their performance. That is exactly what the opposition is asking us to do.

We are already doing that. I do not understand why the opposition members are criticizing the program—actually, they are not criticizing it, they are just not voting for it—and are asking us to do things that we have already done. I would invite them to read the program information and, among other things, attend the webinar provided by the CMHC. I think that it may shed some light on the details of this program.

I would also like to talk about the co-investment fund. We are talking about forcing the levels of government to work with us to build more housing. The co-investment fund does exactly that: It stimulates partnership. To access the co-investment fund, an organization must have partners from the municipal, provincial or other levels to carry out projects. At this time, the average rent for the co-investment fund is \$718 in the country. The co-investment fund ensures that housing in this country is affordable.

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The committee report outlines several excellent recommendations. They are already part of the program that was announced. In addition, I invite all my colleagues in the House to talk with their municipalities so that they are prepared to work with the federal government and submit projects shortly.

We recognize that there is a whole lot of work to be done. However, one thing is certain: Through all the programs under the national housing strategy, the federal government returned to the table with leadership that will stimulate partnership and collaboration. The government wants to ensure that, across the country, the supply of affordable housing will increase, that young families will get access to home ownership and that no one is left out on the street. The right to housing is a human right.

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford has a mix of medium- to small-sized communities, and of course those communities have different resources based on their population. Langford is a big city. It has a well-staffed city council, but if I compare that with the City of Duncan or the Town of Lake Cowichan, they do not have similar resources.

As such, I am pleased to see the recommendations that were in this report, and I know the housing accelerator fund is taking those in stride, but my colleague from Vancouver East raised an important point during the course of her speech. It was the fact that we have many large private corporations swooping in, buying up cheap housing stock and then forcing the residents out with a renovation.

I would just like to hear more from my colleague on how we tackle that problem because, in Canada's major cities, that is a huge problem, and the pace at which we are building affordable housing is not keeping up with how many people are being displaced by that practice.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely correct. When we legislate on the right to housing, we will have to make sure that we protect tenants from renovations. We will have to protect our housing stock to ensure that it belongs to Canadians. Actually, that is one of the reasons why we declared a moratorium on foreign investment.

My colleague referred to municipalities of different sizes. That is exactly the point. The housing accelerator fund is designed to support municipalities at the level they are at, to enhance their capacity to be true partners in building more housing.

• (1220)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary. We know that she is sincere in her intent to do whatever it takes to meet needs.

My colleague cited examples of organizations or groups in her community that are taking action and making a real difference for people experiencing homelessness, low-income individuals and people in the greatest housing need. There is a committee in my own riding that is working to implement this type of co-op housing

to serve residents. However, we know that it can be slow going sometimes.

This fund was promoted to our towns and municipalities, but we know that it is really for municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more. The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was concerned about that. In our opinion, the fund should be for both rural areas and big cities. Should the scope of the fund not have been expanded in terms of support for municipalities?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague and fellow member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I also thank her for all her comments at committee that advance the cause of social and affordable housing.

As for her question, I would like to reassure her by noting that a regional county municipality, for example, can apply to the housing accelerator fund. One of the concerns that we had was about serving the vast majority of municipalities, particularly here in Quebec. That is part of the program, and I would be pleased to discuss it with her personally as well.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for her wonderful leadership on the housing file.

We have come forth with many great programs and initiatives to help those looking for housing and to help solve the housing crisis we are in. Whether it is the rapid housing initiative, the co-investment fund, the housing accelerator or the housing benefit, we certainly know that the Conservative Party voted against each and every one of those initiatives.

The one that puzzles me the most is the right to housing being entrenched in law, which the Conservative Party voted against. My question to the parliamentary secretary is this: Could she give some comments as to why the Conservative Party would vote against such an initiative?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, all I can say is that all I am hearing in the House from this opposition party is insults. They are saying that people are incompetent, particularly when they are talking about municipalities. As a former city councillor, I find that extremely disrespectful to those duly elected representatives.

The members of that party often talk about buying a home. Yes, that is important. I spoke about it in my speech. However, why do they not recognize the issue of the right to housing? All they see in housing is an economic contribution. That is all.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, global inflation, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and supply chain disruptions are some of the biggest issues of our times, and they are colluding to drive up the cost of living up in Canada, particularly the cost of housing. I am thankful for the opportunity to stand here today to discuss housing affordability, a crucial issue that affects everyone in this country.

Our colleagues across the floor have the privilege of picking isolated issues and suggesting that solutions are simple. It is, of course, the role of the opposition in the House to find fault, question policy and hold government to account. Meanwhile, it is the role of the government to act, and we have done that.

We have launched a suite of measures to address the problem of housing affordability on multiple fronts. It would take more than my allotted time to address them all, so I would like to draw the attention of members to two initiatives focused specifically on speeding up the creation of housing.

One of the things that defines the problem of housing affordability is that it takes years to build a home, but the need is happening now, so we created the rapid housing initiative, which is designed to support affordable housing projects with the quickest possible turnaround times. We also developed the housing accelerator fund, which is launching this summer, to encourage systemic changes in how housing is built in this country.

The rapid housing initiative is one of the most successful in our national housing strategy. It is designed to quickly yield new affordable homes for those who need them most and who need them soon. Through two rounds of funding, the rapid housing initiative has exceeded every target we set for it.

Once the last bricks are laid, the two rounds are expected to produce more than 10,000 homes, which is 2,500 more than we had hoped for. That is why late last year we launched the third round of projects, which is backed by \$1.5 billion in investments. It is expected to yield 4,500 additional affordable homes, bringing the total expected to 15,000.

The rapid housing initiative was launched as part of our government's response to the pandemic. It continues because we recognize the urgent need for housing has not gone away.

While that initiative is getting shovels in the ground now, we have also announced the housing accelerator fund to look to the future. The fund will help municipalities cut red tape and streamline their housing processes. The fund is backed by \$4 billion in federal investments and will run until 2026-27. It will begin accepting applications this summer. The target is to create at least 100,000 net new homes over the course of the initiative.

By partnering with local governments, we can create long-term systemic changes to how we build housing in Canada. These changes will continue making a tangible impact on our housing supply well beyond the timeline of the fund itself.

I could spend all my time today telling members why I think these are great programs, but let me tell the story of Brenda Blanchard. Brenda was on a wait-list for seniors' housing and living

with her daughter. She had been struggling with housing costs for a long time until she found a home in the Bechtel modular housing development in Cambridge, Ontario.

Brenda's new home is part of an innovative project to turn shipping containers into affordable housing for seniors. It is funded by the rapid housing initiative, and the project was turned around in 15 months. Most importantly, it has transformed Brenda's life for the better. Its accessibility features mean she can get around easily, and most importantly, she says that it has given her back her independence.

● (1225)

By teaming up with partners in municipal, provincial and territorial governments, indigenous communities and the private and non-for-profit sector, we are creating many success stories such as Brenda's across this country from coast to coast to coast.

As I said, the rapid housing initiative and the housing accelerator fund are just two initiatives in our \$82-billion national housing strategy. They are complemented by the strategy's other activities that, together, tackle this problem from every angle that will have an impact. It is a complex issue that needs a diverse set of responses.

We have built on and enhanced this strategy repeatedly since its launch in 2017 in response to feedback from partners and the public, and to the changing needs of the people of Canada. This is a long way of saying that we have listened and we have acted. We will continue to do both because there is a lot more to do.

Too many people in this country are still struggling to find and keep a roof overhead, to get a home that meets their family's needs and allows them to thrive. There are too many Brenda Blanchards out there, people who are underserved by the housing market and just need a little help getting a home. Our government has made housing a priority since day one of our mandate, and we will continue to do so.

In my riding of Nepean, we have funded Multifamily Housing Initiative's 98 beautiful affordable homes, which are now occupied by families who are very happy. We are also funding a new affordable housing project in the Christ Church area of Bells Corners, with 47 new units coming up. We have also announced funding for Ottawa Community Housing, which is going to start building affordable housing projects and affordable homes in the Barrhaven area of Nepean.

Routine Proceedings

One of the key things in housing is the starts, the new housing buildups, which have become stagnant in the last almost 45 years. In 1980, when the population of Canada was 24.5 million, the housing starts were 130,000. In 2023, the population of Canada is 38.8 million, but the housing starts are just 213,000. The ratio of housing starts to population growth has come down from 0.55 in 1980 to just 0.3 in 2023.

That is the key thing we are tackling, along with partnering with the provincial and municipal governments. The housing starts have to grow, and one of the major reasons developers say that they cannot build new homes is the regulations at the city level or municipal level. We are partnering, in the same way, with the municipal governments so they can act much more quickly and do the approvals faster to get new homes built as soon as possible.

I look forward to any questions that my colleagues might have.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to talk about the recommendations set out in that report, which was actually produced in 2022. One of the recommendations indicates that the housing accelerator fund should be largely devoted to the acquisition, renovation, and construction of off-market affordable rental housing units.

Could my colleague give us an idea of where the government is at in terms of that recommendation? How many units has that been done for to date?

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, there are two things I touched upon. One is the rapid housing initiative, which is for a quick turnaround. It has already accomplished the objectives we had and is now generating up to 15,000 homes. Second, is the housing accelerator fund, which looks much more into the future and builds up a reward system.

Making it exclusive to one particular need, in my view, is not the right approach. It also has different objectives, which are very defined and provide more answers to housing affordability needs in the medium to long term.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a federal government, it is important that we acknowledge that, yes, we have a lot of work to do and we need to make a difference in housing nationally. We have come forth with wonderful programs, whether it is the co-investment fund, the rapid housing initiative, the housing accelerator fund, the Canada housing benefit and the right to housing, which the Conservative Party voted against.

My question for my colleague is this. Which one of those federal programs is having the most impact in his riding?

• (1235)

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, the beauty of the various programs under our national housing strategy is that each one of them is making an impact. I am from Ottawa, as Nepean is part of Ottawa, and almost every single program of the federal government is making a major impact on providing affordable housing and af-

fordable rental units to the people in Ottawa. As I said, we also have to focus on how we can improve housing starts.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always appreciate hearing my colleague speak. However, as he realizes, the seeds of this housing crisis started with Paul Martin's elimination of a national housing program. The fertilizer was the dismal decade of the Harper regime where there was simply no funding for affordable housing.

The government has been pressed by the NDP, by members for Vancouver East and Burnaby South, to build more affordable housing, but it has chosen to prioritize things like a \$750-billion liquidity support package for banks, \$30 billion going every year to overseas tax havens, and it is a crisis.

Would the member admit that the government has to act immediately and has to treat the crisis with the scale and scope required, which means immediate investments to build housing across the country?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, without anybody suggesting it, that the moment we came to power in 2015, from day one, we have focused on housing.

Our national housing strategy is a very defined strategy with various excellent programs. We have partnered with provincial authorities and governments, which have the major responsibility on housing, but we have not stopped telling them that it is their exclusive responsibility. We have stepped up with real money in the national housing strategy and various programs on the affordability crisis for Canadians.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talks about the beauty of all the government programs, but it has a lot of problems actually delivering on them. For example, on the incentive for new homebuyers, almost nobody has taken it up because it does not work. I think of the Canada Infrastructure Bank and all the money it says it has for projects, but nothing is happening.

Will the member not recognize that it is fine to say the words, but things are not getting done on the ground?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, one thing I can agree with member on is that the funds are available. As I said, the problem is the supply, as the money is available for developers. The problem is that we are not seeing new houses getting built by developers. That core issue has to be dealt with first.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always pleased to rise in the House of Commons and share, hopefully, some insightful words.

Routine Proceedings

Before I begin, yesterday you informed me, Madam Speaker, that you were born in Portugal. Yesterday was national day in Portugal. I know there are some celebrations going on in Ottawa, so to all Canadians of Portuguese descent, happy national day, even if I am a day late, and have a great time this evening.

Turning to housing, this morning when I found out we were going to have a concurrence motion and debate on housing, I gave my mortgage broker in Fraser Valley a call.

In April 2023, the average cost of a home in British Columbia was \$995,000 and change. The average detached home in the Fraser Valley or Greater Vancouver region costs northward of \$1.2 million. I talked to my mortgage broker, Vic, and asked him what it would take for a young person to get into housing today.

We can go on the assumption that a very modest home in Abbotsford is probably northward of \$1.2 or \$1.3 million. The member from Langley is pointing his finger up, so it is probably \$1.4 million in Langley. It is a bit cheaper in Abbotsford. For a \$1.2-million single-detached home in Abbotsford, which would be the cheapest house on the market, one would need a down payment of \$240,000.

Before I go on any further, Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

If people were to purchase that home, not only would they need that \$240,000, they would also have to account for a property transfer tax bill of \$22,000 and legal fees between \$1,000 and \$2,000 to complete the transaction. That does not even account for any real estate fees to be paid to the listing and selling agent. Therefore, to buy a home today, a starter home in the Fraser Valley, a person is looking at \$275,000 and change needed to buy that home.

The average condo in B.C. costs about \$500,000. To buy a condo today, people would need approximately a down payment of \$25,000. They would probably pay a transfer tax of \$8,000 and similar legal fees of \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Members may ask why someone cannot just start off with a condo. Why do they need a single-family detached home? When a home is valued or listed under \$1 million, it is subject to the stress test. If it is over \$1 million, people basically need a 20% down payment to purchase that home.

At today's interest rate of approximately 5%, people would need to qualify at the CMHC level of 7.5% interest rate to buy that condo for \$500,000. My mortgage broker, Vic, explained to me that in order to buy a condo in Abbotsford, people would need a household income of approximately \$125,000 to qualify. I will note that the average income where I live is about \$75,000 to \$80,000.

For people to get into the housing market today, they either need a really high-paying job, or they need to get help from their parents or receive some type of inheritance. Indeed, my mortgage broker has told me that he rarely, if ever, sees people doing it on their own today. That is a really important point to make. People cannot do it on their own today. Some people have parents who won the real estate lottery and they are able to help their children. Some people seeking to enter the housing market may have some inheritance from a grandparent, but a lot of people do not have those things.

They have to do it themselves. The cost of doing it on one's own today is astronomical. In fact, it is such an astronomical amount of money that most people are giving up hope.

● (1240)

Being Canadian, our entire financial well-being in our country, and this is what we are told by our educational institutions, from the Government of Canada and from financial advisers, is that to get ahead in Canadian society, we have to purchase property. That social contract we have had with the government and civil society is eroding before us at a very alarming rate.

When young people graduating from university no longer see a pathway to home ownership, when that seems out of the reach of possibilities, they lose hope. What happens when we lose hope? People turn to extremism, on the left or the right. We are in a dangerous position in Canada where there is going to be an entire generation left out of the housing market. That is partially to do with the government's policies of today.

In 2016, the Liberals promised Canadians that they were going to make housing more affordable, that they were going to put in billions of dollars to help people get ahead, to help them get a home. They have had program after program that was to solve the housing crisis. In fact, the only thing that has happened under any government policy is that things have become more expensive and more out of reach. It is simply not fair.

During the pandemic, when we saw one of the biggest increases in housing prices across Canada, the government urged many Canadians to borrow more. The Prime Minister talked about lower interest rates, that they were here for the long term. In fact, the Liberals predicated the country's finances on the assumption that long-term, low interest rates were here to stay.

As a result of that, Canada's household debt is now 170% of our GDP compared to 95% in 2010. It gets worse. Many of the people who did get into the housing market are now in a position to be subject to a variable rate mortgage. My mortgage broker, Vic, mentioned someone on his street, and this is anecdotal, in a Surrey neighbourhood, who had to foreclose on last week because the interest he was paying increased so much that he could not handle his monthly bills anymore.

If we do not start building more homes, if we do not give young Canadians a form of hope and a pathway to home ownership, we are in for disastrous policy outcomes and a dangerous societal position where young people do not feel they will have a future in our country anymore. The message I am bringing forward today is that governments need to get out of the way.

Routine Proceedings

Before I finish up, I want to mention one policy that is really good. The NDP government in British Columbia is mandating 10 cities in the province to build houses at an accelerated rate. The premier of British Columbia, David Eby, recognizes, and has the same position as the Conservative Party of Canada, that the only way we will maybe tackle this crisis is to compel municipalities to push more housing starts at an incredible rate.

That is one of the key things that we can do to give young people hope again. Under the interest rates today, under a government policy and under the stress test, let alone the incomes that do not match the ability to pay for a home and inability of young people to save, we will be in a very dangerous position in our country in the decades to come if people believe that the social contract they signed up for when they came to Canada, or were born here, is going to be taken away from them.

● (1245)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my almost neighbour and I share a piece of territory that has many of the same concerns. That is why I would be very interested in his reflection on the issue I brought up with the NDP. I would like to hear the Conservatives' thoughts on it.

It is about development cost charges, which are really heavily laden on new construction because municipal governments are scared to death of raising property taxes on existing homes. Obviously, that is distorting the price of new units.

What are his thoughts on that?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells raises an important point.

Development cost charges by our municipalities increase the cost of new builds at an alarming rate. Second, to that point, I do not believe municipalities, irrespective of jurisdiction, have always been transparent about how those development cost charges are used. I know that in some cases they might charge a DCC on a rebuild in an existing neighbourhood. They do not use the money collected to improve that neighbourhood. A municipality might say that it is going to use it for one of its other priorities.

I believe that development cost charges need to exist but that they need to be commensurate with the needs of young people in order to purchase housing, first and foremost.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, there is something rather ironic when we talk about the whole issue of access to housing. In my region, Abitibi—Témiscamingue, the vacancy rate is less than 1%. We cannot even house new workers, even those who would come to build the housing.

How will we ultimately be able to implement a new housing strategy? That will take money and programs, but we will also need the temporary means to house people. The labour shortage is hurting our economy. The Abitibi—Témiscamingue CEGEP said publicly today that it needed housing for its students to train the workers of tomorrow. This is what we have come to. How did the situation get so out of hand over the past 15 years?

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, with respect to the labour shortage and housing for workers, including housing for people who build homes, the Canadian Home Builders' Association came forward with a very interesting proposal, and it is one I support: removing the GST on new home builds in Canada. Imagine the government did not collect \$50,000 to \$60,000 on new home construction through taxation. Imagine if we said that those who create purpose-built rental units would not be charged GST on those builds. That is one policy area we could look at a little more closely.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question to the hon. member has to do with the elephants in the room I talked about earlier.

We have some members of the House who tend to blame immigrants for the shortage of housing, when we know that we need workers and that the immigrants themselves suffer from the lack of housing. We also have people who are blaming councils. As a former councillor, I know most councils have worked hard to try to get new housing built.

Does the hon. member really believe that the private market will actually solve the affordable housing crisis in this country, when it has demonstrated that it would not?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I actually do believe that the private sector has a much bigger role to play in solving the housing crisis we find ourselves in today. I do believe that the private sector could do much more. What we have seen in the last eight years is a government trying to replace the private sector, and all we have seen are disastrous results, higher housing costs, more homelessness and more debt.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, while I agree with the concern that the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon shared, it is important to point out that this did not happen just overnight. This crisis was decades in the making, from multiple parties that formed government at that time.

With respect to the member's talking about government getting out of the way, I would love to hear his reflections on the 80s and 90s when governments invested significantly in social and community housing. Did that not help?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, let me just say that, in the 1970s and 1980s, when we had the most purpose-built rentals constructed in our country, it was under a taxation plan that deferred capital gains. That is the only time we have seen the amount of rental construction that we actually need. That was a policy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, I believe. Unfortunately, he quashed that policy. I think we need to look very carefully at bringing back some type of MURB policy to get more purpose-built rentals constructed in our country.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to the concurrence debate on this report on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities because housing is an important topic to my constituents and also an important topic to all Canadians.

I think it is safe to say that we have a housing crisis in Canada. The government, over the last eight years, has presided over this crisis. While provinces have a role to play, and so do municipalities, what I hope to make clear to the House in my short remarks is that the primary responsibility for this mess is with the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada has huge macroeconomic levers not available to the provinces. It regulates our banking system through the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. It regulates the mortgage market through CMHC's mortgage insurance programs, and Finance Canada plays a big role in regulating our financial services sector. These are, far and away, the cause of the housing crisis in Canada. None of the initiatives that the government has announced as part of the plethora of programs on housing is going to offset the macroeconomic mistakes it has made over the last eight years.

We truly have a crisis in two forms. It is a crisis in terms of housing prices. Let us be frank and candid here; Canada has a housing bubble. It is a bubble of epic proportions, which has gone on for so long that we do not even see it for what it is. How did we get this housing bubble? Quite simply, the government mismanaged a number of macroeconomic policies through Finance Canada, through CMHC and through OSFI. For example, it allowed mortgage credit to grow at an unbelievable annual compounded rate over the last eight years, far in excess of inflation, population growth and other measures like productivity growth. As a result, household debt in Canada has grown from 80% of GDP, some 15 years ago, to 107% of GDP today. That is a 27% jump in household debt in Canada. That is almost a 30% jump, in household debt in real terms, per household, in the country over the last 15 years. Most of it is under the government's watch, and all because the government failed to regulate the growth and mortgage credit through OSFI, through Finance Canada and through CMHC.

I will give one example of its mismanagement. In the early days of the pandemic, OSFI relaxed the domestic stability buffer, allowing banks to loan out hundreds of billions in new money. OSFI put no restrictions on the money being loaned out. What happened? Almost all of it was loaned out for residential real estate. It poured fuel on the fire of housing, which is why housing prices during the pandemic skyrocketed. The government should have said, look, we are going to inject some liquidity into the system but we are not going to allow the financial sector to put all of its eggs in one basket,

into residential mortgages, and to pour fuel on the fire of housing prices. That is one big reason why housing has skyrocketed over the last several years.

There are so many other things the government did. It argued against the B-20 rule and it forced financial regulators to weaken the B-20 rule. What situation do we have today? We have a situation where one-fifth of all of CIBC mortgages are ones where the borrowers are not even paying the interest on their loan balances, and their principal is getting bigger. As a result, we are looking down the barrel of a financial crisis.

In about two short years, many of the mortgages that were given out during the pandemic will come up for renewal. Most of these are five-year-term mortgages. Most of these mortgages are fixed monthly payment, variable rate. When those mortgage holders renew about a quarter of outstanding mortgages, they are going to be faced with a crisis, because renewal mandates that the mortgage renew at the original amortization track that the mortgage was supposed to be on when the term was originally negotiated. As a result, people are looking at a 20% to 40% jump in their mortgage payments in about two short years. Those figures come from Desjardins' research analysts. Those figures come from the Bank of Canada itself, and that is the best case scenario.

• (1255)

That is if rates start to drop early next year, and it is not clear they will, because the bank continued to hike them this past month alone, and it may hike them further. It is predicated on our having a mild recession that we get out of fairly quickly, and it is predicated on rates dropping to two and a half per cent pretty quickly. This is all a Goldilocks scenario that may not come to pass, and even in that Goldilocks scenario, payments for these mortgages are still expected to jump 20% to 40%. If a worst-case scenario comes to pass, the payment jumps could be much higher. We are talking about a fifth to a quarter of all outstanding mortgages being in this situation, and that is a direct result of the government's mismanagement of the banking system.

Routine Proceedings

We have a second crisis in our system that the government is not addressing at all, and that is a lack of housing supply. What has happened over many years is that the supply of purpose-built apartment buildings has plummeted. Several decades ago, more than two-thirds of Canadians rented an apartment in a purpose-built apartment building, but I looked up the data for the number of apartment buildings that have been built in the last several decades, and it has plummeted to almost nothing. In fact, in the province of Ontario, 86% of all apartment building stock was built prior to 1980. Almost none of it was built after the 1980s, and as a result, only 60% of renters in Canada today rent an apartment in a purpose-built apartment building. The other 40% of renters are renting a house, a room in a house, a condo or some other non-purpose-built apartment. As a result, we have a government focused entirely on the wrong solution to the problem: building more houses and condos. What we need are more purpose-built apartment buildings, but the government is not thinking about these macroeconomic policies because it is focused on microeconomic policies that are not going to make a difference.

The slowdown in apartment construction coincides with the introduction of capital gains taxes on apartment buildings that do not apply to primary residences. It coincides with negative changes to capital cost allowances that did not allow private developers to write off their investments in a way that made them financially viable. It is a result of GST rules that favour one type of housing over another. It is a result of CMHC introducing restrictions on underwriting of rental housing. It is a result of a range of other issues the government has failed to address, and until the government addresses these macroeconomic policies, whether it is the growth in mortgage credit that has led to a housing bubble, or the lack of rental housing in purpose-built apartment buildings, we are not going to be able to address this crisis.

For all those reasons, I encourage members of the House to think about what the committee has found in this report and to consider the broader picture of how we got into this situation, which is not just a housing crisis but one that could really put the financial stability of our entire Canadian banking system at risk.

• (1300)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member opposite certainly has my respect.

I do have a question for him. Why did he vote against the right to housing? Does he not believe in the right to housing?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, what I believe in are macroeconomic policies of the Government of Canada that are going to ensure that, in the long run, housing returns to 3.5 times a typical family's income. Today in this country, in many communities, it is more than triple that, and as a result, Canadians are struggling under record high levels of household indebtedness. The House can pass all the motions it wants about housing as a right, but the reality is that, in practice today in Canada, affordable housing has become a distant reality for many Canadians because of these ill-founded macroeconomic policies.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have reached a point at which even the middle class is having trou-

ble finding housing. Imagine how bad it is for more disadvantaged or economically vulnerable households. People are on the verge of homelessness. This is a big deal.

There is one recommendation that I find very interesting. I would like my colleague to tell us more about it. The 14th recommendation reads as follows: "That the Housing Accelerator Fund support public and non-profit acquisition of vacant land and existing buildings, including rental housing stock, for the purpose of creating net-new affordable housing units." This is really for people who are in a very fragile economic situation. To me, this recommendation is huge.

What are my colleague's thoughts on it?

• (1305)

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question about the report's 14th recommendation.

I agree that more affordable housing is needed across the country, including in my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills. At the same time, Canada is in a crisis situation.

[*English*]

We cannot rely on only building affordable housing units. The only apartment units being built in Canada are being built with public subsidies. The private sector should be building much more than just affordable housing units that have been subsidized with public subsidies. They should be building apartment units for people to rent, but they are not because of some of the macroeconomic policies that I just highlighted as a problem at the federal level.

While I support the construction of new affordable rental units, more than that, we need many more rental units to help drive down the cost of renting an apartment. That would be a far more powerful way to make housing more affordable for low-income Canadians than any single government program.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, now I have heard the second Conservative speaker calling for some kind of capital gains exemption for real estate investors as a way of solving the housing problem. In the 1990s, we understood that the most vulnerable in Canada, such as young families, seniors and low-income people, needed alternatives to ownership to get secure housing.

I am going to ask the hon. member this again: Do any of the Conservatives support returning to a strong co-op movement in this country that provides people with security of housing, which they pay for themselves but which requires some public subsidy to get going?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, we support all sorts of housing, whether it be co-op, not-for-profit, for profit or affordable housing. To be clear, the source of our problem with the lack of apartment supply in Canada is not solely capital gains taxes. There is a range of problems.

One other problem, which I did not mention in my remarks, is property taxes. I was talking to Jack Mintz, an economist who has done some research on this, and he told me something astounding. In most Canadian cities and provinces, property taxes on apartment buildings are way higher than property taxes on single detached homes in the suburbs. That is because over decades, municipal councils have decided they can increase the mill rate, the tax rate, per hundred thousand dollars of assessment on apartment owners in a way they cannot on homeowners of single detached homes. That is a problem that needs to be addressed, because many people who rent are of much lower income than those who own a home.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to close off this debate with the couple of minutes we have left. It is surprising to see, after a government that has been here for eight years, that the price of a house has doubled and the price of an average mortgage payment has doubled. For those who cannot afford a house, the price of rent has also doubled. This is right across the board, not only in the GTA, which has one of the largest problems in the country.

This is bigger than just a crisis, which I understand the government does not want to admit we are in. This is more than just an affordability crisis. It is a crisis of our communities. It is a crisis of our social cohesion. People cannot afford to buy a home in the GTA where they grew up. They cannot even afford to get close to one. As a result, our community institutions get weaker. People stop going to rotary clubs, churches, mosques and synagogues, all of the things that make a community a community.

When people move far away from their families, maybe it is grandkids who do not see grandparents or kids who do not see parents anymore if they live far away from each other. That has real effects beyond just being able to afford a house. That is why I am surprised the government will not call this a crisis. It is a crisis of affordability and a crisis of our communities, despite the vast quantities of cash being thrown at the problem. The government has spent more than all other governments combined.

I understand that my time is over, but I was just getting started.

• (1310)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forth with the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion.

[*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*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the division stands deferred until later this day at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

* * *

PETITIONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to present two petitions.

The first petition is from a group of Canadians who are concerned that Louis Roy, of the Collège des médecins du Québec, recommended expanding euthanasia to babies from birth to one year of age who come into this world with severe deformities and very serious syndromes.

This proposal for legalizing the killing of infants is deeply disturbing to many Canadians. The petitioners want us in the House to know that infanticide is always wrong, and they call on the government to block any attempt to allow the killing of children.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is from a group of Canadians who believe it is important that Canadians have the right to be protected against discrimination, in particular political discrimination. They believe it is a fundamental Canadian right to be politically active and vocal, and that it is in the best interests of Canadian democracy to protect public debate and the exchange of differing ideas.

Bill C-257 seeks to add protection against political discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act. The petitioners call upon the House to support Bill C-257 and defend the rights of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the first petition I have is from citizens and residents of Canada who draw the attention of the House of Commons to the following.

Whereas Canadians have the right to be protected against discrimination, Canadians can and do face political discrimination. It is a fundamental Canadian right to be politically active and vocal, so it is in the best interests of Canadian democracy to protect public debate and the exchange of differing ideas.

Routine Proceedings

Bill C-257 seeks to add protection against political discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act. The undersigned citizens and residents of Canada call upon the House of Commons to support Bill C-257, which bans discrimination on the basis of political belief or activity, and defend the rights of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition is from citizens and residents of Canada who draw the attention of the House of Commons to the following. Louis Roy, of the Collège des médecins du Québec, recommended expanding euthanasia to babies from birth to one year of age who come into the world with severe deformities and very serious syndromes. This proposal for legalizing the killing of infants is deeply disturbing to many Canadians. Infanticide is always wrong. The undersigned citizens and residents of Canada call on the Government of Canada to block any attempt to allow the killing of children.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of residents from across Canada in support of Bill C-257, which seeks to add protection against political discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Canadians have a right to be protected against discrimination, which includes political discrimination. The petitioners call on the need to defend the rights of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

- (1315)

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions.

The first is from 30 Canadians who are expressing extreme concern that Louis Roy, of the Collège des médecins du Québec, recommended expanding euthanasia to babies from birth to one year of age who come into the world with severe deformities and very serious syndromes. The petitioners are asking that the Government of Canada block any attempt to allow the killing of these children.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is from 50 Canadians expressing support for Bill C-257, which would add protection against political discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act. The petitioners believe that it is a fundamental Canadian right to be politically active and to vote.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to table a number of petitions in the House today.

The first petition is from Canadians who are concerned about the increasing phenomenon of people being bullied in corporate environments over their political views and having pressure put on them to express or not express political opinions that may go against their conscience. The petitioners are in support of a private member's bill I put forward that seeks to protect people from corporate bullying and efforts, in a work environment or other kinds of envi-

ronments under federal regulation, to discriminate or pressure people on the basis of their political views.

Bill C-257 would add political belief and activity as prohibited grounds of discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act. The petitioners want the government and the House to support Bill C-257 and to defend the rights of all Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights concerns about the dramatic expansion of euthanasia under the government, and in particular a recommendation to allow euthanasia for infants. The proposal to legalize the euthanasia of infants is a matter of grave concern for these petitioners, and they call on the Government of Canada to block any attempt to legalize the killing of children in Canada.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition deals with a proposal in the Liberal Party's platform in the last election to effectively politicize charitable status determinations, which is again dealing with an issue of political discrimination and discrimination on the basis of political views. The petitioners are opposed to the government applying values tests or political position-based determinations for making decisions about charitable status. They call on the House to protect and preserve the application of charitable status rules on a political and ideologically neutral basis without discrimination, and to affirm the right of all Canadians to freedom of expression.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition draws attention to the ongoing detention of Huseyin Celil. The petitioners note that although Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were released after 1,000 days of unjust detention, there are other Canadians detained in China, including Mr. Celil, who has been detained for well over 5,000 days.

Mr. Celil is a Canadian citizen and a Uyghur human rights activist who has been detained for supporting the rights of Uyghurs. The Chinese government has, sadly, refused to recognize Mr. Celil's Canadian citizenship and has denied him access to lawyers, family and Canadian officials. He was coerced into signing a forced confession, and he underwent an unlawful and unfair trial. The petitioners further note that evidence makes it increasingly clear that Uyghurs are being subjected to an ongoing genocide and that Canada has an obligation to act to respond to this genocide.

The petitioners want the Government of Canada to demand that the Chinese government recognize Mr. Celil's Canadian citizenship and provide him with consular and legal service in accordance with international law, and to formally state that securing the release of Mr. Celil is a priority of the Canadian government of equal concern as the unjust detention of the two Michaels was. The petitioners want the government to appoint a special envoy to work on Mr. Celil's case and to seek the assistance of the Biden administration and other allies in obtaining the release of Mr. Celil, actions that were taken in the previous cases referenced.

HONG KONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, next I am tabling a petition that deals with the situation of Hong Kongers who are seeking immigration to Canada.

The petitioners note that the judicial system in Hong Kong has been compromised through various measures, including through the passage of the national security law. They note that peaceful protesters charged in Hong Kong have not received fair or impartial treatment and that they have been subject to politically motivated convictions for their democracy activism under the national security law but also under other laws. The petitioners want the government to ensure that for people who have faced these kinds of unjust charges and convictions, those convictions will not be barriers to their potential immigration to Canada.

The petitioners call on the government to recognize the politicization of the judiciary in Hong Kong and its impacts on the legitimacy and validity of criminal convictions; to affirm its commitment to rendering all national security law charges and convictions irrelevant and invalid in relation to paragraph 36(1)(c) of the IRPA; and to create a mechanism by which Hong Kong people with pro-democracy movement-related convictions may provide an explanation of such convictions on the basis of which government officials can grant exemptions to Hong Kong people who are deemed inadmissible under paragraphs 36(1)(b), 36(2)(b) and 36(2)(c) upon an examination of circumstances and a determination that the applicant's criminal record is political in nature.

Finally, the petitioners want to see the Government of Canada work with other like-minded allies, especially the Five Eyes countries, and other democracies to waive criminal inadmissibility of Hong Kong people convicted for political purposes, provided they do not otherwise have a criminal record.

• (1320)

MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the final petition that I am presenting today deals with recommendations of the Minister of National Defence's advisory panel on systemic racism. In its final report in 2022, this panel paradoxically recommended discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation in determinations about chaplaincy and discrimination against religious communities holding views that are not consistent with the Government of Canada's positions on, for instance, various sexuality issues.

Petitioners believe that Canadian Armed Forces chaplains serve all members of the armed forces without discrimination, and they

Routine Proceedings

should not be facing discrimination. This proposed discrimination would affect the Muslim community, the Christian community, the Jewish community and other religious communities in Canada. They call on the Government of Canada to reject the recommendations on chaplaincy in the Canadian Armed Forces in the final report of the Minister of National Defence's advisory panel on systemic racism and discrimination, as well as to affirm the right of all Canadians, including Canadian Armed Forces chaplains, to freedom of religion.

I commend all these petitions to the consideration of my colleagues.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition signed by a number of Canadian citizens, including those in my riding. They call on the Government of Canada to publicly and unequivocally support a private member's bill, Bill C-314. This bill is sponsored by my colleague from Abbotsford; it would clarify that MAID, medical assistance in dying, should not be available to those whose only underlying health condition is a mental illness.

The petitioners point out that there is no consensus among health experts regarding what constitutes the irremediability of mental illness. They also point to section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, on the right to life, liberty and the security of the person, in support of a petition that mental health supports should be made available, particularly to vulnerable Canadians, to counsel against medical assistance in dying for those who are suffering with a mental illness.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1446, 1453, 1455 and 1456.

[Text]

Question No. 1446—**Mr. Eric Melillo:**

With regard to government subsidies for Volkswagen (VW) and the announcement in St. Thomas: (a) when was the timeline of decisions related to VW made and when were the offers sent or received; (b) did the government consider alternative companies to receive subsidies, and, if so, what (i) expressions of interest were received from other companies in this regard, (ii) monetary and non-monetary demands were received in each expression of interest; (c) what were the decision-making factors that the government weighed when making the VW commitment; (d) what additional non-monetary commitments were made to VW; and (e) has the government imposed any conditions on VW in relation to the sourcing of critical minerals and other raw materials from within Canada, and, if so, what are the conditions?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to parts (a) through (e), the government cannot release commercially sensitive details of the Volkswagen, PowerCo., project, including details concerning the negotiations, beyond what has already been made public. Additional information in response to the various parts of the question can be found below.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to part (a), generally speaking, the government must complete several steps before it can fund a project. First, it conducts technical, financial and market due diligence of all projects for which applications were submitted. Once a project passes the due diligence assessment, officials engage with applicants to determine the conditions of agreed-on funding and create two key documents: a term sheet and a contribution agreement. Through these discussions, the government and the applicant agree upon a description of a project's fundamental characteristics and identify expected commitments and benefits resulting from the project, such as job creation, research and development, R&D, and capital investments, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, IP preservation and employment targets related to gender, diversity and equity.

With respect to key milestones for PowerCo., Volkswagen announced on March 13, that it had chosen Canada as the location for its first overseas Gigafactory of its battery company PowerCo. SE. This news was shared on the Government of Canada's web page: Canada and Ontario welcome historic investment from Volkswagen.

Following this announcement, on April 21, Volkswagen, PowerCo., Canada and the Province of Ontario released additional information about the project and the level of support agreed to secure this investment. More information on the PowerCo. project can be found on the web page: Volkswagen's new electric vehicle battery plant will create thousands of new jobs.

With regard to part (b), before moving ahead with a project, the government conducts a project assessment covering key areas of consideration, such as the benefits the project can deliver in relation to the growth of Canadian firms, clusters and supply chains, while also evaluating the financial and market risk of proponents and their potential to meet demonstrable market demand.

To date, Canada has attracted 110 projects with \$62.6 billion in total project expenditures. Of these 110 projects, 24 are in the auto and batteries sectors, and 21 are in the advanced manufacturing sectors. This information is publicly available on the web page: Projects: Strategic Innovation Fund.

With regard to part (c), decision-making factors are specific to agreements with PowerCo. They are subject to cabinet confidence, and the release of this information would negatively impact future negotiations. Overall, each project is assessed based on the Government of Canada's priorities and the potential for the project to benefit the Canadian economy and Canadians at large. For example, under its business innovation and growth project segment, the strategic innovation fund, SIF, focuses on funding innovation projects that involve activities related to R&D and commercialization of innovative products, processes or services; support the expansion or material improvement of existing industrial or technological facilities; and support the establishment of new facilities or bring new ventures and production capabilities to Canada.

As indicated above, Canada also seeks commitments with respect to economic, public and innovation benefits when entering into a funding agreement with a company, such as job creation in Canada, R&D, capital investments, reduction of greenhouse gas, GHG, emissions, gender, diversity and equity targets, and preservation of intellectual property, IP, in Canada. Additional information

can be found on the web page: Program Guide – Strategic Innovation Fund – D) What are eligible supported costs?

With respect to PowerCo., the decision to support both capital expenditures and production follows the government's public commitment to facilitate the industrial transformation of the automotive sector to a net-zero future and take the actions needed to remain competitive.

With regard to part (e), as indicated, the government does stipulate expected commitments and benefits when negotiating funding agreements, including but not limited to job creation, R&D and capital investments, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, if applicable, IP preservation and targets related to gender, diversity and equity.

Question No. 1453—Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:

With regard to Employment Insurance sickness benefits, broken down by month since April 2020, and by province and territory: (a) how many claims have been received from individuals impacted by the long term effects of COVID-19; and (b) how many of the claims in (a) were granted?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no requirement under the Employment Insurance Act to provide the nature of an illness in order to receive sickness benefits and Service Canada does not request this information. As such, this information/data is not available.

Question No. 1455—Mr. Michael Barrett:

With regard to the statement by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development on April 25, 2023, in the House that "The law dictates what is an essential service, and passports are not considered essential under the law.": what is the specific law and subsection which dictates that passports are not considered essential?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act defines an essential service as follows: "Definitions 4 (1) The following definitions apply in this Part:

Essential service means a service, facility or activity of the Government of Canada that is or will be, at any time, necessary for the safety or security of the public or a segment of the public.

Essential services agreement means an agreement between the employer and the bargaining agent for a bargaining unit that identifies: (a) the types of positions in the bargaining unit that are necessary for the employer to provide essential services; (b) the number of those positions that are necessary for that purpose; and (c) the specific positions that are necessary for that purpose."

As such, essential services were identified, and an essential service agreement reached, with the applicable bargaining agents using the above noted Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act definition.

Essential services remain available for clients in the U.S. and abroad and domestic clients experiencing humanitarian and/or emergency situations defined as: passport clients at risk of financial hardship; passport clients who rely on travel as a source of employment, and their income security will be jeopardized; passport clients who must travel for medical reasons, or have had a death or illness in the family; and passport clients whose situation is deemed urgent on compassionate grounds.

Requests that do not meet the definition of humanitarian and/or emergency situations are not considered essential as they are not necessary for the safety or security of the public or a segment of the public.

Question No. 1456—**Mr. Adam Chambers:**

With regard to claims made by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development in the House related to child care: (a) what specific data and information was used to make the claim on November 16, 2022, that "Ontario has had 92 percent of licensed child care providers sign on"; (b) what specific data and information was used to make the claim on January 30, 2023, that "almost all of them have reduced fees by 50 percent" in reference to the provinces and territories; (c) what specific data and information was used to make the claim on February 6, 2023, that "an additional 20,000 child care spaces, which are going to be created in Alberta. That is in addition to the 42,500 that were already announced"; and (d) what is the list of providers that (i) have, (ii) have not, signed on in Ontario to support the claim in (a)?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to part (a), in budget 2021, the Government of Canada committed to providing provinces and territories with over \$27 billion over five years to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care, ELCC, system. As part of this system, the Government of Canada negotiated a series of Canada-wide ELCC agreements with each of the provinces and territories, including an asymmetrical agreement with Quebec, that would provide federal funding to help provinces and territories work toward achieving the goals of the multilateral framework on ELCC within their jurisdictions.

The specific implementation of these ELCC agreements falls within the legislative authorities of the provinces and territories, in accordance with their own unique ELCC systems. In the case of Ontario, the provincial government offered licensed child care operators the choice to opt in to a series of provincially developed regulations in order to qualify for funding under Ontario's Canada-wide system. The deadline for licensed child care operators in Ontario to opt in to this provincial system was originally September 1, 2022, later extended by the province to November 1, 2022.

Subsequent to the November 1 deadline, in the course of regular discussions between officials, Ontario's Ministry of Education informed the Federal Secretariat on ELCC that an estimated 92% of licensed child care providers within the province had opted in to the provincial Canada-wide program. While it was this direct communication from the Government of Ontario that formed the basis of the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development's knowledge, it is worth noting that this 92% figure was also reported publicly by the Canadian Press on November 7, 2022, more than a week in advance of the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development's statement in the House. Since then, Ontario has also published its Early Years and Child Care Annual Report for 2022, which confirms that as of November 1, 2022, 92% of licensed providers had opted into the Canada-wide program.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to part (b), as of January 30, 2023, four provinces and territories were delivering regulated child care for \$10 a day or less within their jurisdictions. This included Nunavut, which achieved the milestone on December 1, 2022, Newfoundland and Labrador, which achieved the milestone on January 1, 2023, as well as Yukon and Quebec, both of which were already providing \$10-a-day or less regulated child care prior to the signing of their Canada-wide agreements.

Of the remaining provinces and territories, only one had not achieved an average fee reduction of at least 50% by January 30, 2023. A list of fee reduction averages and their public announcement date as of January 30, 2023, is as follows: Manitoba: 30% reduction on average, February 3, 2022; Nova Scotia: 50% reduction on average, November 28, 2022; Prince Edward Island: 50% reduction on average, December 16, 2022; New Brunswick: 50% reduction on average, April 25, 2022; Ontario: 50% reduction on average, December 19, 2022; Alberta: 50% reduction on average, November 26, 2021; British Columbia: 50% reduction on average, December 2, 2022; Northwest Territories: 50% reduction on average, March 3, 2022; and Saskatchewan: 70% reduction on average, August 11, 2022.

While the methods used to achieve these fee reductions vary based on the unique characteristics of each province and territory's ELCC system, such as fee caps, direct subsidies to parents or a combination of methods, the determination of reduction level is based on a comparison to fee levels in 2019, or 2020 for Ontario, in accordance with its agreement. In each case, provinces and territories provide data to the Federal Secretariat on ELCC in advance of each announcement.

With regard to part (c), on January 31, 2023, a week prior to the February 6 date cited in the written question, the governments of Canada and Alberta publicly announced the successful completion of a cost control framework and for-profit expansion plan for child care within the province of Alberta. The information can be found at the following web page <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2023/01/new-cost-control-framework-to-support-the-growth-of-22500-additional-quality-child-care-spaces-in-alberta.html>.

This framework was designed to build upon the province's existing, successful approach to working with the private sector to guide how federal funds would be used to support the development of an additional 22,500 new child care spaces among Alberta's for-profit child care providers over the remainder of the Canada-wide ELCC agreement. In total, Alberta has now committed to the creation of a total of 68,700 new licensed child care spaces by the end of March 2026, which will greatly enhance the availability of affordable, high-quality child care spaces in the province. The framework was formalized as an amendment to the Canada-wide ELCC agreement with Alberta, and can be found at the following web page: <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/alberta-canada-wide-2021/amendment.html#h2.03>.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to part (d), as ELCC is a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the Federal Secretariat on ELCC does not track data below the provincial or territorial level. A list denoting which of Ontario's more than 5,500 child care centres and 139 licensed home child care agencies have opted in to the Canada-wide system would fall within the constitutional authority of Ontario's Ministry of Education. Some of this information could also be available at the municipal level, for example, the City of Toronto provides on its website a list of licensed child care centres participating in the Canada-wide system, at the following web page: <https://www.toronto.ca/data/children/dmc/a2z/a2za.html>. This is likewise a matter of provincial and territorial jurisdiction.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the government's response to Questions Nos. 1447 to 1452, 1454 and 1457 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1447—**Mrs. Kelly Block:**

With regard to the COVID-19 vaccine doses procured by the government: (a) how many doses purchased are known to have (i) been lost or stolen, (ii) expired, broken down by manufacturer; and (b) what are the details of each instance where doses were lost or stolen, including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) number of doses, (iii) manufacturer, (iv) location, (v) incident summary?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1448—**Mr. Colin Carrie:**

With regard to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and Health Canada (HC): (a) did PHAC or HC receive or become aware of documents related to Pfizer-BioNTech which were the subject of a court order requiring their release to the public starting around January 6, 2022; (b) if the answer to (a) is affirmative, (i) when did the government receive them, (ii) which department or agency reviewed them, (iii) what conclusions and recommendations were arrived at, (iv) was a risk versus benefit analysis conducted after the review, and, if so, what were the findings, (v) when did the review commence and finish; (c) did PHAC or HC receive or become aware of the document titled: "5.3.6 CUMULATIVE ANALYSIS OF POST-AUTHORIZATION ADVERSE EVENT REPORTS OF PF-07302048 (BNT162B2) RECEIVED THROUGH 28-FEB-2021", and, if so, (i) on what date did PHAC or HC review the document, (ii) what were the conclusions and recommendations that resulted from the review of the document, (iii) when did the review commence and finish, (iv) which Canadian federal health agency was assigned to review this document and when; (d) what are PHAC's and HC's latest warnings or instructions to health care professionals who advise Canadians about the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine; (e) do the warnings or instructions in (d) consider the adverse events of special interest identified in the Pfizer study; and (f) will the government notify Canadians about the events in (d)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1449—**Mr. Dan Mazier:**

With regard to the Centre for Rural Economic Development: (a) where is the Centre for Rural Economic Development headquartered; (b) how many full time equivalents are employed by the Centre for Rural Economic Development; (c) what are the classifications and job titles of each employee in (b); (d) how many rural communities have contacted the Centre for Rural Economic Development, broken down by community and fiscal year; (e) how many issues raised with the Centre for

Rural Economic Development were deemed (i) resolved, (ii) unresolved; (f) what was the total annual budget and the forecasted budget for each fiscal year between 2019-20 and 2025-26; (g) what is the annual spending, broken down by year and by standard object, from 2019-20 to 2022-23; (h) what is the amount of spending on internal services or overhead, broken down by year, between 2019-20 and 2022-23; and (i) what are the latest performance indicators and results?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1450—**Mr. Dan Mazier:**

With regard to the connectivity (i.e. internet, cellular, broadband, etc.) funding announced by the government since November 4, 2015, broken down by company: (a) what is the total amount of money announced to date for Bell Canada, Telus Communications Inc., Rogers Communications Inc., and their subsidiaries, for connectivity under the (i) CRTC Broadband Fund, (ii) Strategic Innovation Fund, (iii) Universal Broadband Fund, (iv) Connect to Innovate program, (v) First Nation Infrastructure Fund, (vi) Canada Infrastructure Bank, (vii) Investing in Canada Plan; and (b) of the amounts in each subsection in (a), how much has been transferred?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1451—**Mr. Dan Mazier:**

With regard to government funding for satellite internet service companies, since November 4, 2015: (a) what is the total amount of money that has been (i) announced for, (ii) transferred to, Kepler Communications Inc. or its subsidiaries, broken down by program; (b) what are the details of each funding announcement or transfer in (a), including the (i) date of the announcement, (ii) amount announced, (iii) project description, including the location, (iv) program, (v) date the funding was transferred, (vi) amount of the transfer; (c) what is the total amount of money that has been (i) announced for, (ii) transferred to, Starlink and its parent company Space Exploration Technologies Corporation (SpaceX), or any subsidiaries, broken down by program; and (d) what are the details of each funding announcement or transfer in (c), including the (i) date of the announcement, (ii) amount announced, (iii) project description, including the location, (iv) program, (v) date the funding was transferred, (vi) amount of the transfer?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1452—**Mr. Damien C. Kurek:**

With regard to the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA): (a) how many businesses received loans under CEBA and were later deemed ineligible for the loans, broken down by province or territory; and (b) what mechanisms are available for businesses to (i) appeal or challenge a decision of ineligibility, (ii) provide information to demonstrate that a decision of ineligibility was made in error?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1454—**Mr. Michael Barrett:**

With regard to the special rapporteur tasked with assessing the extent and impact of foreign interference in Canada's electoral processes: what are the details of all meetings the rapporteur has had related to foreign interference since March 15, 2023, including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) names and titles of each attendee, (iii) location?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1457—**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:**

With regard to requests made by the government to Google since January 1, 2016, broken down by department, agency, or other government entity: what are the details of all requests, including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) title of who made the request, (iii) reason for the request, (iv) summary of the request, (v) title of who received the request, (vi) resulting action (request granted, denied, etc.)?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-8, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill S-8. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motion No. 1 to the House.

MOTION IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC) moved:

That Bill S-8 be amended by deleting the long title.

• (1325)

[*English*]

He said: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address Bill S-8 today. This is important legislation that Conservatives have been supportive of. It is also an opportunity to discuss the significant problems with the sanctions regime that we have seen under the government, including the failure to move quickly enough to sanction perpetrators of violence around the world, the failure to be consistent and the failure to apply sanctions in some critical cases where that is required.

I want to focus my remarks today on expressing support for the modifications, as we supported them at committee, around inadmissibility to Canada being tied in with sanctioning. I also want to highlight the gaps, in terms of the government's responses when it has come to sanctioning.

The trend we are seeing overall, in terms of sanctioning, is to try to be as precise and as targeted as possible. This is done to minimize the harm to a civilian population in association with sanctioning and to have sharp sanctions against perpetrators of violence to hold them accountable for their own actions, as well as to sanction those institutions that are involved in violence and the flow of resources that allows violent regimes to hurt their own people and people in other countries.

More and more precise sanctions, broadly speaking, are a positive development. However, as we move in this direction, we need to ensure precision and enforcement, as well as that we are not missing things or allowing holes in the process that render the sanctions that have been put in place ineffective. We also need to ensure that enforcement is in place as required and that it is effective.

Another trend we have seen is the adoption throughout the world of Magnitsky sanctions legislation, which is part of that trend of narrowing in precision and targeting those responsible for violence.

Government Orders

In particular, it aims sanctions at those involved in gross violations of human rights.

In the past, those involved in violations of human rights in other parts of the world would generally have stayed in their own countries. However, in the globalized world we live in today, it is much more common for oppressors, oligarchs and maybe their family members to take their ill-gotten gains and try to use them to vacation, attend school and do other things in various other parts of the world, including the United States, Canada, Europe, etc. Magnitsky sanctions provide us with a unique opportunity to try to deter human rights abuses by saying to those who are involved in gross violations of human rights that they are not going to be able to engage in this kind of travel, move their money or spend time in Canada or other parts of the world if they cross certain thresholds in terms of violations of human rights.

Another reason these types of sanctions are very effective is that, when people are part of violent autocratic regimes, they often realize that these regimes can turn on those within them. As the saying goes, "Sometimes the show trial comes for you." These corrupt officials who have been involved in violence are often thinking in the back of their minds, "What is the escape hatch that I could have if I need to leave my country at some point? Can I move my money? Can I create a kind of golden parachute that would allow me to leave the regime I am a part of, if I need to?"

Magnitsky sanctions, by sanctioning individuals who are involved in human rights abuses, are a way of saying that if individuals cross a certain threshold in terms of violation of fundamental human rights or if individuals are identified as being involved in violence against civilians, human rights violations or threats to international peace and security, they could be sanctioned and therefore prevented from finding that escape hatch. One corollary to the point of people maybe wanting to escape at some point but being told that they would not be able to escape and using that as a way of deterring human rights abuses is that, in order for these sanctions to be effective, they have to be imposed in coordination.

If Canada, the U.S. and our partners in Europe are sanctioning different people, then those who may be sanctioned in one place but not another would still have that escape option available to them. However, if like-minded countries are coordinated, then it shuts off the potential options of escape for those involved in human rights abuses. Therefore, it puts pressure on them to stop or at least to limit their violations of fundamental human rights.

• (1330)

They know there will be significant consequences for them if they persist in this direction. I think we have a big problem with impunity right now. People who are involved in human rights violations believe they will get away with it, because we do not have effective systems to hold people accountable. Magnitsky sanctions are a key tool for countering that.

Government Orders

It is in that spirit that Senator Andreychuk and, in this place, my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman put forward the Magnitsky sanctions bill. It initially received a cold response from the government, but eventually, it was passed unanimously. With Bill S-8, if an individual is subject to sanctions, including under the Magnitsky act, they are also considered inadmissible to Canada. It lines up inadmissibility provisions with sanctions provisions. This is positive.

The problem is that the Magnitsky act and other sanctions tools give the government tools to use for sanctioning individuals, but unfortunately, the government has been reluctant to use them. For a number of years now, the government has not used the Magnitsky sanctions tool. When it was passed, the Magnitsky act provided the government with tools for sanctioning human rights abusers under the Special Economic Measures Act, and some of that has been done.

However, the absence of the use of the Magnitsky act is troubling, especially because the act is an important mechanism of coordination among allies. Multiple countries have a Magnitsky act, and if we are able to use our Magnitsky act and coordinate with other countries' use of their Magnitsky acts, we can send a stronger, clearer message of deterrence to human rights abusers.

The government has been very reluctant to use a tool that it has been given by Parliament and encouraged by Parliament to use. Recognizing the failure of the government to use the Magnitsky act sufficiently, we have actually put forward a new private member's bill. It just passed this place, and it is on its way to the Senate.

Bill C-281 would create a parliamentary trigger mechanism that would allow a committee, in the House or in the Senate, to pass a motion calling on the government to list an individual under the Magnitsky act. The government would then have to provide a response to that committee within a time frame consistent with the time frame for responses to committee reports in the Standing Orders. It would have to provide that response regardless of, for instance, whether there is a prorogation.

We recognize the value of the coordination that we are seeing in Bill S-8, but like any other sanctions tools, it is only as good as its use. If the government is failing to use that tool, then we are still going to have a significant problem.

I want to use this opportunity to call on the government to use more sanctions and more effective targeted sanctions against the military junta in Burma. I have met with various communities from Burma recently. There is an urgent need to support pro-democracy and opposition movements in Burma, as well as to apply tighter, more rigorous and more effective sanctions against the Burmese regime.

That is the case for a number of reasons. One is that the Burmese regime is supporting and co-operating with the Putin regime. We see increasing collaboration among countries that are seeking to violently upset the international rules-based order, as well as a sharing of weapons and technology among them. If we want to effectively sanction the Putin regime and deter further violence by that regime, then we also have to be sanctioning the partners that are

supplying them with military technology; that includes the government of Burma.

The government of Burma has also been involved in horrific violence against civilians. It is undertaking a campaign of air strikes targeting civilians that is horrific in its proportions. It follows, of course, the Rohingya genocide that we spoke extensively about in the House a number of years ago. It has been positive to see an increasing collaboration or reconciliation among various ethnic minority communities and the pro-democracy movement, including Rohingya in that process, of course.

More work needs to be done there, and Canada needs to stand with opposition groups. That includes sanctioning the Burmese regime. In particular, the government should be applying tough sanctions to prevent aviation fuel from getting into Burma. Aviation fuel is what is allowing the military junta in Burma to undertake these horrific air strikes against civilians. Sadly, until now, this has been a gap in terms of government sanctions, but I hope it will step up and improve in that respect.

Overall, we are supportive of Bill S-8, but we are very concerned about the government's failure to use the tools that are available to it on sanctions. We call on it to apply those tools more effectively.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is nice that we finally got to the debate on what it is that we were supposed to be debating a few hours back.

Let us put behind us the fact that Stephen Harper and his government did nothing in regard to the sanctions. It took this government to ultimately ensure that there would be sanctions. The violation of human rights is something that Canadians as a whole take very seriously, as we know.

This legislation, in essence, would apply additional sanctions by not allowing individuals who have been sanctioned to be admitted to Canada going forward. Does the Conservative Party clearly support this legislation?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I think I have been very clear about that already, but I do want to pick up on the first comment he made about the Harper government and sanctions.

What he said is obviously nonsense. In fact, under the Conservative government, Canada led the world following the invasion of Ukraine and we were able to drive a consensus in the G7 that led to a tough response. It was likely not tough enough, but we were able to bring our allies along for a response that removed Russia from what was then the G8 and sanction Russia for the invasion of Ukraine that began at that time in 2014.

Of course, there have been changes in the world. There have been further developments since then, and I am very pleased about the passage of the Magnitsky act. It was a Conservative private member's bill that was passed following the 2015 election. I will also mention boycotting the Commonwealth summit in Sri Lanka.

Government Orders

After the Liberal government took office, the Liberals actually wanted to warm things up with Russia. They wanted to have good, warm, cozy relations with Russia again. That was what the then foreign affairs minister Stéphane Dion was pursuing, and the Liberals cut off sharing radar satellite images with Ukraine.

Conservatives have been steadfast with Ukraine, opposing the Putin regime from the beginning.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I will refrain from commenting on the misinformation the member just presented and ask him something very clearly.

Canada is a part of the Five Eyes community. In that community, countries like the United States and England and Australia do have similar legislation. Can the member give a specific example of what those countries have done that Canada has not done if he is saying we have not put in enough sanctions? What country among the Five Eyes trusted allies has put in more sanctions?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, everything that I said in my previous response is on the public record and is easily verifiable as accurate.

The member asked if there are instances of other countries that have imposed sanctions that Canada should have imposed. Yes, absolutely, and I will pick one present topical example.

Five years ago, the House listed the IRGC, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran, as a terrorist organization. The House voted five years ago. That member, if he was present, voted for it. I know the Prime Minister was present but he did not vote for that listing.

In five years, they have done nothing. It has been five years of inaction in terms of recognizing the IRGC as a terrorist organization. The United States has recognized the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

We just had hearings at the foreign affairs committee on the Wagner Group. We have been calling for the listing of the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization. The United States has listed it as a transnational criminal organization, which is slightly different, but they have applied tough sanctions against the Wagner Group that we have not applied at an equivalent level.

There have been various instances. For instance, there are officials associated with the Sri Lankan military to whom we did eventually apply some sanctions this year, but we were way behind the Americans, who had applied those sanctions years before. There are many examples, actually, of allies being far ahead of us on sanctions.

We need to do better. We should be leading, by the way, not just catching up. We should be leading in terms of taking a stand against violations of fundamental human rights.

• (1340)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the comment about the Five Eyes.

It seems to me that we are losing our position in the world. The Five Eyes are not inviting us to meetings, NATO is losing confi-

dence and we have not been included in the new relationship between the U.K., the U.S. and Australia.

Would the member comment on that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague is referring to AUKUS and the fact that Five Eyes is supposed to be, and is, this critical vehicle for collaboration among five Anglo-sphere nations for sharing of intelligence, yet the U.S., Australia and the U.K., three of the Five Eyes, are creating a separate alliance that covers many of the areas that are supposed to be covered by the Five Eyes.

Recently there have been statements out of the White House saying that there are no plans to invite Canada to participate, so we should be very concerned about what is behind those developments.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government will use every tool at its disposal to punish all those responsible for violations of international law, such as human rights abuses.

As members know, sanctions have proven to be effective foreign policy instruments to hold bad actor regimes accountable for their blatant disregard for the rules-based international order. The government may choose to use sanctions in situations relating to a grave breach of international peace and security, gross and systematic violations of human rights and significant acts of corruption. Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine is just one example.

In reaction to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the most recent developments in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Canada has imposed a series of individual and economic sanctions. Sanctions may be enacted through a number of instruments, including the United Nations Act; the Special Economic Measures Act, or SEMA; and the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Sergei Magnitsky law.

The government may choose to use sanctions in situations relating to a grave breach of international peace and security, gross and systematic violations of human rights, and significant acts of corruption. Under our autonomous sanctions legislation, sanctions against individuals and entities can include a dealings ban, which is effectively an asset freeze, and restrictions or prohibitions on trade, financial transactions or other economic activity. Canadians are also prohibited from dealing with sanctioned individuals, effectively freezing their Canadian assets.

Canada's well-managed immigration system has a strong global reputation, in part due to its well-balanced enforcement system. For nearly 20 years, Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, IRPA, has worked in tandem with our sanctions legislation to ensure bad actors are found inadmissible to Canada. The IRPA defines the applicable criteria for all foreign nationals seeking to enter or remain in Canada, including grounds of inadmissibility that would lead to an application by a foreign national for a visa or entry to Canada to be refused.

Government Orders

In the case of the inadmissibility provisions of the IRPA as they relate to sanctions, decisions are relatively straightforward: If an individual is explicitly identified under one of the sanctions' triggers, they will be found inadmissible to Canada under the IRPA on that basis alone.

However, inadmissibility provisions of the IRPA as currently written do not fully align with all grounds for imposing sanctions under the SEMA.

In 2017, two new sanctions-related inadmissibility criteria were brought into force by the Senate bill, Bill S-226. Bill S-226 ensured that foreign nationals sanctioned under the SEMA were inadmissible to Canada, but only in circumstances of gross and systematic human rights violations and systematic acts of corruption. This approach meant that foreign nationals sanctioned under other provisions, such as "a grave breach of international peace and security", which has been frequently used in sanctions imposed in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, were not inadmissible to Canada.

In other words, this means that Russian individuals sanctioned under the SEMA may nevertheless continue to have unfettered access to travel to, enter or remain in Canada, unless they are inadmissible for other reasons.

This is unacceptable and runs in direct opposition to the government's responsibility to protect our country's residents. It also contradicts the very essence and purpose of these sanctions against foreign entities.

● (1345)

Parliament previously identified this as a legislative gap in Canada's sanctions regime. In 2017, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, or FAAE, recommended that the IRPA, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, be amended to designate all individuals sanctioned under the SEMA, the Special Economic Measures Act, as inadmissible to Canada.

The legislative amendments we are discussing today under Bill S-8 respond to these recommendations and would help to further bolster Canada's sanctions against bad actor regimes. Among other important amendments, Bill S-8 would help to ensure that all foreign nationals subject to sanctions under the SEMA are inadmissible to Canada. If passed, the current inadmissibility ground relating to sanctions would be expanded to ensure foreign nationals subject to sanctions for any reason under the SEMA would be inadmissible to Canada.

These important amendments would ensure sanctions have meaningful consequences, both from an economic perspective and in terms of immigration and access to Canada. In adopting these measures, Canada would be sending a very strong message to the world that those who violate human rights are not welcome in our country.

The Government of Canada will continue to stand firmly against human rights abuses abroad, and we will hold both Russia and all other bad actor regimes accountable for their actions. At the same time, the government remains firmly committed to protecting the safety and security of all residents here on Canadian soil.

Fully aligning the inadmissibility provisions with grounds found under Canada's autonomous sanctions legislation will result in a significant increase in the number of sanctioned nationals being rendered inadmissible to Canada. These include individuals sanctioned as a result of their roles in grave breaches of international peace and security, resulting in serious international crises, as well as individuals sanctioned as a result of calls from international organizations. This includes sanctioned individuals from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Iran, Myanmar, Syria, South Sudan, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and North Korea.

Without these proposed amendments, many of those who are sanctioned in these states may continue to access Canada and threaten the safety of all those who live in our peaceful country. Bill S-8 is urgently needed to address this gap in our current legislation. For this reason, I implore all hon. members in this house to support this important and timely legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am a little surprised that there were no questions and comments. My colleague gave an excellent speech, after all.

I happen to have the best speaking time, right before question period. I am pretty happy to have this time slot.

Since the war in Ukraine began, more than 7 million Ukrainians have had to leave their country, often leaving everything behind in the hopes of finding refuge elsewhere. In the host countries, most of the newly arrived refugees come from areas that have been seriously affected by the conflict. They often arrive in a state of distress and anxiety, worried about what lies ahead for their family members, whom they reluctantly left behind.

To help these families, Canada set up the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel. This program allows refugees to obtain a visitor's visa to come to Canada temporarily. Applicants can then obtain a work or study visa if they wish to remain in the country. However, the administrative delays seemed endless for families. I have often mentioned this in the House when asking questions of the hon. Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. These delays were preventing Ukrainian refugees from entering the country. The minister and I had some pretty heated exchanges in the House, despite the fact that he ultimately intended to be collaborative.

Government Orders

More than a month after the war began, thousands of Ukrainians were still waiting for authorization for emergency travel to Canada. Once again, Canadian bureaucracy was slowing down the process. As I have often said, in my opinion, it was not because the minister lacked the will. I think the minister's will was definitely there.

Unfortunately, the problem at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, is not the captain. The issue is with the boat, the vehicle. There is water in the gas tank and sand in the gears. We have all had to deal with cases like this in our constituencies. It is never the minister's will that is lacking, it is the actual structure of IRCC that needs to be reviewed on a number of levels.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, the Bloc Québécois has made many suggestions to quickly improve the plight of claimants, given the state of emergency. Fortunately, the government implemented some of them to more quickly welcome Ukrainian families to Canada. For example, the government lifted the requirement to collect biometric data for some population groups and it chartered flights. Unfortunately, it only chartered three flights. The provinces chartered more flights than the federal government. Once again, we can see the disconnect between the minister's will and the action that his department is taking.

It would have taken too long, because, let us be honest, when such a large military invasion occurs, it is not the time to fool around with paperwork. People need to get here as quickly as possible, without compromising their safety. Even if good measures were put in place, this once again shows that the government's response time is still much too slow in times of crisis.

The Bloc Québécois has suggested many times that the government create an emergency division at Citizenship and Immigration, a permanent emergency mechanism that would be triggered in the event of an international crisis, whether an armed conflict or a natural disaster. Having such an emergency mechanism would allow the government to intervene quickly as soon as a crisis leads to a flood of refugees, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan or the earthquake in Haiti. This mechanism would allow refugees to get help as soon as possible.

The Bloc Québécois's emergency division proposal included the implementation of a special emergency visa, the expansion of the sponsorship program and the partial lifting of biometric data collection requirements. Depending on the nature of the crisis, some levers would be automatically triggered. Depending on the context, others would not be used.

Again, it is too little, too late. The minister told me in committee that, after we made our proposal, he asked his officials to implement such a mechanism. That was in the fall and I have not heard any more about it since. I am quite curious to know where things stand.

What I notice about the government's management of humanitarian crises is how painfully slow it is. I am not alone in making this observation. Most of the people directly concerned, by which I mean the victims of this crisis, also think it is too slow.

• (1350)

However, Quebeckers, like Canadians, want Quebec and Canada to remain a land of refuge for people fleeing war, corruption—

• (1355)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. member for a few seconds.

[*English*]

I would ask colleagues to please remain somewhat silent so that we can hear the speech by the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Speaker, as I said, the best time to speak is just before oral question period.

What I was saying is that Quebeckers and Canadians want our country to continue welcoming people fleeing repression or intolerable humanitarian crises. I would like to think that this is the context for Bill S-8, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts and to amend the immigration and refugee protection regulations.

Bill S-8 is currently at third reading and has been studied and amended by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. I had the opportunity to replace my Bloc Québécois colleague from Montarville on that committee and to work with my colleagues from other parties.

Members know that I am among those who believe that, despite differing ideas and political visions, most of the time collaboration helps parliamentary work. We witnessed that recently once again with Bill C-41. It also demonstrates that despite sometimes having different, and even diametrically opposed, positions, we can work together and get things done. Our work is to find common ground. Everyone knows that politics is the art of compromise.

In short, it is this teamwork that will have helped improve the bill currently before us. I must recognize the remarkable work done by the committee and all the parties that came together to amend Bill S-8 so that it would not undermine attempts by people who want to escape the war. That was the main objective. Let us not forget that one of the concerns of the organizations was that some people from a sanctioned country might not be able to seek refuge because of the new provisions in this bill.

Statements by Members

Bill S-8 also ensures that Canada meets its international obligations when it comes to welcoming refugees. This means that individuals targeted by a sanctions regime could claim asylum. However, they would not be able to receive permanent resident status as long as they remain targeted by a sanctions regime. Bill S-8 therefore fixes the problems that were introduced by the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, which prohibited individuals targeted by a sanctions regime to file a claim for refugee protection. It also allows border officers to turn away individuals who would be targeted by a sanctions regime as soon as they arrive.

That correction is in line with the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which states that only convictions “by a final judgement of a particularly serious crime [or a crime which] constitutes a danger to the community of that country” are sufficient grounds to remove a refugee from the country or deny them entry. I sense that people are interested in what I am saying.

The bill also now includes a provision that requires it to be reviewed after three years to determine its effectiveness, which is excellent news. That is a fine amendment that will enable us to make changes to the bill, if ever it were to have undesirable effects on certain refugee groups.

In short, it is a good bill that was improved by my colleagues from all parties in order to remedy the situation for certain asylum seekers. This bill will assure those who are fleeing war, corruption and oppression that it is indeed they that we intend to protect from armed conflicts, not those who instigate such conflicts. Those who violate human rights are not welcome in Quebec and Canada. In solidarity with our allies and out of aversion for warmongering regimes and organizations, the Bloc Québécois invites all parties to unanimously vote in favour of this bill so that Quebec and Canada are and remain welcoming nations for asylum seekers, and not safe havens for criminals.

In closing, I will repeat that we are here to do a job. When parties collaborate and move a bill in the right direction by working together, we, the parliamentarians, are judged by the people we represent. Our constituents must be thinking that, for once, parliamentarians are getting along and working together to improve bills for the well-being of the people of Canada, but also for the well-being of people coming from other countries who would like Canada and Quebec to become their new home.

I congratulate my colleagues once again. I want to highlight their work, and I believe that it should become a good example for other committees. It was a pleasure to rise today just before oral question period.

• (1400)

The Speaker: There will be five minutes for questions and comments for the hon. member when the House resumes consideration of this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

BASKETBALL EXCELLENCE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate someone who has made our city so proud: Jamal Murray. From the Stanley Park Community Centre and Grand River Collegiate Institute to the seventh overall pick and helping lead the Denver Nuggets to an NBA championship last night, it does not get much bigger than this.

Jamal is just the ninth Canadian to win an NBA title, and his 26.1 points per game are now the most by a Canadian in an NBA playoff run ever. He also has the most points scored by a Canadian player in a playoff run, and in second place is Jamal again from the 2020 playoffs.

It is not just the accolades. Since he was three years old, Jamal has been building up to a moment like this with determination, mental strength and unwavering commitment.

I send my congratulations to Jamal, Sylvia, Roger and the rest of their family. Our whole city and country are proud of Jamal, and we cannot wait to welcome him home this summer.

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CENTRAL YORK FIRE SERVICES

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as provinces across Canada continue to battle wildfires, it has never been more important to recognize the vital role firefighters and fire services play in our communities.

I am proud to congratulate the entire graduating class of 2023 from Central York Fire Services, whose graduation I attended this past week. I congratulate Taylor Dallas, Lindsay Hoffman, Chris Sargent, Bailey Van Praet, Jacob Watson and Trevor Fulcher.

I want to give a special shout-out to Lindsay Hoffman, the only woman in her graduating class. While all six graduates went through an intense nine-week training program, I know that, as a woman, Lindsay overcame even more barriers to get there. I thank Lindsay for being a positive role model for other women.

Central York Fire Services is the backbone of emergency services in Aurora and Newmarket. I am particularly grateful to it as its quick and professional response to an emergency at my home saved my husband's life not once, not twice, but on three separate occasions in 2022, the last time bringing him back from complete cardiac arrest.

I would say to all Canadian firefighters that we will always have their backs, as they have ours. It was heartening that Bill C-224, a national strategy on cancers related to PFAS chemicals in firefighting equipment, introduced by my colleague, the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, was passed unanimously.

In closing, I thank fire chief Ian Laing and deputy chief Rocco Volpe for their outstanding leadership and hard work, which has made Central York Fire Services one of the best in the country.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the Liberal government, everything is fine. Why is it that one in five Canadians are visiting a food bank? Why is it that deficits continue to pile up? Why is it that students are being forced to choose between education and accommodation? Why is it we have more debt, more inflation, more taxes and higher costs? It is because the Liberal government has added over \$60 billion in inflationary spending.

There is more bad news. Not only do we have carbon tax 1, but carbon tax 2 is coming, which is going to cost Saskatchewan families over \$2,800.

Common-sense Conservatives understand the hardships caused by the Liberal government's failed policies. Canadians from coast to coast to coast cannot wait to boot this tax-and-spend government off to the sidelines.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 2021, I joined the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association back home at the Invest Windsor Essex Automobile and Innovation Centre to announce a federal investment of \$5 million to support the development of Project Arrow, the first Canadian-made zero-emissions concept vehicle.

Tomorrow, less than two years later, thanks to the contributions of more than 58 Canadian suppliers, including several in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, Project Arrow will make its amazing debut on Parliament Hill.

On behalf of president Flavio Volpe, APMA and all its members, I invite all members of the House to come and check out Project Arrow tomorrow, from 12:30 to 4:30 in front of West Block, and take pride in this tremendous team Canada effort.

Thanks to APMA members, manufacturing communities such as Windsor Essex and St. Thomas are leading the world in electric vehicle and battery manufacturing and innovation. I send my congratulations to Flavio Volpe and the APMA team. I thank them for leading the charge.

Statements by Members

• (1405)

[Translation]

LISETTE FALKER

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a dedicated citizen, Lisette Falker. She recently won the Francine Ruest-Jutras award, a distinction bestowed by the Union des municipalités du Québec to recognize women who demonstrate exceptional leadership in municipal politics and in the governance of Quebec communities.

Ms. Falker was the first city councillor to receive the award. As just one example of her many accomplishments, she wrote a book called *Histoires d'élues*, which tells the stories of 25 elected women from Lanaudière, in a bid to increase women's political participation. The book was published in collaboration with the Réseau des femmes élues de Lanaudière, where Ms. Falker is a project manager and mentor.

Ms. Falker is also the executive director of Action famille Lavaltrie, which provides support to the families and newcomers with whom we have the pleasure of working.

Ms. Falker is a role model in terms of support for and dedication to women. She is an inspiration for the people of Berthier—Maskinongé and Quebec. Well done.

* * *

[English]

EVENTS IN ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a busy week in Orléans and our surrounding communities. Last Sunday, I had the honour of attending the Balaji Kalyanam, an important spiritual celebration for the Hindu community in Orléans and in our national capital.

June 3 was also a busy day. I started with Blackburn Hamlet's annual Blackburn Funfair parade, which was themed to honour our health care heroes.

[Translation]

I then took part in the first-ever business expo for female immigrants organized by Franco Impact Canada, where I met some amazing female entrepreneurs who have immigrated to Canada.

I also attended a family fun day organized by Point d'accueil francophone. This event brought together organizations that offer services to Ottawa's francophone immigrant community.

[English]

I ended my day by joining my colleague MPP Stephen Blais at his 10th annual ladies tea, an incredible tradition recognizing the women leaders in our community.

* * *

COMMUNITY 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 150th anniversaries of two amazing communities that I have the privilege of representing: Inwood and Watford.

Statements by Members

Inwood and Watford are both rooted in agriculture and have contributed to the growth and development of our region. They have also nurtured a strong sense of community and a culture among their residents and visitors. The people of Inwood and Watford are hard-working, generous and proud. They value their history and heritage, and they look forward to the future with optimism and hope.

To mark this milestone anniversary, both communities are hosting a variety of activities from June 23 to June 25 that showcase their spirit and achievements. Inwood is holding a two-day celebration with fun activities for all. Watford is organizing a three-day celebration, with entertainment and surprises for everyone. I am proud to represent these two remarkable communities and to join with them in celebrating their 150 years of legacy, history and people. I wish a happy anniversary to both Inwood and Watford.

* * *

BAPS CANADA

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to extend a warm welcome to His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj as he graces our country with his presence. He is one of the most respected Hindu leaders in the world today and the current spiritual leader of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. He is the successor of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who gifted Canada with the magnificent BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto.

The presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj marks the commencement of celebrations for BAPS Canada's 50 years of dedication to community service. This auspicious event will ignite a year-long festivity, allowing us to reflect upon and commemorate the remarkable achievements and invaluable contributions of BAPS to our great nation. Over the past five decades, BAPS, guided by His Holiness's vision, has emerged as a nationally recognized organization. Its spiritual and humanitarian endeavours span across 154 towns and cities throughout Canada.

Let us extend our heartfelt gratitude to His Holiness for his visit and for the impact BAPS has made and continues to make in fostering spiritual enrichment and for its significant support during the pandemic and its dedication to diversity and inclusion.

* * *

● (1410)

CHARITABLE GIVING

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month, Telus is helping Canadian youth and families get ready for back-to-school season with its 18th annual kits for kids program. The annual Telus Days of Giving movement continues to grow, now bringing together over 75,000 Telus team members and retirees across the globe.

We know that for many families getting ready for back to school is a stressful time, so as part of its annual Telus Days of Giving, Telus has proudly donated more than 200,000 kits for kids across Canada since 2006. Members of Parliament from all parties attended our event today and helped pack these backpacks full of school supplies. Telus will be distributing over 19,000 kits to youth in need in partnership with governments and community groups. I

would like to thank all MPs from all parties who attended today. Here is to another year of successful volunteering.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the farm there is an expression: When it rains, it pours. While the weather at home is dry right now, farmers are experiencing a metaphorical rainstorm as a result of this government's continued indifference toward fiscal responsibility. This storm consists of labour shortages; ever-rising interest rates as a result of inflation, which is a result of government deficits; fertilizer tariffs; a lack of homegrown fertilizer, but not from this chamber; and not one but two carbon taxes.

Instead of driving winds onto our fields, this storm is driving food prices up to record levels from coast to coast to coast. The entire food value chain has been impacted, from fuel to move our farm products, through to our input suppliers, retailers, and food packaging, which has seen dramatic cost increases.

Canadian farmers provide us with food security in an insecure world. The least we can do is stop drowning them in a sea of government incompetence.

* * *

YUKON 125TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Yukon-led territorial legislature meets in a special session in Dawson City to mark the 125th birthday of the Yukon territory.

On this day, 125 years ago, just over a year after the discovery of gold in the Klondike, the House passed the Yukon Act, creating a distinct territory out of the Northwest Territories, a vast region from which many other provinces and territories would emerge.

[*Translation*]

Since then, Yukon's story has been intertwined with the story of gold, from the discovery of Bonanza Creek to the modern-day industrial operation of Victoria Gold.

[*English*]

However, there is more than gold in them there mines, as the Yukon is a source of many of the vital critical minerals poised to jump-start Canada into the new green economy. In the years since June 13, 1898, we have also belatedly come to embrace the vital history and heritage of Yukon first nations. Today's Yukon territory is one with self-governing first nations, a progressive and outward-looking people, and an economy and population growth that is the envy of the nation.

Statements by Members

I ask my colleagues to please join me in wishing the Yukon a happy 125th anniversary.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflationary spending is driving up the cost of living. Food, housing and fuel are all hitting record highs. Canadians are stretched thin. According to the International Monetary Fund, Canada has the highest risk of mortgage defaults because of the high levels of household debt compared to similar economies.

This government said that interest rates would be low for a long time and debt had no consequences. Now, in a span of a year, interest rates have gone up by 4.5%. Canadians who believed this government and took on a large mortgage to afford the inflated price of homes now do not know how they are going to pay the bills.

Canadians are already experiencing \$600 increases in mortgage payments. According to the Bank of Canada, over the next three years, a large share of Canadian households will see their payments go up by 40%.

It is time to restore stability, restore hope and bring the back common sense of the common people.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been 40 years since the Trudeau government caused such pain for Canadians with inflationary spending and skyrocketing interest rates. I remember when that Trudeau came through my hometown while on vacation and gave his famous Salmon Arm salute from his private rail car to a group of protesters calling for restraint on government spending. Interest rates would reach record levels and people could not afford to keep up with the soaring cost of living.

Now, 40 years later, it is the same out-of-control spending. Sixty billion dollars' worth of fuel poured on the inflationary fire is causing the interest rates to rise 19-fold higher than they were a year ago, and the Prime Minister wants to go on another vacation. While the PM goes on vacation, Conservative members will work through the summer to make things right so that Canadians can afford groceries, the cost of living and homes. For their home, my home, our home, let us bring it home.

* * *

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU SCHOOL

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, loyalty and continuity of service are becoming very rare qualities these days. That is why I would like to commend the six teachers and educators who have dedicated 25 years of service to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau School. The school's warm, family-like atmosphere helps our youth develop and grow.

[*English*]

The dedication and perseverance towards our children from Ms. Sara, Ms. Daniela, Ms. Jennifer, Ms. Alexandra, Ms. Angie and Ms. Mara are remarkable, and they make school a home away from home for them. Their contributions over the years to the well-being and learning of children will have an everlasting effect on their lives. I congratulate them and wish to express my profound gratitude for their 25 years of service.

Our entire community is thankful for their hard work, dedication and commitment towards the students and families of the English Montreal School Board. Cheers to many more.

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PHARMACARE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, seconded by the member for Burnaby South, retabled the Canada pharmacare act.

Two years ago, I was the sponsor of that bill, and the Conservatives and Liberals shamefully voted against it. Now, under confidence and supply, the Liberals have committed to voting for pharmacare this time.

Tommy Douglas always believed in health care that covered people from the top of their heads to the soles of their feet, and Canada remains the only country with universal public health care that does not have universal pharmacare.

Pharmacare will save Canadians over \$4 billion a year according to the PBO. It will save money for our health care system and it will save money for businesses. Most of all, it will save lives. Hundreds of Canadians die every year because they cannot afford medication that sometimes costs more than \$1,000 a month.

The NDP will continue to fight until universal pharmacare becomes a reality. Let us get the Canada pharmacare act passed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MANGE TON SAINT-LAURENT!

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, we do not wait for anyone. The Mange ton Saint-Laurent! collective gets that.

Made up of scientists, such as Mélanie Lemire and Yv Bonnier Viger, renowned chefs and mentors, such as Colombe St-Pierre, and artists, filmmakers and entrepreneurs, the group hopes that Quebeckers will take ownership of the St. Lawrence River's edible bounty.

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To make that happen, it is running a campaign called “I am St. Lawrence” to support our fisheries and encourage us to buy Quebec seafood products. Fully 85% of our high-end seafood products are exported abroad, while we sometimes end up with lower-quality imports.

We vote with our dollars. Let us eat local. Like the thousands of fans of the St. Lawrence River, let us proudly add the “I am St. Lawrence” slogan to all of our communications and demand seafood products labelled as being from the St. Lawrence River.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to say a thank you as big as the St. Lawrence River to the collective, which is promoting our food sovereignty. Like all of us, “I am St. Lawrence”.

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[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government continues to borrow money and borrow money, and then borrow some more, which means higher deficits, which means higher inflation. That inflation is resulting in interest rate hikes by the Bank of Canada, and that is making everything more expensive, especially housing and mortgages.

Too many Canadians are struggling to pay their mortgages now and with these rate hikes, many are at risk of losing their homes altogether. They only have the Liberal government to thank for that.

Some are saying that the housing crisis is past the point of no return. However, I actually disagree. When Canadians finally have a government that is willing to fight for the housing people need, when Canadians finally have a housing minister who acts with the urgency this crisis demands and when the member for Carleton is finally the Prime Minister, then we will bring it home.

* * *

● (1420)

MEMBER FOR LABRADOR

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank everybody for the warm welcome. I am excited to be back in the House of Commons, back to work as the member of Parliament for Labrador and the Parliamentary Secretary to two amazing, the Ministers of Natural Resources and Northern Affairs.

I thank my colleagues, constituents, staff, family and friends for all their support and encouragement and patience as I successfully battled breast cancer for the second time.

Those who sent messages and prayers lifted me up, and their positive spirit was felt on every step of this journey.

I want to express my deep gratitude to the Newfoundland and Labrador health care teams. They never relent in their quest for a cure and they never relent in their service and commitment to their patients. The health care system in our province of Newfoundland and Labrador remains strong, despite challenges, because of the dedicated people who work in our health care system.

I remind all Canadians of the significant progress that has been made in cancer research in our country and how important it is to

support the cause for a cure. I encourage women to get regular mammography testing and wellness screening. I am proof that early detection can save lives but we must all do our part.

During this journey to good health, Labradorians were always in my heart. On June 24, at the Cancer Society's Relay for Life in Labrador, I will be ringing the bell of hope to celebrate this huge victory over cancer. I hope that all other Canadians will have the opportunity to ring that bell of hope.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that there are roughly 100 ongoing police investigations into foreign interference, including an investigation into Beijing's targeted intimidation of a member of the House.

We also learned that this Prime Minister's national security adviser knew about this intimidation for a long time. The rapporteur has already had to step down due to a conflict of interest.

Will the Prime Minister launch a real independent public inquiry?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to work with the various parties and experts to develop a plan to move forward and continue the fine work started by Mr. Johnston, which now needs to shift to another phase.

We will continue to be there to work collaboratively with all those who are willing to take this issue seriously, set partisanship and toxicity aside, and work constructively to truly address foreign interference.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the experts now agree that deficits are causing inflation. These include Liberal experts.

The former Liberal premier of Nova Scotia, Stephen McNeil, says that deficits are causing inflation. The former Liberal finance minister and deputy prime minister, John Manley, says that the Prime Minister's deficits are like putting his foot on the inflationary gas pedal. Even the present Deputy Prime Minister has said that inflation is caused by deficits.

Will the Prime Minister finally table a plan to balance the budget, so we can bring down inflation and interest rates?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know how much the Leader of the Opposition has asked us to trust independent experts and not Liberals on various issues of importance. We disagree. We think Liberals have important things to say.

However, if he is looking for a strong independent voice, he can look no further than the Governor of the Bank of Canada, who recently confirmed that government spending was not “contributing to the slowing” of the economy. Nor was it “standing in the way of getting inflation back to target.”

We continue to invest in supporting Canadians in targeted ways, while the Conservatives continue to talk about cuts to programs and services.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if he does not trust Liberals on the economy, why should anybody else?

It was, in fact, his own finance minister who, just weeks before she introduced her budget, said that deficits were like pouring gas on the inflationary fire. Then weeks later she introduced \$60 billion, or \$4,200 per family, of brand-new gas on that fire.

Our children are screaming because of the debt they are going to inherit from the government. Will the Prime Minister act responsibly and introduce a plan to balance the budget to bring down inflation and interest rates?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister said that, and then she brought in a responsible and fiscally sound budget that continues to contribute.

I know the Conservatives do not like it because it gets in the way of a good political argument, but if we look at the facts, we have the lowest deficit in the G7 and the best debt-to-GDP ratio, and we have preserved our AAA credit rating, while being there to support Canadians who need it in targeted non-inflationary ways.

While the Conservatives continue to propose cuts in programs, cuts in help for Canadians and cuts to services, we will continue to be there in a way that continues to fight inflation and support Canadians.

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HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's inflationary spending binge caused the price of everything to go up. All that spending and all that money he flooded into the financial system bid up housing prices, which doubled, leading to the most expensive housing prices in the G7. It now takes 25 years for the average family in Toronto to save for a down payment. They used to be able to pay off an entire mortgage in that time period. It takes roughly 90% of a Vancouver family's monthly income to pay the average monthly mortgage.

Will the Prime Minister balance the budget to bring down inflation and interest rates so that Canadians do not lose their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Leader of the Opposition were serious about housing, he

Oral Questions

would have supported our housing investments. Instead, he is focused on cutting services, picking fights with municipalities and protecting wealthy landlords.

On this side, our plan includes collaborating with municipalities, including investing \$4 billion to fast-track new housing approvals to create 100,000 new homes; tying infrastructure investments to housing; helping Canadians save up for their first homes; providing support for low-income renters; and converting surplus federal lands into affordable housing.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has had eight years to deliver on those promises. The only thing he has done is double the average rent, double the average mortgage payment and double the down payment on the average house. He has made Vancouver and Toronto two of the 10 most expensive cities in the world. It now takes 25 years to save enough money for a down payment.

Will the Prime Minister finally put an end to his inflationary deficits so as to reduce interest rates and enable Canadians to keep their homes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past few years, we have helped Canadians save for their first home through measures like the first-time homebuyer incentive and the tax-free first home savings account. We are investing in building and repairing more housing, including by helping municipalities accelerate the construction of 100,000 new units. We are making sure housing units are used as homes by putting an end to unfair practices that drive up prices. For example, we are prohibiting foreign actors from buying a home, and we are introducing a federal rule to discourage flipping.

* * *

• (1430)

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the resignation of the special rapporteur appointed by the Prime Minister could turn out to be a turning point in the crisis surrounding the independent public inquiry. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities showed signs of openness that I welcome with a mixture of enthusiasm and caution.

I would like the Prime Minister to tell me if he would agree that the first thing that needs to be done, before any further action can be taken to bring this matter to a positive conclusion, is to put in place an independent public inquiry.

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc Québécois leader for suggesting some credible and reasonable names. We are quite willing to look at them and to continue working with the Bloc to establish a process that has the confidence of the House and of Canadians. The importance of the foreign interference issue far transcends partisan rhetoric or personal attacks.

We will work constructively, as we always have, to take this issue seriously, to continue the work we started and to restore Canadians' confidence in our electoral system and in our democracy.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have to come back to this. We have to first agree on one fundamental principle: A commission of inquiry and the one or more commission chairs who are appointed must be completely independent from the government in order to do their job properly.

If we agree on that principle, then and only then can we move forward and look at potential candidates. If the minister or the Prime Minister wants to talk to me about it, I can be reached at any time.

However, I do have a question for the Prime Minister. Can we agree that all of this should be clearly and formally resolved before we rise for the summer?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree that we need to move forward quickly and appropriately. I am very open to such discussions with the opposition parties. Unfortunately, over the past few months, we have seen a lot of partisanship, toxicity and personal attacks, which is shameful, but I am pleased that people are now open to taking the matter of foreign interference seriously.

We are here to work in good faith and to continue our work on foreign interference in order to protect our democracy, our institutions and our electoral system.

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HOUSING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I was at university, my brother had to live with me and I had to work three jobs. It was a tough time, but things are even harder these days for students, who have to cram together into apartments that are too small, too expensive and substandard, just to make ends meet.

It is a matter of dignity. When will this government stop wasting time and start taking action to lower rent for students?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years, we have been investing in housing, in various programs to help students and low-income families and to encourage housing construction. We will continue to do that.

We know we have to be there for our students, because support for them in the short term will contribute to society in the long term. That is why we eliminated interest on federal student loans in the last budget. We will continue to be there with more help for students, which includes continuing to look at ways to help them with rent.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want the Prime Minister to imagine what it is like for students trying to find a place to rent in this country right now. Take for example a student in Windsor. The CBC reports that a 24-year-old student living in an apartment in Windsor with his sister is on the verge of homelessness because the cost of rent has gone up by so much. Sadly, this is the story of so many students who cannot find a place to rent that is within their budget. The reality is that the government has been a failure when it comes to housing.

When will the government take this issue seriously and take concrete steps to bring down the cost of rent for students?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we took this issue seriously back in 2017 when we put forward a \$40-billion national housing strategy that the Conservatives opposed, even though they had not engaged in housing for 10 years and then got up to about \$70 billion in the national housing strategy.

More recently, we put \$4 billion on the table directly to invest with municipalities instead of fighting with them like the Conservatives wanted to do; to work with them, to accelerate investments, to accelerate zoning processes, to accelerate permitting, to build more supply of housing and to take the pressure off so many Canadians around the housing market.

* * *

● (1435)

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months now the Prime Minister has tried to cover up Beijing's interference in our democracy. He has denied, he has changed his story and he has hired as many members of the Trudeau Foundation as will accept the job to try and help him with that cover-up.

Now that David Johnston has done what this House called on him to do and resigned from the made-up position that the Prime Minister gave him for \$1,500 a day, will the Prime Minister do what this House has called on him to do three times and call a public inquiry?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister was clear in his response to a previous question today. Our government is looking to collaborate in a constructive way with opposition parties, to hear from experts and other professionals in this space, to design precisely those next steps forward since Mr. Johnston has decided to leave his position as special rapporteur.

Oral Questions

We think that Canadians would benefit from a collaborative conversation, one that we have always been inclined to have. We found it difficult on the other side to find a willing partner, but we are more encouraged this week than we were a week ago.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have not been encouraged by the inaction of the government. We heard today at committee that the deputy minister for foreign affairs knew for two years that members of this House were being targeted for intimidation by foreign state actors like the dictatorship in Beijing. What did the government do? Absolutely nothing. It is not a comedy of errors, it is a tragedy of errors with the government. Opposition parties have three times called for the government to have a public inquiry and have been ready to collaborate the entire time.

Will the government now make up for lost time and the wasted months on this issue and finally call a transparent public inquiry?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to hear a Conservative member speak about inaction on this file because that is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition did for two years when he was the minister responsible for democratic institutions.

Our government is the first government to take concrete steps to counter foreign interference in democratic institutions. We have strengthened these measures time and time again, and now we are looking forward again to hearing constructive suggestions from the opposition about how we can work together to further strengthen these measures. That has always been our approach and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here we are. The government has wasted three months deflecting and dodging on this issue. Canadians have not been duped; no public inquiry, no truth and no responsibility has been shown by this government. Now, with David Johnston's resignation, the government has only one option, an open and independent inquiry. Canadians support it, the majority of this House supports it and even their very own Liberal minister declared that it was never off the table.

When will this government call a public inquiry?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that the hon. member said across the way that I do agree with, which is that we continue to look at all options including a public process to shine a light on the way in which we are fighting foreign interference. What is important now is that the Conservatives stop with the partisan attacks, roll up their sleeves and get down to work so that we can better protect our democratic institutions. That is work that the government has been committed to doing since day one.

This is not a partisan issue. We need to work together to overcome the challenges of foreign interference.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whole government is about partisanship. From day one, the Prime Minister has had zero interest in letting Canadians learn the truth. He refused to tell us what he knew and why he did nothing about it. He selfishly used David Johnston to delay the process and cool the air around the issue.

Now that Mr. Johnston has resigned, it is time for the Prime Minister to do what Canadians are demanding. While he laughs at me, I will ask him this question. Will he call a public inquiry right here, right now?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was in opposition, I was a critic for public safety. We asked for information on national security. We asked to be able to see into every corner of government. The minister at that time, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, said no. He said no to an independent group of parliamentarians who could look into every aspect of national security.

We said yes. The members opposite had an opportunity using NSICOP. They then had an opportunity offered by the Prime Minister for the Leader of the Opposition to get a briefing. They also said no. They have another opportunity now to collaborate, to stop being so partisan, to put the national interests first and to participate.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that the RCMP has opened more than 100 investigations into foreign interference. The RCMP is conducting investigations involving more than 100 Canadians who were influenced by a foreign state.

A real leader makes real decisions. A real leader takes responsibility for his decisions. The Prime Minister does neither. He has no backbone. He is incapable of making important decisions. That is why he chose a special rapporteur and gave his friend, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the option of trying to waltz around the issue and not have an independent public inquiry.

Will he stop waltzing around and finally launch an independent public inquiry?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my gratitude to the commissioner of the RCMP for the update on RCMP investigations he provided to the committee earlier today. It is proof of the concrete action that the RCMP is taking to fight foreign interference.

Now the Conservatives must stop their squabbling and partisan games and do the work that will better protect our democratic institutions.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the special rapporteur announced his resignation four days ago, but he will remain on the payroll long enough to produce a final report that has already lost all credibility.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister is the one who chose partisanship by ignoring the three calls by the majority of members of the House to launch an independent public inquiry. As everyone knows, he selected a friend, a member of the Trudeau Foundation, whom he literally threw under the bus to protect himself and prevent Canadians from learning the whole truth.

I am giving him another chance to call an independent public inquiry to uncover the truth about any interference by the Beijing regime in our democracy.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit rich for the Conservatives to talk about partisanship in their question. It was the Conservatives who decided to turn an issue as important as protecting our democratic institutions from foreign interference into a partisan issue. Moreover, when they were in government, they did nothing to counter the interference threatening our institutions at the time.

We have taken action, we will continue to do so, and we hope to have their co-operation.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is collaborating to ensure that a public inquiry into Chinese interference will finally be launched.

We have submitted names of potential commissioners in order to foster a consensus and make sure that the government will finally launch this public inquiry before we rise for the summer. That said, the ball is in the government's court. Of course, no one will blindly accept this role after the way the government set up David Johnston. That is why the government needs to announce two things: First, that it is launching an independent public inquiry and, second, that the commissioner can specify their own mandate.

When will the government finally tell us what it intends to do?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said a few minutes ago, we very much appreciate the suggestions we have received from the Bloc Québécois. They put forward strong names of credible people. I think it is a good start to a meaningful conversation.

We also share the Bloc Québécois' concerns about acting quickly enough so as not to delay a public process. We look forward to working with the Bloc and, I hope, the other political parties to identify the person or persons who can lead this process and have an appropriate mandate. His letter is a very good start.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, nobody in their right mind would accept that kind of position without making sure that they were independent from the government. That is why the government needs to announce a real commission of inquiry and give the commissioner the latitude they need concerning their mandate. At this point, the government's failure to disclose key details is the main thing holding up the inquiry. The government has been avoiding a public inquiry for almost four months now, while foreign interference continues, so it would be easy to believe that it is still trying to hold up the process.

What is the government waiting for? When will it give the public all the facts?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not trying to hold up the process. We are trying to collaborate. For us, the letter we received from the leader of the Bloc Québécois is an important step in a constructive conversation.

What is more, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency are continuing their work. My colleague, the Minister of Public Safety will be introducing legislative measures soon, or so I hope. We are continuing the work, and we look forward to working with the opposition parties.

● (1445)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, commissions of inquiry are not held to deal with simple issues. They are held to deal with sensitive issues where the information is not accessible, because those with the information are afraid or do not want to collaborate. Clearly, it is a delicate matter. Clearly, there will be times when proceedings are in camera. Commissions of inquiry provide for that. If it were not a sensitive matter, we would not need an independent public commission of inquiry, but that is where we are today.

When will the government announce this independent public commission of inquiry?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking our Bloc Québécois colleagues for their remarks. My colleague highlighted certain issues that must be addressed. For example, we can protect our national security institutions, despite the challenges, by having a very open and transparent conversation.

In the meantime, the government is also taking other measures. For example, budget 2023 provides \$49 million for the RCMP. That is another way to better protect Canadians.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Oshawa, the dream of home ownership, historically, has been within reach of young people who work hard, save for a down payment and feel confident in their choice to be successful.

This is not the case anymore. The Liberal government has killed that dream. The Prime Minister's record deficits feed inflation, cause interest rates to approach highs not seen in years, and have killed that dream. With starter homes around a million dollars, young people are giving up hope.

Will the government, today, state the date it will balance the budget, or will it continue to kill the dream of Canada's youngest and brightest?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the number one thing the Conservative Party of Canada could do to help with the affordability of housing for Canadians from coast to coast to coast is to stop grandstanding in this place and to actually support a budget that helps Canadians, with \$4 billion for the housing accelerator fund and \$4 billion for indigenous housing, money to make sure the cities can actually put up housing where it is needed.

This is all bluff and bluster. We are here acting for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister's inflationary policies are causing terrible harm and immense sadness. For instance, the exponential rise in the cost of rent, which has doubled in recent years, is forcing people onto the streets or into debt. A woman with a disability in the Montreal area has no choice but to live in a motel and put the cost on her credit card because she cannot find suitable housing at a reasonable price.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to this woman who is suffering?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would respond to this woman that our government has helped get thousands of units built. Over half a million units have been renovated and built. When we talk about access to housing, we are also talking about the right to housing, and the Conservative Party has opposed the right to housing up until now.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, young adults are living in basements. Students are living in shelters or slums, even. Another heartbreaking example is the couple in Montreal who have to sleep in their car because they cannot find affordable housing.

The government is spending lavishly and fuelling inflation. It needs to take action today, now.

What is the target date for balancing the budget?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion (Housing), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that my opposition colleagues talk among themselves to agree on what they want to say to Canadians.

Do they want us to invest in housing? That is exactly what we are doing.

Do they want us to withdraw from the national housing strategy?

The Conservatives should talk to each other first before talking to Canadians.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rising cost of rent is hurting thousands of Canadians of all ages who are seeing their rent increase by up to 55%. It is completely immoral, just like this Prime Minister, who is more concerned about returning favours than finding solutions to inflation.

Does this tired government understand that rent hikes are getting out of control and that it needs to find solutions to really help Canadians?

• (1450)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Sport and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives are so sensitive to the difficulties Canadians are currently experiencing, they should prove it when they are in the House and vote in favour of the measures we are putting in place to help people who need it most, such as measures to lower the cost of child care and provide help to families to send their children and seniors to the dentist.

The Conservatives are not proposing any solutions, yet they keep voting against our measures for helping people who really need it. They are being inconsistent.

* * *

[*English*]

PHARMACARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today New Democrats introduced our plan to deliver prescription medicines for all. Our push comes after the health minister blocked reforms meant to save Canadians billions on drug costs. Too often we have seen the current government put the interest of big pharma ahead of patients, and it is now clear that only public pharmacare will save our health care system billions and help millions of people.

Will the health minister assure Canadians that he will put their health ahead of pharmaceutical industry profits and implement the NDP pharmacare plan?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague for his collaboration and support towards building and tabling a bill on pharmacare in the next few months. That is going to lead to greater accessibility, greater affordability and greater appropriateness of the use of drugs in this country. We look forward to reviewing his bill and to working with all members of the House toward a better drug system for all Canadians.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are struggling to pay their rent, buy groceries and afford their medication. I have met seniors who are taking their pills every other day or cutting them in half to make them last longer.

Oral Questions

Today, New Democrats introduced a plan to help Canadians afford their prescription drugs. The Liberals have been promising pharmacare for 25 years, without acting. People are counting on the current government to make life more affordable, but it is letting them down.

Will the Liberals finally support the NDP's plan for universal pharmacare to help Canadians make ends meet?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. People are counting on the government to make life more affordable for seniors and for families with children, including the 300,000 children who have received the Canada dental benefit since December of last year. These are children who can now go see a dentist or hygienist and have access to proper and affordable oral health care, which we all know is essential for global health in this particular country.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Davenport, we have been watching in horror as Russia continues to strike civilian targets in its unprovoked, unjustified and illegal invasion of Ukraine. Canada stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Ukraine and will do so for as long as it takes.

Could the Minister of National Defence please provide an update on the additional support we are providing to Ukrainians in the face of Russia's brutal invasion?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since day one, Canada has stood steadfast with Ukraine in its fight for sovereignty, security and territorial integrity. On the weekend, the Prime Minister announced another \$500 million for Ukraine. That is going to go to extending Operation UNIFIER. It is going to go to 10,000 rounds of ammunition as well as almost 300 air defence missiles to protect Ukraine's skies.

We will always stand with Ukraine in the short term and the long term. Our support will not waiver.

Slava Ukraini.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friedman once said that inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon, a problem of printing too much money. The Liberals have been printing money for eight years. Now they have doubled our debt, and everyday inflation is out of control. One can drive up and down any country road or visit any small town, and one will see the effects of inflation and high interest rates.

When will the Liberals get off the backs of Canadians and out of their back pockets?

● (1455)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the challenges that Canadians are facing right now, and so does the government.

We heard it right there, once again: the Conservative austerity caucus on overdrive. What would they cut, the Canada child benefit, which actually provides thousands of families in my riding of Edmonton Centre with support every month? Would they cut the new dental program, which is providing supports to 11 million Canadians from coast to coast to coast? Maybe they just do not care about Canadian workers and would cut their benefits. There is austerity there.

There are supports here. That is our job, and we are going to keep doing it.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cabinet minister needs to get out of his ivory tower and wake up to the everyday common problems Canadians face.

Canadians will be going to renew their mortgages in 2024 and 2025, and they are going to face a grim reality with the interest rates. In addition, businesses are trying to make investments to improve productivity, which would actually reduce inflation, if we can imagine that.

When are the out-of-control-spending Liberals going to get their spending under control, reduce inflation and get interest rates under control?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is fascinating to hear my colleague make a case for classic neo-liberal economics, which tends to favour the wealthy and does not do much for the working-class people living in communities like mine. The reality is that the Conservatives' argument, their plan to deal with the rising cost of living, is to make sure families receive less money from the government to help them with the cost of living.

We believe something fundamentally different. We believe in supporting students through generous Canada student grants. We believe in supporting families with the Canada child benefit. We believe in supporting seniors with a more generous old age security benefit. We are going to continue to support workers with the Canada workers benefit. Every step of the way, we are here for the working class. The Conservatives are here for the wealthy.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a little puzzling last week that, on the same day the Bank of Canada raised interest rates, the finance minister said, "We are very close to the end of this difficult time, and to a return to low, stable inflation and strong, steady growth." Now, experts are saying the risk is that inflation will not come down, which means interest rates and mortgage rates will be higher.

Is it not time the government cut inflationary deficits, or inflationary taxes like the carbon tax, so interest rates and mortgage rates can come down for Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I respect the hon. colleague a great deal. He knows, like we do, that the inflationary cycle taking place in Canada is not a Canada-only phenomenon. Inflation is taking place across the world.

Let us listen to the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem, who said that government spending patterns are not standing in the way of inflation getting back to target. In our projections, which incorporate those measures, we have inflation coming back to target.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a previous Bank of Canada governor who said that government deficits made interest rates go higher this year.

However, let us talk about the government's predictions. It said interest rates would remain low forever. They have not. It said inflation would not come. It has. It said once inflation came, it would be here just a short time. It is still here.

Now the government is telling everybody that inflation is coming down and the economic uncertainty is over. Do all the ministers agree with the finance minister? How many predictions does someone need to get wrong before they are held accountable?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that many people on that side were predicting that Stephen Harper would win the 2015 election. How did they get those predictions?

On this side of the House, we are focusing on Canadians. We are making sure that health care is stabilized for a generation. We are making sure that we are growing the economy. We are helping those Canadians who need it most.

The Conservatives will not tell Canadians where they would cut, so the question is, where would they cut? Let us hope we never find out. We are going to keep delivering for Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are workers who are missing out on weeks of work because of the wildfires. For some, returning to work in the short term is not in the cards. They include seasonal workers employed in forestry, tourism, outfitting, parks and many other sectors.

The federal government says it will—

The Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member for a second. The member has done nothing wrong, but I would like her to start over.

Before she starts over, however, I would like the conversations on both sides of the aisle to stop. They are getting quite loud.

• (1500)

[*English*]

I am going to say to members that if they want to talk to each other, it is fine, but maybe they could either whisper to somebody

close, or if they are far apart, not yell across the floor but maybe just go outside and come back; that is allowed.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville may begin again.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Speaker, there are workers who are missing out on weeks of work because of the wildfires. For some, returning to work in the short term is not in the cards. They include seasonal workers employed in forestry, tourism, outfitting, parks and many other sectors.

The federal government says it will fast-track their EI claims. For some, that is good. For all the workers who do not qualify for EI because of the excessively high 700-hour threshold, it is useless.

Is the minister going to ease the requirements to ensure that no worker affected by the wildfires is left behind?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this important question.

As I mentioned a week ago, Service Canada will accept claims from those affected by the wildfires. They can apply even if they do not have a record of employment. They can access employment insurance.

We will do everything we can to ensure that these workers receive EI.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the rate the government is going, the trees will grow back before workers get help.

Nothing changes. Every time there is a crisis, six out of 10 workers are abandoned by employment insurance. Somehow, the federal government is surprised every time.

We would not urgently need more flexible measures today if the government had reformed EI as promised. History is repeating itself because of its broken promises.

When will it announce emergency measures for all workers affected by the fires, including those who fall through the cracks?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the seriousness of the challenges that many Canadian workers, including those in Quebec, are facing right now. We are with them on the ground. We encourage all workers impacted by wildfires to apply for EI as soon as possible, even without a record of employment. We are on top of this and we will be there for Canadian workers.

*Oral Questions***FINANCE**

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, due to the government's overreach, overspending and overtaxation, the financial pressure on Canadians has become overwhelming.

In my region and across Canada, Canadians are struggling. Our Atlantic premiers have been clear: They need relief and they need it now. Meanwhile, the government is busy doing its dastardly dance of disorder with the Davos wonder class, amassing wealth and jet-setting around the world, all the while taxing the little guy for simply driving to work.

When will the government stop fanning the flames of inflation and provide the much-needed relief that Canadians are desperate for?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is talking about things like the Canada child benefit, the Canada workers benefit or the climate action incentive, which are actually providing thousands of dollars into the pockets of Canadians.

The real question that Canadians want to know about is what the Conservatives are planning to cut. What services and what benefits are they planning to cut that Canadians will no longer have access to? We saw under Harper's decade of darkness, if my colleague wants to continue with the alliteration, that they cut services and benefits to Canadians. On this side of the House, we believe in supporting Canadians.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are tired the government's tepid tiptoeing through the tulips of political expediency with clear non-answers displayed just like that. Canadians are financially battered, beaten and broken, and they are tired of being belittled.

When will the government end the delays, the denials and the deflection, and finally address the escalating dismay of being overlooked, overwhelmed and overtaxed?

Canadians are desperate for relief. When is it coming?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will grant the member that he is good at alliteration, but what he clearly cannot do is see the policies that are actually helping Canadians. What Canadians need to know is what the Conservatives plan on cutting, because they are talking about services and supports for Canadians.

We are there for the lowest-income, most vulnerable Canadians. We have cut poverty for children in this country in half since 2015. Poverty under the Conservatives flatlined. They did nothing to help low-income Canadians. We do not believe that this is the right process and we are going to continue to support Canadians.

• (1505)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, this Prime Minister is out of touch and Canadians are out of money. The Liberals' out-of-control spending has caused inflation to reach record levels.

That is not all that is reaching record levels: More Canadians are using food banks than ever before. In fact, just last month, the food

bank in Saskatoon held a food drive, as food bank usage has reached a new record of 24,000 people monthly.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his inflationary policies so that Canadians can afford to put food on the table?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly affordability is a critically important concern for this government. We have made enormous efforts to work with Canadians to try to ensure that affordability applies to everyone in this country. Certainly we agree with the opposition that it is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

However, to talk about out of touch, we are seeing forest fires across this country that are the product of climate change. We are facing a party that has no policy on climate change; in fact, it is not even clear that Conservatives believe in climate change and the scientific reality of climate change. That is being out of touch.

* * *

[Translation]

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, was in Montreal yesterday to announce a significant contribution to social finance, not only for Quebec, but also for the rest of Canada.

Can the minister tell us more about how the social finance fund will help increase the positive impact that social purpose organizations have on our society?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we celebrated the launch of the social finance fund, a \$755-million initiative to advance the growth of the social finance market.

Social finance plays a crucial role in tackling issues such as access to affordable housing, food insecurity and poverty. By increasing access to flexible financing opportunities, the social finance fund will help social purpose organizations grow, innovate and enhance their social, economic and environmental impacts.

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax could cost each farmer \$150,000 per year, and that is before the second carbon tax comes next month. This tax on tax on tax drives up the cost of food production. It is simple math: If it costs the farmer more to grow food, it is going to cost Canadians more to feed their families, and it is going to put the future of our Canadian farms at risk. No farms, no food.

Will this government give Canadians a break and axe its carbon taxes?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this country, rage farming is not an agricultural policy.

On this side of the House, we believe in investing in farmers. We have invested \$500 million to support our agricultural sector. We have invested almost \$1 billion to support farmers' transition as they buy new equipment to lower their carbon footprint.

Climate change is real. In 2021, 30% of the grains did not make it to market. On that side of the House, they still do not have a climate plan.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we cannot fight fires with inflation—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex can begin from the top, please.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Speaker, we cannot fight fires with inflation. The government's inflation is causing the cost of food and groceries to skyrocket.

Farmers pay carbon tax to get their crops from the field to their warehouse and from their warehouse to the grocer's warehouse. Then the grocer pays carbon tax to get the food to the grocery store, and then families pay carbon tax to drive to the grocery store to buy their food. This tax on tax on tax never ends, and it is increasing the cost of our food.

There is no common sense in this, so when will the government axe the carbon tax?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, farm fuel is exempt from any price on pollution. I would encourage her to speak to canola farmers, as she would know then that the clean fuel standard is great for farmers—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: We were doing so well. I am going to ask everybody to take a deep breath.

Order.

Now, let us all listen to each other, not while we are shouting, but just while one person is speaking. Then, one person will ask a ques-

Oral Questions

tion and one person will answer. That is the way it is supposed to work.

The hon. parliamentary secretary can take it from the top, please.

• (1510)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, a noisy plan is not a climate plan.

We believe on this side of the House that farm fuels should be exempted on farms, and they are. We also believe that the clean fuel standard will bring great opportunities for farmers and especially canola farmers.

I would encourage the members on the other side, especially from out west, to have a conversation with the canola growers and see if they are supportive of this particular policy, because they are.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are at it again, trying to silence those who disagree. Because I clapped in support of a public inquiry, the Attorney General sent an email from his official account. The email outlined that he was the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. It clearly threatened my legal reputation and my professional future.

However, we as Conservatives will not be silenced. Does the Attorney General think it is acceptable to intimidate an MP and threaten his reputation because the MP supports an inquiry?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did nothing of the sort. I was deeply disappointed all week to hear Conservatives attacking the reputation of Frank Iacobucci, who is a former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and was a deputy minister of—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am trying to hear what the hon. minister has to say, but the shouting is getting louder and louder. The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo asked a question; I think he deserves an answer.

The hon. minister.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I was merely reacting to the fact that all week the Conservatives have been attacking Mr. Justice Frank Iacobucci, a former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and a former deputy minister of justice under the Conservatives under Brian Mulroney.

Oral Questions

The hon. member clapped loudly when Mr. Justice Iacobucci's name was—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Don Valley East.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-21 was designed to be part of a larger solution to mitigating gun violence here in Canada. We know that banning handguns was one part of the solution, but we also know that preventive measures can have a major impact on gun violence.

Our government is investing resources into supporting programs and working with young people to prevent them from getting involved in crime at a young age. Can the minister please share with this House some of the steps we are taking to invest in preventive programs and services directly aimed at young people?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to eradicate gun violence, we need strong laws and strong borders and strong prevention. We are rolling out a \$250-million “building safer communities” fund to address the root causes that my colleague talks about.

However, I also want to call on the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada to free his Conservative senators and free the bill. Bill C-21 is in the Senate right now. We need to read it, debate it and pass it into law so that we can save lives. It is only the Conservatives who continue to stand in the way of this legislation. All other four parties in this House passed it. Let us save lives.

* * *

LABOUR

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 port expansion is fully automated, it could cause a ripple effect across other Canadian ports that could cost thousands of jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to start again, if you do not mind. Members could pipe down a bit in their rage farming.

The Speaker: I am sorry. I was distracted. I could not hear the noise that was going on because we were trying to look at what is going on.

I am going to ask the hon. member to start from the top so that we can hear his question. I am going to ask everyone to take a deep breath and not heckle each other. Just try to be nice.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, if the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 port expansion is fully automated, it could cause a ripple effect across other Canadian ports that could cost this country thousands of jobs.

At the same time, there are very serious environmental concerns. The federal government's own review process called the environmental damage from this project permanent and irreversible.

The ILWU has reached out to the minister and expressed strong concerns on both of these fronts, yet the minister approved the

project without even reaching out to them. How can this minister say that he is on the side of working people when he ignores the concerns of Canada's largest port workers union—

● (1515)

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government respects and has faith in the collective bargaining process. We believe the best deals are the ones that are made and reached at the bargaining table.

The parties are negotiating with the help of a federal mediator right now. We have confidence in the parties' ability to work together to reach a deal as quickly as possible.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my office has been flooded with calls. Canadians expected to see the Canada disability bill arrive today because that is what the government said last week, but the Liberals are still stalling. They did not keep their promise. This benefit will bring relief to those who need it the most, the thousands of Canadians living in poverty with a disability.

Will the Liberals finally keep their promise and adopt this new benefit before we rise for the summer to ensure Canadians get the urgent help they need?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Canada, no person with a disability should live in poverty. That is why we are creating the Canada disability benefit and income supplement, which has the potential to seriously reduce poverty and increase financial security for hundreds of thousands of working-age persons with disabilities.

In February, this House unanimously adopted Bill C-22, and Bill C-22 is now on the calendar for debate tomorrow. We are looking forward to getting this legislation past the finish line.

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord on a point of order.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: Whereas French is one of Canada's two official languages and the Constitution Act, 1982, enshrines the equality of both official languages within the Parliament of Canada; whereas documents tabled in the House of Commons and in committees must be made available to the members of those parliamentary bodies; the House therefore calls on the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency to suspend all business until the documents produced by the Public Order Emergency Commission chaired by the Hon. Paul Rouleau are translated and made available in both official languages to the members of the committee.

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

An hon. member: Nay.

[*English*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands just said something unparliamentary to me about having a thin skin and about being offended given what the Minister of Justice did, which was to threaten my professional future and threaten my legal reputation. This is not funny. He should be apologizing and withdrawing that comment forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for reflecting on the fact that the member has a thin skin.

• (1520)

The Speaker: That is not an apology.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

That is more of a mockery than an apology. I am going to ask the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands to apologize like he means it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:20 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[*Translation*]

Call in the members.

• (1530)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 372*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Ali
Anand	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bains	Baker
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bérubé
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joneas	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Casey
Chabot	Chagger
Chahal	Champagne
Champoux	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Collins (Victoria)
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Desbiens	Desilets
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Dong	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gaheer
Garon	Garrison
Gaudreau	Gazan
Gerretsen	Gill
Gould	Green
Guilbeault	Hajdu
Hanley	Hardie
Hepfner	Holland
Housefather	Hughes
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Idlout
Ien	Jaczek
Johns	Joly
Jones	Jowhari
Julian	Kayabaga
Kelloway	Khalid
Khera	Koutrakis
Kusmierczyk	Kwan
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larouche

Routine Proceedings

Lattanzio	Lauzon	Jeneroux	Kelly
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier	Kitchen	Kmiec
Lemire	Lightbound	Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Long	Longfield	Kurek	Kusie
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Lake	Lantsman
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacGregor	Lawrence	Lehoux
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney	Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Martinez Ferrada	Masse	Lloyd	Lobb
Mathysen	May (Cambridge)	Maguire	Martel
May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)	McDonald (Avalon)	Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McGuinty	McKay	McLean	Melillo
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod	Moore	Morantz
McPherson	Mendès	Morrison	Motz
Mendicino	Miao	Muys	Nater
Michaud	Miller	O'Toole	Patzer
Morrice	Morrissey	Paul-Hus	Perkins
Murray	Naqvi	Petipas Taylor	Redekopp
Ng	Noormohamed	Powlowski	Rempel Garner
Normandin	O'Connell	Robillard	Richards
Oliphant	Pauzé	Rogers	Rood
Perron	Petitpas Taylor	Sahota	Scheer
Plamondon	Powlowski	Samson	Seeback
Rayes	Robillard	Scarpaleggia	Shibley
Rodriguez	Rogers	Serré	Shiple
Romanado	Sahota	Shanahan	Soroka
Saks	Samson	Sidhu (Brampton East)	Stewart
Sarai	Scarpaleggia	Simard	Stubbs
Schiefke	Serré	Singh	Tochor
Sgro	Shanahan	Sousa	Uppal
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)	St-Onge	Vecchio
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard	Tassi	Vien
Sinclair-Desgagné	Singh	Thériault	Vis
Sorbara	Sousa	Thompson	Wagantall
St-Marie	St-Onge	Trudel	Waugh
Sudds	Tassi	Valdez	Williams
Taylor Roy	Thériault	van Koeverden	Zimmer — 115
Therrien	Thompson	Vandenbeld	
Trudeau	Trudel	Villemure	
Turnbull	Valdez	Weiler	
Van Bynen	van Koeverden	Yip	
Vandal	Vandenbeld	Zarrillo	
Vignola	Villemure		
Virani	Weiler		
Wilkinson	Yip		
Zahid	Zarrillo		
Zuberi — 207			

NAYS

Members

Aboultatif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Berthold	Bezan
Block	Bragdon
Brassard	Brock
Calkins	Caputo
Carrie	Chambers
Chong	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Deltell
d'Entremont	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Ferreri	Findlay
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback

PAIRED

Members

Bergeron	Bibeau
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Liepert
Sajjan	Savard-Tremblay — 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix on a point of order.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Speaker, I honestly had an issue with my phone, which is defective. I am waiting for a replacement one. I was unable to vote remotely. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to apply my vote.

The Speaker: Does the House agree with the member's proposal?

It is agreed.

The hon. member is therefore voting in favour of the motion.

• (1535)

[English]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED BREACH OF GOVERNMENT OBLIGATION TO APPOINT OFFICER OF PARLIAMENT—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the question of privilege raised on June 5 by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes concerning the vacancy in the position of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

In his intervention, the member alleged that the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner had been hampered in conducting investigations by the government's failure to appoint a new commissioner. By extension, the member contended that the ongoing vacancy impeded him and the House in the performance of their parliamentary duties.

To support this assertion, he referenced proceedings in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, where officials from the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner indicated that they are limited in their ability to initiate or conclude investigations, until the position of commissioner is filled.

[Translation]

As described at pages 239 to 241 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is appointed by the Governor in Council, after consultations with the leaders of all recognized parties in the House. This appointment process is clearly defined in the Parliament of Canada Act.

The House and its committees do play a role in the ratification process in accordance with Standing Order 111.1, but not in the initiation of the appointment process. This authority clearly belongs to the government by statute. The commissioner is an officer of this House who plays an important role in the administration of the conflict of interest regime prescribed by law and by our Standing Orders. It would, of course, serve the interests of all members to have the position filled promptly.

[English]

As to whether the ongoing vacancy constitutes a prima facie question of privilege, it is a well-established practice that the Chair needs to be satisfied that the matter is raised in the House at the earliest opportunity, while clearly illustrating what breaches of privilege or contempts have occurred.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, states at page 145:

The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House. Therefore, the Member must satisfy the Speaker that he or she is bringing the matter to the attention of the House as soon as practicable after becoming aware of the situation. When a Member has not fulfilled this important requirement, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is not a prima facie question of privilege.

The Chair did not hear an explanation as to why this matter should take priority of debate now. The vacancy referenced has been an ongoing matter for some time. Therefore, I cannot find a prima facie question of privilege at this time.

Privilege

I thank members for their attention.

ALLEGED INTIMIDATION OF MEMBER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to respond to the question of privilege raised yesterday by the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo respecting the message that was sent to him by the Minister of Justice.

I would start off by providing some context. The members across the aisle have had no qualms at all about casting aspersions to attempt to destroy the integrity of any member or private citizen who may not agree with their stance on any given issue. They do this virtually on a daily basis in this place. The member rose to applaud an attack on the integrity and the impartiality of the Hon. Justice Iacobucci. Not only is the justice a former member of our highest court and an eminent Canadian, but he is also a respected member of the Italian Canadian community who serves as a role model for many aspiring lawyers but specifically Italian Canadians.

When the member rose to applaud disparaging remarks concerning Justice Iacobucci during Italian Heritage Month, the Minister of Justice sent a message to the member to tell him that this disrespect would be shared with members of the Italian Canadian community. What happens in question period is public and viewable by all Canadians. The minister has stated publicly that his message was in respect of telling Italian communities about this flagrant example of disrespect for an eminent Canadian.

Members must be taken at their word in this place. What the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo believes about the motives of the Minister of Justice is pure speculation and is easily dismissed by the public statement about these events in public. Speculation does not amount to a prima facie question of privilege. The facts are indeed clear.

A member opposite directly attacked the integrity of the Hon. Justice Iacobucci, who is not here to defend himself. That member's colleague, the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, rose to applaud his abhorrent attack. Instead of reflecting on his actions, the member jumped to conclusions without any facts in his possession. That is not something lawyers normally do. Lawyers seek out the facts. A simple conversation with the minister would have cleared this matter and the intentions of the minister.

A public display of disrespect is public. A member may share this with members of his cultural community. This is yet one more example of the thin skin of the members across the aisle and of their attempts to impute motives to other hon. members designed for the sole purpose of weaponizing questions of privilege to delay the government's legislative agenda. This allegation has no basis in fact and is pure speculation.

Members must be taken at their word. Any unsubstantiated allegation has been refuted by the minister.

Government Orders

• (1540)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. member for his information and will certainly take it into consideration with the other information that was previously provided.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill S-8, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to make consequential amendments to other Acts and to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of Motion No. 1.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that if they want to have a debate, they do not have the floor. If they want to have a conversation—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order on both sides of the House.

It is not helpful when members are trying to have debates on issues that are not currently before the House. If they want to have discussions on that, they should take them out.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise to enter into debate with respect to Bill S-8. People may ask what Bill S-8 would do. The bill would make changes to sanctions related to immigration enforcement by bringing the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act into line with the SEMA. It would make sanctioned individuals, including previously sanctioned individuals, inadmissible to Canada.

Ukraine has also asked Canada to take this step with regard to Russians on our sanctions list. At present, the great breach of international peace and security is the primary mechanism that Canada is sanctioning Russian individuals under, and that does not currently trigger the inadmissibility provisions. That is why we have Bill S-8 before us, which is meant to fix this.

I should note, though, that what Bill S-8 would not do is address the absence of parliamentary oversight of our sanctions regime or enforcement in areas that are not immigration related; that is, the seizing of assets. Therefore, a lot of work needs to be done to fix our sanctions regime if Bill S-8 is to pass.

The bill would not fix the challenge of clarity either, for example, why the government adds some names but not others and for what reasons. Further, public communication and access to sanction lists is still subpar. We need a comprehensive review of Canada's sanctions regime. The NDP has proposed a study at the foreign affairs committee on Canada's sanctions regime, and we hope that study will take place this winter.

Canada's foremost expert on sanctions policy, Andrea Charron, has said:

While there is nothing wrong with highlighting in the Immigration and Refugee Act that inadmissibility due to sanctions is possible, this repeats a pattern whereby Canada tinkers on the margins of legislation without addressing core policy and process issues. If we are to continue to sanction autonomously with allies, we need to fix fundamental issues of policy and process.

This has been put on the public record by experts, so the bill is a step in the right direction, to be sure.

We are debating a bill that is supported by all the parties in the House, but what is happening is the Conservatives are trying to use parliamentary tools to delay progress of the work in the House. Not only are we debating this bill that everybody supports and wants to get done, but the Conservatives have moved an amendment to change the title of the bill. This is a tactic. In fact, at this moment, what we are technically debating is a motion to change the title of the bill. I have seen this play over and over again in this Parliament.

Last week, we had debate on the child care bill. What did the Conservatives want to do? We were debating the child care bill until midnight, a bill that we wanted to move forward to ensure that child care provisions were made available to Canadians. Instead of doing that, we were debating a motion to change the title of the bill. That is what we are doing again.

I find it distressing that those are the tactics on which the Conservatives repeatedly rely. The sole purpose of that is not to talk about the substance of the issues and the importance of the issue and how we can improve the legislation or how we can improve the situation for the people who need the changes, but, rather, it is a tactic that is deployed by the Conservatives to upset progress in the House, all for partisan politics. It is all for the Conservatives' own political motivation. It has nothing to do with the work that is really important for the people.

• (1545)

With respect to the issue around sanctions, why is this so important? We need to ensure that inadmissibility is in place. We are talking about Russians who have waged this illegal war against Ukrainians. We are also talking about other countries that are faced with sanctions as well.

However, the ineffectiveness of our sanction regime has been highlighted over and over again. In addition to the inadmissibility piece, we need to also look at the issue around sanctioning that applies to assets as well. So far, what we have seen with respect to that arena is that very little effort has been made. It has not been effective.

We are now talking about foreign interference as it relates to China. For members of Parliament, including myself, who have been targeted by the Communist Chinese Party, there is a question about sanctions applying to China as well that needs to be in play. There are a number of different countries for which we need an effective sanctioning regime.

Government Orders

I would urge the members of the House, the Conservatives included, to stop playing games. Let us get on with the work. We are here to do this work and move forward. It is important to pass this bill and bring forward accountability measures for sanctioning regimes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate a number of the member's comments. For me, it is very much about human rights and the role that Canada can play in regard to that.

What I have witnessed over the years is that Canada far exceeds, based on the population, the type of influence we have on the international scene. That is one of the reasons why it is important we support legislation of this nature and provide the sanctions.

Could the member provide her thoughts on that issue?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, we need to actually get the proper sanction regime and one that is effective. Bill S-8 is a step in the right direction. Canada plays an important role, not just in the situation with Russia but for other countries as well, such as addressing, for example, Iran, the Iranian regime and the atrocious human rights violations. We need to bring those measures in place for other countries, such as South Sudan, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and I could go on with a list. It is very important for Canada to get our sanctions regime in order.

• (1550)

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question related to Bill S-8 is on my private member's bill, Bill C-281. The NDP, supported by the Conservatives, introduced the idea in the amendment to have an international human rights strategy. Unfortunately, the Liberals decided to shoot that idea down. I still think it is a great one. Does the member agree with me?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, there is much work to be done. Of course, my colleague, the member for Edmonton Strathcona, is the foreign affairs critic. She has been doing this important work at committee. She intends to bring forward additional work through the committee. I hope that the motions she will be bringing forward, the ideas that she has proposed on the floor there, are followed up on and studies are completed, so we can move forward in completing this important work.

It does not matter what party we are talking about. We are talking about human rights and it is above partisan politics. Let us put our minds and hearts together to do the right thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for her speech on the important bill we are debating, Bill S-8.

Of course, I agree with her that we must try to raise the level of debate and move away from partisanship, particularly when it comes to important bills.

Where I tend to disagree with her is on the moralizing we hear from the New Democratic Party. Today they are telling us that we

should stop playing games. I would remind people and parliamentarians present in the House that the NDP helped the Liberals pass 26 time allocation motions to shorten the debates.

This shows a lack of consideration and respect for democracy and for the parliamentarians who are elected to do that work. Our job is to come and talk and debate bills.

My question for my colleague is simple: Does she think democracy is a game?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, that is precisely it. Some parties in the House are filibustering debate.

What we are talking about here is a motion to change the title, adding time to the debate so that we are taking away important time to deal with other issues. This is repeated ad nauseam, over and over again, to the point where we have to move forward on things, for example, the budget bill, to ensure that people get the dental care supports they need and the various other supports included in the budget. That is the reality.

We do not like to cut off debate, but in the face of some parties wanting to play partisan games and delaying the passage of important bills, we have no other choice. We have to get the job done. Therefore, I urge all members of the House to stop playing games. Let us get on with the job we are supposed to be here to do and get the bills passed.

If members have legitimate questions to ask, they should ask them and debate them, not play games to delay the passage of bills for the purpose of partisan politics.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is the odd occasion in which I agree wholeheartedly with what the member opposite says inside the chamber. I really appreciated her comments on why it is so incredibly important that we recognize legislation for what it is and, yes, have some debate on it. However, to intentionally prevent the passage of legislation does not do a service to Canadians.

Bill S-8 is a good example. My understanding is that we are going to get fairly good support for Bill S-8, whether that is from the Conservatives, Bloc members or New Democrats. I am not too sure about the Greens on Bill S-8, but I assume they are supporting it. I get a thumbs-up from the leader of the Green Party. I believe there is fairly wide support for the initiative.

Even on legislation the Conservatives support, they want to push the envelope in preventing the legislation from passing. The Conservative Party members are familiar with that particular tactic. When they were in government, the Conservative majority government instituted time allocation all the time.

An hon. member: And boy did you complain.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member opposite said I complained. In fact, the record will clearly show that I stood up, even when I was in opposition, and said that time allocation is a necessary tool in order to get legislation passed. It is unfortunate that, at times, some opposition parties feel that it does not matter whether they support the legislation or how timely the legislation might be; it is more important to use legislation in virtually all situations as a mechanism to prevent the government from passing legislation.

Bill S-8 is legislation that should be, relatively speaking, non-controversial. If we take a look at the issue of human rights violations and canvass our constituents about it, a vast majority would be very upset at the notion of the human rights violations taking place anywhere in the world. I would suggest that over 95% of them would be upset.

I am very proud of the fact that, a few years back, we established a human rights museum in my home city of Winnipeg. For many residents, this amplifies the issue of human rights.

We have had members of Parliament, both today and in the past, who have been strong advocates in fighting against those who inflict human rights violations, whether it is an individual, a state or any other organization taking away basic human rights. I think of such individuals as Irwin Cotler and David Matas, whom I had the honour and privilege to know, at least in part, and whose passion I was able to see. I heard them articulate why it is so important that, no matter which political party one belongs to, we get behind it as legislators and do what we can. Ideally, we should do so collectively.

I think of the Magnitsky act and the push to ultimately get that into law. As members will know, one can come up with an idea, but it can sometimes be a challenge to put it into law. Fortunately, through the support of all parties inside the House, through a private member's bill, we were ultimately able to make that happen. The desire was there, and justifiably so.

● (1555)

Take a look at Canada and the world. I will direct this point to the speaker before me. Canada's population is about 38 million people, yet look at the positioning that Canada has around the world among the 150-plus countries and states. Canada carries a great deal of influence throughout the world. We are a country in very high demand, in terms of people wanting to come to Canada. We constantly get people coming on visits to Ottawa to meet with parliamentarians, civil society and different organizations. We have organizations scattered throughout the country that provide all forms of humanitarian aid for countries around the world.

I believe that Canada is a leader in many different areas, including the area of human rights. It is something that we can all take a sense of pride and ownership in, I would suggest, no matter what political party we are part of. We see that in some of the legislative debates that we have had. I have always appreciated having debate and the take-note debate, for example, in regard to what is taking place in Ukraine. When we talk about the sanctions in Bill S-8, the bill would ensure that there is a direct consequence to individuals who have been sanctioned by the government, so that they will never be able to enter Canada. If members look at past emergency de-

bates or the take-note debate on the issue of Ukraine alone, members would find that there have been many hours spent debating it over the years.

I was in opposition in 2014, when there was the uprising that was taking place in the Maidan, or Independence Square, in Kyiv. I had the opportunity to go over there on a visit and witness some of the things first-hand, as I know many of my colleagues have done.

I have heard the horror stories about the human rights violations that are taking place, whether by the Russian regime or the Iranian regime. It is terrifying. The discrimination based on gender is disgusting, not to mention the atrocities with regard to issues of torture, such as a war that is ongoing and unjustified.

That is why we have this legislation. From my perspective, it is a complement to the Magnitsky Act. We are saying we want to ensure that there are sanctions against these people who are causing all these issues of a horrific nature, but not only that, Bill S-8 says that we do not want them in Canada. I think that is a powerful statement. I think it adds value to what I suggest is Canada's place in the world, where we are reflecting true Canadian values, which are there to protect human rights. That is why, when I look at this particular piece of legislation, unless the Conservative Party or another party is opposing it, I do not necessarily see why we would cause a delay like the one we witnessed this morning.

● (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague seems awfully pleased with how Canada is dealing with the human rights issue. We know that this is documented in Canada. Take, for example, the crisis in Iran. We know that there are Iranian nationals who are here and who are friends of the regime in Iran, a regime that is currently violating women's rights. I do not think that I need to paint a picture. There are some pretty horrific images making the rounds on social media.

With regard to China, the government is still tolerating Chinese police stations here in Canada. The RCMP's reports on that are contradictory. Recently, the mayor of Brossard told the media that a city councillor had been elected with the help of the Chinese regime on social media. The Brossard city council is extremely uncomfortable with that situation. The mayor talked about it in the paper. She was trying to find out from the RCMP what to do with one of her city councillors, who, as we know, was elected with the help of the Chinese government.

Could my colleague enlighten us on what is happening on that issue?

● (1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I have absolute confidence in the system we have here in Canada. That includes our national police service and the security agencies that we have.

Government Orders

I believe it is up to those agencies and those law enforcement officers to do the work that is necessary; where they find violations, there would be charges, and offices would be shut down. I do not ever want to see Canada take a position where, for example, a few members stand up and say, “Well, that is this. Now we want the police to go and shut it down.”

We have to have confidence in our security agencies to ensure that our interests are best served.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things I have been very concerned about is whether our sanction regime is actually being enforced. The easy part of sanctions is to put people on the list. The hard part is to actually enforce those sanctions and to make sure that they are transparent and enforced, as well as that we are following through with action.

We know, because we heard testimony from the RCMP at the foreign affairs committee, that there are very few resources allocated to our sanction enforcement in this country.

Would the member agree that if the government is just putting names on a list and does not actually enforce those sanctions, it is just committing political theatre?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let me add a different perspective.

When the government puts legislation in place, we cannot necessarily expect that, virtually overnight, everything will work the way in which people envisioned. We have to allow for other protocols to be put into place. At the end of the day, we hope those protocols ensure that it is meeting the objectives that were put in place, or believed to be there, when the legislation was enacted.

In other words, I think it might take time in order to put Canadians' desires into effect. It might take more than one or two years. We cannot just pass legislation and think that it is going to happen overnight.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the point made by the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona. We should recognize that, when we talk about refugee protections in this place, we are normally talking about protecting people who need to come to Canada.

There is an option in this legislation, which is good for humanitarian exceptions, if somebody is otherwise inadmissible but has a profound case for why they should come to Canada.

This very significant legislation, which is important, would recognize that certain people, for human rights or criminal reasons, are not welcome in this country, are inadmissible and are under sanction. We need to follow up on making sure that if they are sanctioned, they do not come here.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I believe, ultimately, that we do not want anyone who has been sanctioned coming to Canada. That is the primary purpose and the objective of this legislation, or at least one of them.

To that end, I would expect that those who are responsible for the administration would understand what is being brought forward and passed by parliamentarians, which reflects the will of Canadians.

Those responsible are our law enforcement agencies, our border control officers and our civil service, which is second to no other in the world.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to get my remarks on Bill S-8 in Hansard today.

We know this bill is about sanctions and the sanction regime of this country. Sanctions are an important tool the government can use to deal with bad actors in the world.

One thing to note about recognizing the sovereignty of nations, as we want our sovereignty to be recognized, is the reality that we cannot enforce our laws in other countries. What we can do, though, is deal with other countries as entire entities or with individuals if they choose to come to Canada.

There is a whole host of reasons we would use sanctions. Most often, as we have seen lately, countries that violate human rights are subject to Canadian sanctions. Countries that do not respect the borders of other countries also get sanctions. Countries that are threatening to Canada, although maybe not directly, would be sanctioned too. We also sanction individuals. We may sanction folks who have committed heinous crimes in other countries that our courts have no jurisdiction over.

This tool has been used for many years, and in my time here in Parliament, we have improved, enhanced and worked to increase the sanctioning abilities of Canada. I am talking about the Magnitsky act. When I first came here, the Magnitsky law was passed, and more recently the name was changed to the Magnitsky act to better reflect what we are talking about here.

Putting sanctions on particular countries is something the government has the power to do, and it does do that from time to time. One is banning folks from coming here. I do not know if members know this, but I am living under a sanction. I am one of the Canadians who have been banned from Russia. I do not think it was an overly effective sanction, as I was not planning to go to Russia anytime soon, but nonetheless, I am being sanctioned by Russia. In the same way, through sanctions, Canada will ban people coming from particular parts of the world from participating in Canadian society or visiting their family members who live in Canada. That is something Bill S-8 attempts to achieve. It would prevent folks on a sanctions list who are from a country being sanctioned from coming to and visiting Canada.

What is interesting about all of this is that it does not seem to be a problem. When folks came to the Senate committee, they noted that there did not appear to be any attempts by people who are sanctioned to try to come to Canada. In the same way, with me being sanctioned and made a *persona non grata* in Russia, there is no major threat of me breaking the sanction due to the fact that I am not planning to go to Russia anytime soon. Folks who are sanctioned by Canada often are not travelling to Canada. It was therefore noted at committee that this appears to be a solution in search of a problem. It appears the government is attempting to look like it is doing something when in fact there is no issue to be seen here.

Government Orders

This bill does theoretically ensure that folks who are under a sanction do not come to Canada, but at the same time, it gives dramatic leeway to the minister. Once again, this is where we run into trouble with the idea of the rule of law. The law should be written down so that folks are able to read it, and there should not be ambiguity in how it is enforced. When ministerial discretion is given to a minister, one case may be judged and ruled on differently than another, which is the challenge that folks have brought forward. This bill introduces some ambiguity as to who will be allowed into Canada and who will not be allowed into Canada.

• (1610)

I understand that there are times when we are challenged by the rule of law given that it is written rigidly. We can see that what is legal and what is right and just sometimes come into conflict. In that case, I imagine we could allow for ministerial discretion, but it will be a challenge for folks to bring this to the minister in a uniform way. Folks who are facing the same situation will depend on their connections and will depend on who they know in order to get an audience with the minister and get the minister's discretion to come into force, either to prevent folks from coming into Canada or to get around a particular sanction in a particular country.

There is some cause for concern that, once again, perhaps this is another piece of legislation where the rule of law is being undermined by ministerial discretion. We have seen this before with the Liberals. They do not necessarily do their homework when they are designing laws. They will put together a piece of legislation that says something nice at the very top and then turns out to be basically a blank piece of paper underneath. We have seen this before. Then they will say, "Trust us. We will write it in the regulations when we get to the regulations."

We have seen this with their child care bill. We have seen this with their dental care program. We have also seen this with their disability benefit. The disability benefit regime is, in my opinion, probably the best case, or the worst case depending on how we look at it, to show how the government does not do the hard work of governing with legislation. Rather, it says, "We want to put this program in place, but trust us; we will get it right once we get there."

We do not have any criteria on eligibility. We do not know who is going to get it. We do not know how this new program that is yet to be designed will impact the average Canadian. To some degree, that is what we see with Bill S-8 as well. It is governing by ministerial edict. It is governing without regard for what the law has written down.

All of that is a concern, but I want to bring this back to the point from folks at committee. They mentioned that there has not been, as far as they can tell, any attempt by somebody under Canadian sanctions to try to flout and get around those sanctions to come to Canada. That in particular is, I think, interesting since the government spent time on this bill.

The government will often accuse us, the Conservatives, of wasting time in this place. We are the official opposition. It is our job to scrutinize bills. It is our job to ensure that time is spent debating them, listening to Canadians from across the country with different

perspectives and outlining problems that may be in legislation and problems that may be concerning to Canadians.

This is an interesting piece of legislation, as there has not been a case the government can point to, or a story, where somebody who has been under sanction has gained access to Canada through some of these measures. What I can say is that the government has let folks into Canada who have not been under sanction but who probably should not have come to Canada. I am thinking of one of the generals of the Sri Lankan army, who is responsible for a significant number of deaths in the Tamil community. The Tamil community was very upset that he was allowed in.

These are some of the things I am concerned about with this bill. I am looking forward to the discussion.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Peace River—Westlock. We both care deeply about this important issue that affects human rights.

To me, this bill is more important than ever.

On Saturday, I participated in a demonstration in support of women and girls in Iran. People told me that there should be sanctions against this religious regime, which keeps women in a state of subservience and inferiority.

This morning, I attended a meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, standing in for my colleague, the foreign affairs critic. The topic was the conflict in Ukraine, with a focus on terrorist groups like the Wagner Group and the horrible crimes being committed. Witnesses talked about women being used as sexual weapons in this conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

It is important to take action and send a clear message. The sanctions need to work. Canada must not be a haven for these criminals.

• (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I think the member is talking about the use of sanctions. The use of sanctions is very important, but I do not think this bill affects the use of sanctions whatsoever.

We need to ensure that sanctions are put in place on the correct individuals and are then enforced. I am sanctioned by Russia in that I am not allowed to visit Russia, but that sanction is not necessarily of concern to me because I am not visiting Russia. In the same way, we sanction folks and say they are not welcome in Canada, but there do not seem to be many cases of folks who are banned from Canada attempting to access Canada.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have been very welcoming to the Ukrainian refugees fleeing the brutal invasion by Vladimir Putin's dictatorial regime. However, compared to many European countries, Canada is not taking in that many refugees.

The NDP believes we could be doing more in some very specific situations, including taking in LGBTQ refugees from Iran, Saudi Arabia or, more recently, Sudan, where certain sexual orientations, including gay and lesbian, have been criminalized in an extremely violent way.

Does my colleague think that we should be taking in more refugees from the LGBTQ community?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, just this morning, I was on a call with members of the foreign affairs committee of Latvia. They were congratulating Canada on our refugee settlement efforts. They noted that Canada was one of the best countries in the world for refugee resettlement.

I take issue with the whole premise of the member's question. I think Canada does a great job of accommodating refugee claimants and settling refugees here in Canada, and I am very proud of the efforts that Canada has made.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to speak at third reading of Bill S-8, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts and to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations.

I am very interested in this subject because, early on in my career, when I was a student and a community worker, I worked with refugees a lot and I also worked in human rights. It was very hard sometimes. Our work was impacted by cases of people entering Canada under dubious or fraudulent pretexts. It was very disheartening to see these people, who had committed human rights violations and other serious offences in their own country, find refuge here in Canada. I think it is very important for Canada to use every tool at its disposal to punish all those responsible for violations of international law, such as human rights abuses.

As members know, sanctions have proven to be effective foreign policy instruments to hold bad actor regimes accountable for their blatant disregard for the rules-based international order. The government may choose to use sanctions in situations relating to a grave breach of international peace and security, gross and systematic violations of human rights, and significant acts of corruption. In reaction to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the most recent developments in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Canada has imposed a series of individual and economic sanctions.

Sanctions may be enacted through a number of instruments, including the United Nations Act, the Special Economic Measures Act and the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act.

Under our legislation, sanctions against individuals and entities can include a dealings ban, which is effectively an asset freeze, and

restrictions or prohibitions on trade, financial transactions or other economic activity. Canadians are also prohibited from dealing with sanctioned individuals, effectively freezing their Canadian assets. This tool to freeze the assets of those who have committed acts that violate human rights is really effective. It is incredible. Freezing their assets really gets their attention.

Canada's immigration system has a strong global reputation, in part due to its well-balanced enforcement system. For nearly 20 years, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA, has worked in tandem with our sanctions legislation to ensure that bad actors are found inadmissible to Canada.

The IRPA defines the applicable criteria for all foreign nationals seeking to enter or remain in Canada, including grounds of inadmissibility that would lead an application by a foreign national for a visa or entry to Canada to be refused. In the case of the inadmissibility provisions of the IRPA as they relate to sanctions, decisions are relatively straightforward. If an individual is explicitly identified under one of the sanctions' triggers, then they will be found inadmissible to Canada under the IRPA on that basis alone.

• (1625)

However, inadmissibility provisions of the IRPA as currently written do not fully align with all grounds for imposing sanctions under the Special Economic Measures Act, or SEMA.

In 2017, two new sanctions-related inadmissibility criteria were brought into force by the Senate bill, Bill S-226. Bill S-226 ensured that foreign nationals sanctioned under the SEMA were inadmissible to Canada, but only in circumstances of gross and systematic human rights violations and systematic acts of corruption.

This approach meant that foreign nationals sanctioned under other provisions, such as "a grave breach of international peace and security", which has been frequently used in sanctions imposed in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, were not inadmissible to Canada. In other words, this means that Russian individuals sanctioned under the SEMA may nevertheless continue to have unfettered access to travel to, enter or remain in Canada, unless they are inadmissible for other reasons. This is unacceptable.

As we know, Parliament previously identified this as a legislative gap in Canada's sanctions regime. In April 2017, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development released a report that recommended that the IRPA be amended. The objective was to designate all persons sanctioned under the SEMA as inadmissible to Canada.

Government Orders

That is what is proposed in Bill S-8. The proposed amendments would ensure that all inadmissibility ground relating to sanctions are applied in a cohesive and coherent manner. Bill S-8 will align the sanctions regime with inadmissibility to Canada so that Russian individuals and entities, which were recently sanctioned because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Iranian individuals and entities, which were sanctioned for supporting terrorism and their systematic and blatant human rights violations, are inadmissible to Canada.

These amendments are very important because they would enable the Canada Border Service Agency and officials at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to refuse to issue visas.

These important amendments would ensure sanctions have meaningful consequences from both an economic perspective and in terms of immigration and access to Canada. In adopting these measures, Canada would be sending a very strong message to the world that those who violate human rights are not welcome in our country. The Government of Canada will continue to stand firmly against human rights abuses abroad, and we will hold both Russia and all other bad actor regimes accountable for their actions. At the same time, the government remains firmly committed to protecting the safety and security of all residents here on Canadian soil.

I know I am almost out of time, but I want to say that this is a very important bill for all political parties in the House of Commons as well as for my constituents in Châteauguay—Lacolle. We believe in justice, and we want justice. For that reason, I implore all hon. members of this House to support this important and timely bill.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked a lot about the bill being clear about making people inadmissible on the basis of their being sanctioned, or an entity that they belonged to being sanctioned, or a country being sanctioned, but the bill also includes some ministerial overrides.

Could she talk a little bit about the breadth of those overrides and the ministerial powers for overriding what would normally be a sanction that would make someone inadmissible? How much latitude and how much power would the bill give to the minister?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, it is important in Bill S-8 that we have the ability to have coordination among the different legislative pieces that are there to ensure that undesirables are not able to stay in Canada.

Once in a while there will be a need to proceed on a case-by-case basis, and I think that in that regard, ministerial oversight would still be required. However, what I like very much about this bill is that it brings together all of these pieces of legislation to deliver a clear message of what we will not accept here in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague seems to think Canada is tough and imposes sanctions on regimes and individuals that violate human rights around the world.

We recently passed a motion recognizing the genocide against the Uyghur community in Xinjiang, China. However, we continue to import products from that region. The United States dealt with the problem differently: It assumes that any product manufactured in that region is associated with human rights violations.

Does my colleague think Canada should adopt the same policy? We give no one any chances, and we no longer buy products from that region?

• (1635)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's suggestion is very interesting.

In this case, these individuals have been identified as the perpetrators of certain reprehensible acts that are contrary to our laws. As for a general policy of some kind, I think this is more of an economic policy issue. It is very interesting. I know Canadians and Quebecers already pay close attention to the origin of the products they buy at the dollar store.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my problem continues to be on the implementation of our sanction regime. Of course, there should be no one in this House who wants people who have been sanctioned to be able to come to Canada, such as people who have committed human rights abuses or perhaps taken part in the illegal war in Ukraine and the genocide against the Ukrainian people. However, the problem is that the bill would do very little to fix the sanction regime, which provides no clarity to parliamentarians and provides no transparency.

We have asked time and time again about the seized assets, and I have brought a question forward through the Order Paper on this aspect. The government has made quite a big show out of saying it is going to be using those assets to help Ukraine rebuild. However, we have not been able to get any information from the government on what those seized assets are.

Why does that member believe the government is finding it so difficult to share that information, and why is the number of assets seized so incredibly low?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I certainly respect the work of my hon. colleague in this area as well.

What I like about this bill is that it comes out of a study that was done in the foreign affairs committee in 2017. We know that things happened between 2017 and now, but it was a very comprehensive way to bring forth this kind of legislation. I am glad to see that it does have the support of, I believe, most members in this House, and certainly there is more work to be done.

[Translation]

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

Government Orders

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach, Disaster Assistance; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment; the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, Persons with Disabilities.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to rise in the House today and offer my thoughts with respect to Bill S-8, a bill aimed primarily at amending the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other acts, including the Emergencies Act, to ensure that those whom Canada has sanctioned as a result of the war in Ukraine, and others, cannot claim sanctuary in Canada.

I would like to begin by addressing three areas of my remarks this afternoon. I will start by addressing some of the weaknesses in this legislation. This will be followed by thoughts that China poses a much stronger and more relevant case for this legislation. Finally I will say why, despite the obvious flaws, I will be supporting this bill, albeit with reservations.

When this legislation was brought before the Senate last year, the senators heard from Dr. Andrea Charron. Dr. Charron is the director of the Centre for Defence and Security Studies at the University of Manitoba. She noted what many of us in this chamber and the other place have noted over the past seven and a half years, which is that the Liberals really struggle to bring coherent legislation. Whether here or in the Senate, there is a pattern of bringing forward legislation that sounds good, sounds comprehensive and sounds tough but ultimately achieves nothing. That really is the legislative legacy of the current Liberals: symbolism and sanctimony over substance, and virtue signalling rather than leading with virtue. It is legislation that is far more concerned with looking and sounding good rather than with doing good. It is legislation that is ultimately aimed at pleasing certain core constituencies of the Liberal establishment and international entities rather than at achieving real change for Canadians.

As Dr. Charron put it, this bill “repeats a pattern whereby Canada tinkers on the margins of legislation without addressing core policy and process issues.” As Senator MacDonald noted in his critique, “[Dr. Charron’s] critique of government bills is becoming all too commonplace of late. Many of the bills that the government is introducing are increasingly reactive measures, usually quick responses to external events. They are hasty measures designed to be symbolic, and it shows.”

Despite the Liberals’ claim that they are listening to the experts, which is a claim that experts whose testimony has been systematically blocked or ignored by the Liberals in committee would dispute, their actions are not based on reality, unless they mean experts in how to keep the government from collapsing under the weight of its own self-righteousness and its own ineptness. The scandal-plagued government and Prime Minister consistently bring forward legislation, when in reality, as noted by expert witnesses at committee, changes to departmental processes and policies would likely be more efficient and ultimately more effective.

This virtue-signalling, reactive approach to legislation is often coupled with creating a straw man. Rather than dealing with the real issue or causes, the current government creates a false narrative with false bogeymen and false spectres of impending disaster, and then it attacks anyone who attempts to take a critical approach to its disingenuous actions. Dr. Charron asked the Senate committee a simple question: Is this actually a problem that needs to be addressed? Has this actually happened? Are there thousands of pro-war, pro-regime Russians whom we have sanctioned breaking down the door to get into Canada? Dr. Charron was unaware of such an occurrence.

The Senate heard from Richard St. Marseille, the director general of immigration and external review policy at the CBSA. Mr. St. Marseille informed the committee that no sanctioned individual from any country is known to have entered Canada in the past five years. There have been refusals abroad, including five under the Special Economic Measures Act and 10 under the Magnitsky law, but even those refusals are out of 1,858 individuals sanctioned under SEMA and roughly 2,200 individuals listed under various sanction grounds. To put it another way, none of these individuals have entered Canada, and fewer than 1% have even attempted to do so.

We have a lot of problems with our immigration and border security systems right now, but the simple facts and figures show that this is not one of them, nor is it likely to become one of them, because, despite the Prime Minister’s belief that he has created a progressive utopia where everyone wants to live, many people in other parts of the world, including Russia, do not see it that way. Many Russians look at similar so-called progressive policies by the Zelenskyy government in Ukraine as a degradation of traditional values and, by extension, as part of their justification for invading in the first place: in order to rescue Ukrainians from what they view as western decadence and widespread immorality. A vast majority of Russians are appalled by the decline of traditional family values and what they see as the failures and weaknesses of western culture.

• (1640)

A growing number of Russians may be opposed to the war, even to President Putin, but let us not mistake that for a seismic culture shift that will suddenly embrace progressive policies and values. The notion that we are going to have a flood of Russians, especially those who have been sanctioned by Canada for supporting the regime, and who have had their assets seized, suddenly wanting and trying to come here is, frankly, ridiculous. They know they are not wanted here, and that is fine with them because they do not want to live here. There is no evidence or even indication this has been, is currently, or will become a problem.

Government Orders

We do have a pressing public safety and immigration problem, and that is with the Chinese Communist government. We have the Chinese ambassador and an untold number of agents of Beijing working to actively undermine our democracy; to intimidate and harm expats and family members, even members of the House; and to engage in espionage and cyber-attacks.

The government has consistently refused to address the actions of Beijing; better put, it has actively covered up for China's government. There are our National Microbiology Laboratory, the Chinese police stations that continue to operate despite the government's claim they do not, and the government's continuing to fund them through the Liberals' Canada summer jobs program. In fact, if one substituted China for Russia as the impetus for this legislation, it would be a lot easier to see this as a genuine effort rather than as just more virtue signalling. The opposition has been demanding, for months, the removal of the Chinese ambassador, the shutting down of these police stations, a stop to the government's covering up for its friends in Beijing, and its coming clean about what happened at the National Microbiology Laboratory and with election interference.

Instead, the government seeks to keep Canadians in the dark and distracted by creating a straw man so they will not pay attention to what the actual problem is. I really think the MO of the PMO has become to address something that has not been a problem, that is not a problem and is unlikely to become a problem, in order to distract Canadians from the myriad problems the government has created. Rather than address the illegal guns that the government has allowed to flood across the border, as used by the violent criminals it has kept out of jail, it goes after law-abiding firearm owners. Rather than go after its wealthy friends, it labels small business owners as tax cheats and goes after them. Now, rather than deal with the pressing and proven problem of Beijing, it raises the unsubstantiated spectre of an influx of sanctioned Russians.

I am not denying that Russia presents a threat to our Arctic sovereignty or to our digital infrastructure, or that the invasion of Ukraine is not a problem. It is a big problem, and Canada has gone above and beyond in our efforts to help Ukraine. However, this is Canada's Parliament, and those who poses an immediate domestic threat and should not be coming here are not the Russians; they are those from Beijing. This is really my main point here today. If we are going to pass this legislation, let us make sure we do so for the right reasons and use it against the right people. Let us use it to finally deal with Beijing, to finally deal comprehensively with the IRGC and those who are already here and pose a direct threat to Canadians and to our democracy.

With that said, as I noted at the top of my speech, despite these reservations, I will be voting in favour of this legislation. First, it would address a gap in the existing legislation that would allow IRCC to deny an individual based on international sanctions. Second, it would grant new powers to the Minister of Public Safety that would allow the minister to make a determination and issue a removal order. While any additional ministerial power, especially with the current government and its track record of shunning accountability at every turn, is a cause for concern, the opposition hopes that by removing the disingenuous excuse of so-called departmental dependence, the minister would now act in accordance

with the will of the House to remove bad actors. Third, Conservatives have always been strong supporters of sanctions and the Magnitsky law, and have been critical of cases where individuals with ties to certain organizations but who are not necessarily on the terrorism list, like members of the IRGC, have been allowed to enter and remain in Canada. The legislation would remove the government's chief excuse for failing to deal judiciously with such individuals, so there is a chance it would become useful down the road, especially once a new Conservative government cleans up the legislation.

Despite the obvious flaws, there is sufficient merit to this legislation, and I will be supporting it.

• (1645)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I certainly heard the member start off his speech by saying that he would be voting in favour of—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): An earpiece too close to the microphone causes problems for our interpreters. I want to remind members to keep those away, as well as their telephones.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I will check the seats around me. I hope that is better.

I note that the member started his speech by saying that he would be supporting the bill, but then he spent about eight of the 10 minutes talking about everything that was bad about it. The member then came back at the end and said that there are a couple of good things about it, so therefore he would be supporting it.

Does this mean that the couple of good things outweigh all the bad things, and that is why the member would be voting for it?

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, that is a great question from the parliamentary secretary. He has clearly identified that, as an opposition member, I have done my job. I have identified that the legislation itself is good and that we are going to support it, and then I used the eight minutes between the front and the end of my speech to articulate some weakness in the bill that I think needs to be addressed. I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for giving me the opportunity to clarify.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his speech, my colleague spoke about China and its current regime. I would like to follow up on what my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert spoke about earlier, namely the situation of the Uyghurs and the forced labour of Uyghur children.

Government Orders

I would like him to expand on the issue of zero tolerance. Should Canada adopt a zero-tolerance approach to everything concerning human trafficking in all its forms in Canada and also around the world?

I believe we must send a clear message. We need something that goes far enough to truly address the issue of forced labour, which especially affects the Uyghur community in China.

I would like to hear more from him about the importance of adopting a zero-tolerance approach.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, I want to recognize that the hon. member is the co-chair of the committee studying human trafficking and smuggling. I compliment her for the tremendous work she does there.

Specifically in regard to the Uyghurs in China, this is an issue that has been raised in the House many times before. One of my constituents has worked very closely with the Uyghurs in China and has seen, first-hand, how they have been rounded up and put into re-education plants, how their children have been forced into slavery in factories in China, and how we, as Canadians, have been buying some of those products. I think the media has done a pretty job of identifying some of the products that have been subsidized by forced labour.

We, as a country, need to take a hard look at that, and, where necessary, we need to sanction the individuals responsible for enslaving people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government is very good at announcing sanctions. The Liberals say they are going to punish Russian oligarchs, they are going to seize their assets, their bank accounts and freeze everything. It is taking forever, and practically nothing has been done. At one point, the Liberal government even said that it was relying on the banks to deal directly with their Russian clients to see what assets could be frozen.

What does my colleague think of the government's lack of leadership in implementing these sanctions against Russian oligarchs in any meaningful way?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

There have been lots of talk and lots of lip service around sanctioning individuals, but there has been little action. The member for Edmonton Strathcona previously mentioned that the number of assets that have actually been seized as a result of these sanctions is fairly minimal.

We did read in the paper earlier this week that a cargo plane has been seized at the Toronto Pearson international airport. The Antonov 124, which I have noticed there in my travels over the last year, has now been seized by the Canadian government, so it looks as though maybe the government is actually doing something about its sanctions.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, over the course of this debate, some of the reasons and examples that have been cited for this bill's being brought forward have to do with the Iranian regime. Why the Liberals refuse to list the IRGC as a terrorist entity is confusing.

I am wondering if my friend from Provencher would be able to highlight any further examples, related to the Iranian regime, of individuals having made their way and found safe haven in Canada, even though it appears, as has been highlighted, that they have been complicit in very serious crimes against protests and whatnot in the Iranian state.

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, we have seen examples of people who have been involved in Iran and in the IRGC who have made their way to Canada, finding sanctuary and safe haven here, and our government has refused to act, refused to sanction them and refused to remove them from our country.

This legislation would clarify that, if there is evidence to show that people have been involved in some very torturous activities or brutality against their own citizens, they could be sanctioned. Once they are sanctioned, this legislation would now give the government the ability to remove them from the country. That was a great question.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could you remind individuals, when they are giving a speech, to not to have their phones on their desktops close to the microphone when they are speaking? I can hear vibrating in my earpiece when somebody else is speaking. I did not want to raise it when the member was speaking and interrupt the flow of his speech.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I mentioned that when we were having some feedback here. When members are speaking, could members please ensure that their phones are not on the table beside them or ensure that the vibration mode is off completely if they do put them on their desks. This happens to a lot of members. It is a problem not just for those listening, but especially for the interpreters.

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Speaker, on that point of order, I think I was the culprit. I do apologize as I did receive a few texts during my speech.

• (1655)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, today, we are debating Bill S-8, which would amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act as well as regulations made under the act. It would also make changes to the Citizenship Act and the Emergencies Act.

Everyone here knows that these are important policy areas affecting our national security, our national interests and our immigration system, and that is what we have to carefully consider.

It is helpful to start out any discussion in this place, especially on these topics, by recalling what an amazing privilege it is to be Canadian. That is the reason people from all around the world want to come and start a new life in Canada. It is a blessing to live in a country where we can enjoy freedom, opportunity, security and prosperity.

Government Orders

None of those things can ever be taken for granted and if we are fortunate enough to have all of that here, despite the government's attempts to undermine them, we also have a responsibility to maintain it for ourselves and our fellow citizens. We need to ensure that Canada is always in the best position to preserve our way of life in the present and for the future. That is what we must get right.

We are dealing with a bill on an important subject, which the government decided to introduce in the other place. It already went through a first round of legislative process before it came to us. This means that instead of the usual process, we are the ones who are here to give it a sober second thought. In a way, this adds to our role as elected members of Parliament to review proposed legislation, provide oversight and act as representatives to the people.

As I understand it, Bill S-8 tries to close a gap in our immigration law. It would provide a legal framework to declare someone inadmissible or to deport the individual from Canada on the basis of international sanctions. This does not currently exist in the relevant laws. They do not specifically list international sanctions as a reason to reject applicants from permanent residency, citizenship or refugee status. If this was somehow missed, Parliament now has the opportunity to fix it.

An international sanction could come from the Canadian government or it could come from an international body of which we are a member. Either one would prevent the implicated person from legally entering or remaining in our country.

On this point, I would like to congratulate my colleagues across the way for seeming to get something right. In the time that I have been here, it has been rare thing to see something in a government bill that actually makes sense. However, this is something simple and easy enough to support, even it might be baby steps instead of bigger steps. We should all want to protect Canadians from bad actors and to stand up for our values around the world.

Having mentioned international organizations, I want to be clear right now that this aspect of the bill should not, must not and, in fact, does not weaken our sovereignty as a nation.

Despite the Liberal government's efforts to the contrary, every Canadian has a charter right to enter, remain in and leave Canada. Despite the same government's negligence and virtue-signalling over the years, we are a country that should have strong border security. It is essential for us to have control and set our own standard for whoever is allowed to enter.

With international sanctions, we are talking about foreign nationals who are involved in serious crimes or violations of human rights. In principle, this new section of the act would strengthen our ability to protect ourselves and would give us more control. There will be one less excuse for the Liberals not to take the necessary action when it comes to public safety. It will come down to whether the government uses this power and how it chooses to do so.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to pass a new law to make the problem go away, and Canadians have good reason to wonder what results will come of this. We have seen something similar to this already with the Magnitsky law.

In 2017, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act passed through Parliament unanimously so that the government could impose strong sanctions. These are the types of sanctions that are included in Bill S-8 today. However, since it came into effect, Magnitsky sanctions were starting to get used a little during the following year here and there. The point is that the government has chosen not to make much use of it even though it is can.

We are all aware that human rights violations or significant corruption did not suddenly stop happening four or five years ago either. In all that time, we have listened to people speaking out from different communities in Canada or in other countries, calling for these sanctions to be used as they were intended. Professionals and policy experts have expressed the need for it, and so Conservatives have joined with these voices to demand better.

However, as more and more time goes on, Canadians can see that they need a government that can handle these issues better than the Liberals. We could spend all day talking about these bills and we can pass them, but what good will it do if they are not enforced? That is also what has been happening with Iran and the IRGC.

● (1700)

Four and a half years ago, the Liberals voted for a Conservative motion to list the IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. That still has not happened five years later. The motion passed but the government chose to ignore it, chose to ignore the will of the House. This happened long before the current protest in Iran.

Since those started, there have been reports of hundreds of people who have been killed. Many thousands more have been arrested or detained by police and some of them have received death sentences or have been executed. Of course, the Liberals have made public statements of solidarity with the protesters, but when it comes to taking meaningful action with the motion that they originally voted for, they will not follow through in designating the IRGC. Will they at least explain what is stopping them if they agreed to do it?

It is time to stop playing with empty statements. If the Liberals really want to do something, they have to show it by their actions. We will wait to see if the Minister of Public Safety will use his authority and influence to officially list the IRGC as a terrorist entity.

I know that many of us care about the news stories we are seeing, regardless of party. I also know that we have heard from Canadians and Iranian refugees calling on the government to act decisively.

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Back in November, the Iranian community in Ottawa hosted an exhibition of photos and paintings at City Hall, which I was able to attend. It was moving to be there and to talk with people from the community who were present, people who could tell the stories of their family members back home, some of them who were in their home country, experiencing some of this abuse and some of the atrocities that were being committed against their people.

Many of the people who were there had already lost loved ones or had loved ones who were arbitrarily detained and arrested for no valid reason. Many of those people were kids or young adults, people with their whole lives ahead of them, yet their lives were taken, eliminated from this earth. They were not given the chance to live a full life.

More recently, I had the opportunity to join and speak at a rally put on by a group of Iranian Canadians called "Woman, Life, Freedom." A lot of us have heard from the community in different ways, whether it is at an event like the one in Ottawa, in our ridings or at other places across the country. Hopefully this bill will make a difference for them. We will have to see whether the Liberals decide to do anything with it.

Unfortunately, we have learned a lot of discouraging things over the past months about the government's failure to protect our national security. The Liberals have been very slow to act, or in some cases not responded to threats and foreign interference. There have been many displays of weakness for the whole world to see, whether it is our allies or hostile powers. It is unacceptable and it undermines our national security. We need to see the government use its lawful powers to put a stop to it and defend our citizens. That is what it is entrusted to do.

Despite the massive problem of inaction, it is good to see a bill that addresses any problem in our immigration system, which has been neglected by the Liberals for way too long.

I have asked the government about one of my constituents who has been waiting a year to get final approval for a foreign worker to work with his small business, and he is not alone. There is a massive backlog, with over half of the files going beyond the acceptable processing time limits by the government.

The Liberals need to stop breaking everything they touch, if they can help it. They need to get serious about fixing our immigration system. A lot of people want to live and work in our amazing country. We have so many blessings and so much potential in Canada.

Canadians are counting on their leaders to protect what we have and strengthen it for the future, strengthen it in a way that more people will want to come to our country to enjoy the fruits of our prosperity. We take that to heart on this side of the House. We are not going to let them down. We are not going to let current Canadians, future Canadians and the next generation of Canadians down either.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things that has been mentioned in a number of speeches is how the shortcomings of this regime has been demonstrated in relation to the regime change that took place, specifically the IRGC and some of the individuals involved with that revolution

and how individuals complicit in crimes were given, in some cases, citizenship and whatnot in Canada.

I wonder if the member could comment further on how those things need to be addressed so that Canada does not become a safe haven for international criminals?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, that is a very good point. Canada wants to be taken seriously on the international stage, and we used to be taken seriously. When we have loopholes that allow people who are guilty of human rights atrocities around the world to enter our country, to be given citizenship, to be allowed to take up residency and then start to fundraise to fund the acts that they are committing abroad, those human rights violations and atrocities, that needs to be stopped.

This bill starts to get us on the right track. It is a good first step, but a lot more needs to be done. I wish the bill did more. I wish it could do more, but it is a little step in the right direction.

However, the member is absolutely right. We need to be seriously focused on closing those loopholes. In that way Canada can be taken seriously when we talk about foreign affairs.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, this bill is a good opportunity to discuss the many human rights being trampled on across the world these days. One country we rarely talk about, if at all, is Haiti. Currently, Haiti is a country in turmoil, ravaged by gang-related theft, looting and murder.

There are tremendous challenges in my riding involving women who are here in Canada but whose children are still in Haiti, living in very troubled areas, with no adults around. They live with their grandmothers in villages controlled by violent street gangs. It is very difficult to bring these people here. We have had a few success stories. One or two children have been repatriated, but this is extremely difficult to do.

Obviously, it is always a bit complicated to intervene in other countries, but what could we do to resolve this atrocious crisis caused by the events in Haiti?

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for that very important question.

There is a gentleman who goes to the same church that my wife and I attend. He and his wife are very involved in the administration of adding an orphanage and a school in Haiti. He talked about some of the stories he has heard with respect to what has gone on and how these kids are being blocked from going to school. The orphanages are usually one of the last places to be affected, because everybody, even some of these bad actors, recognizes the importance of the role that orphanages play in their country. However, we are starting to see some of these places that are usually safe havens being abused by these bad actors in these countries.

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I think Canada has a role to play in stepping in and helping to alleviate the situation there, and to provide some structure so that a reliable, legitimate government can be officially set up in Haiti once again to give the power back to the people so they are not at the mercy of street gangs.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, my private member's bill, Bill C-281, provides parliamentary oversight in order for the Magnitsky act to be triggered.

Does the member believe, as I do, that sanctions are not being triggered often enough by the current government, and that there are many human rights violators who are getting off scot-free in this world?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Madam Speaker, yes, I absolutely agree with the member. His bill is a great bill, and it shows leadership in doing more. It is not just taking a baby step; it is taking a big step forward. It is a more concrete measure than even a bill as long as this one is. He was able to do that with a private member's bill, which is fantastic. I applaud him for doing so and for having the courage to do that. I thank him very much for that.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an honour to enter into debate in this place to touch on some of the very serious issues that are affecting, in this case, not just my constituents and not just Canadians from coast to coast to coast; the bill truly speaks to Canada's role in the world.

Bill S-8, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts and to amend the immigration and refugee protection regulations, speaks to a gap that has been highlighted, and I would like to explore a bit as to why this bill is being brought forward now.

The bill speaks to a gap that exists. There are examples in Canada of those who have been complicit in, profited from or may have even been involved in some of the most heinous crimes globally, whether during a revolution or during regime changes. These people have not specifically been sanctioned in many cases, but were a part of a regime that participated in massive human rights violations. Specifically, I will get to some of those examples as they apply to Iran.

We see that there is a gap. When somebody comes to this country and applies for permanent resident status or maybe even citizenship, their application will be judged based on the merits of that application, when it is quite possible that this individual may have been complicit, as I mentioned, in very serious and heinous crimes.

What the legislation purports to do, and I will get into some of the challenges, is take a baby step in the right direction, although there seems to be as much ambiguity being added to the process as there is an attempt to address some of the challenges that exist. The bill would help to ensure that this cannot happen.

I think it bears mentioning that the changes in this bill are long overdue. Given some of the loopholes that have allowed these perpetrators of human rights violations to come to Canada and the fact that these gaps may exist, the changes are long overdue.

Why did it take eight years for that to take place? As we know, a global security challenge has shaken the very foundations of what we all came to take for granted. Specifically, as I am sure members know, that is the conflict, the Russian aggression, against the state of Ukraine. All of a sudden, there it was, although certainly there have been many conflicts, including many that have risen to the point where sanctions have had to be applied.

We see how this conflict brought in a whole barrage of sanctions against Russians and those who are sympathetic to, or involved in, the activities of a country that is devastating a state and impacting the people of Ukraine. The fact is that there would be this loophole that actors who may be complicit in abuses can profit from. The current law does not specifically mention that, and that is a key point here. That it is not specifically mentioned would grant someone the possibility of coming to Canada to be given safe haven.

As we heard in the expert testimony before the Senate committee and as we heard from stakeholders on this subject, there is some ambiguity about what exactly the bill would allow the government to do versus what the bill is being said to do. I would just highlight that it was long overdue to see these loopholes fixed, but in typical fashion, the government is proposing a bill, in this case going through the Senate, that is admirable in its intentions. The government gets an "A" for the announcement, but when it comes to the delivery and the implications of what is being proposed, there remain many outstanding questions.

I think that is a troubling trend that we have seen across a host of issues. The government, over the last eight years, has been really good at the politics of legislation; however, it fails in the actual hard work of governing, and that is truly what is key when it comes to so many things in our country. It takes hard work. It is not just about announcements. It is easy to stand in front of a podium and make an announcement; it is a whole lot harder to actually get down and get to work.

• (1710)

As a farmer, I know that if someone simply thought about and talked about the planting season, that person certainly will not be successful. Work is required to put the seed in the ground and to make sure that it can come to the point of harvest in the fall and everything associated with that.

It is the same thing with vineyards. There is a burgeoning wine sector in the Peterborough area. It is very exciting, and my colleague and I have had some chats about it with, I think, the chair of the wine caucus as well. I mention that as well.

I will take this opportunity, since my colleague is here talking about one of his passions, to say that it was a pleasure for me to see Bill C-281 pass just this past week, I believe with unanimous support, and how important it is that parliamentary oversight was given to the Magnitsky sanctions regime here in Canada, that Parliament could trigger that, and that there would have to be a mechanism for reporting to this place to ensure accountability to our democratic infrastructure.

The reason I believe this is important, and let me highlight a few examples of why this is important, is that we have seen an increasing disconnect between the executive government in our nation and Parliament. That is incredibly concerning for a whole host of reasons, but it very directly applies to what we are talking about here today.

Bill C-281, in one of its four parts, specifically addresses making sure that accountability comes back to the people's House here in the House of Commons and that there is that reporting mechanism.

Further, we see a disconnect, and I will not get into the myriad examples outside of this issue, in the Americanization of the separation between the executive and legislative branches of Parliament. That is very concerning. That is not how our system is meant to operate.

Our Prime Minister sits in the House of Commons and our cabinet ministers are members of the House of Commons, and it is absolutely key that there be that close connection between the executive government and the legislative branch of our government. When there is a separation, we see that many of the issues that Canadians are facing, and the scandals and the erosion of trust in our institutions and whatnot, can be pointed back to the fact that we have a government that refuses to acknowledge the will that is expressed by the people in the House of Commons. That can not be highlighted any more clearly than when it comes to the issue of the IRGC.

What is unique about Westminster democracy is that it is Parliament that is the chief arbiter of the nation. This principle of Parliamentary supremacy is absolutely key to how we do business in this country, and yet we have, increasingly, the Liberals taking things for granted. They may have confidence on financial measures and whatnot, but when it comes to actually addressing issues, of course, we see that Liberals reject the will of Parliament and by nature the will of the people when it comes to calling a public inquiry into foreign election interference.

We also saw that happen, very troublingly, when it came to the issue of the IRGC. It was this House that voted in favour of listing the IRGC as a terrorist entity. This House voted in favour of that listing multiple times. It is dumbfounding, quite frankly, that the government would refuse to take that action when the people of this country, by nature of this institution of the House of Commons, the keystone of democratic involvement in our country, have said that this should be the case.

The Liberals have tried to explain that away, but it is that disconnect that exists. It may be inconvenient to the political whims of the government on a whole host of issues but we need to get back to the roots of why this place exists.

I have highlighted some of the challenges, but let me finish by highlighting one challenge that I think merits significant attention, and that is the increasingly unstable circumstance of the situation in Asia, with China and some of the gestures that are being made toward Taiwan, and the issues with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There are a whole host of other issues.

It behooves all of us to make sure that we get this right to ensure that Canada cannot be a place where international war criminals or

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those who have profited from war crimes and the worst possible actions can come for safe haven.

• (1715)

I support this bill. It takes a small step in the right direction, although there is certainly much more work that needs to be done.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech was well thought out.

We are talking about economic sanctions against people who are essentially terrorists. The intention of that is to inflict financial and economic pain on them. If the whole western world comes together on that, it can have a very positive effect. Unfortunately, on the other hand, we are still doing business with Russia.

The Prime Minister was asked if he could do something to facilitate the sale of liquid natural gas to Germany, and he told the German chancellor that we do not see a business case for that. Germany is still doing business with Russia and, in that way, Russia is able to finance its war against Ukraine. Could the member comment on that?

• (1720)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, that is a great question and one that strikes close to home, especially representing what is the beating heart of Canada's oil and gas sector and the beating heart of Canada's energy industry.

It is shameful that a country that has the capacity and the resources to supply not only our domestic needs but also the world's with the clean, reliable energy required to displace that dictator and despot oil, that dictator and despot LNG, just like that which is financing Russia's war machine. We have the potential to do that.

I think the only people who do not see a business case for Canadian LNG is the Prime Minister and his activist friends in the Liberal cabinet. When it comes to the world, it are desperate for it, yet the Prime Minister had the audacity to stand beside the German chancellor, who had asked us nicely to facilitate the export of our resources and import them to Germany, but the Prime Minister said no. That is a stain on our country's ability to address it.

When it comes to sanctions generally, the reason sanctions are effective is because they get to the heart of the money to strike down some of the economic infrastructure that allows these regimes, these individuals and these organizations to carry out their duties.

Sanctions are important, but we also need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to get our resources to market so we can displace that dictator crude.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech. The member touched on this briefly, but when we look at Canada's place in the world with our natural resources and what they mean for us, in a sense it has to do with our public safety here in Canada.

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We can look at where our resources are coming from and where people are escaping from. We are buying and importing resources from the countries people are trying to come to Canada to escape from, yet we are indirectly, and sometimes directly, supporting those very regimes. Does my colleague have any further comments on that?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. We need to be using every tool at our disposal to make sure that Canada stands up for the peace, freedom and democracy we are known for.

I think back to when Canada was seen to become a nation, such as the battles we fought in France during the First World War, the bravery of our soldiers during the Second World War and the peacekeeping missions we participated in. We have a role to play in the world. It is unfortunate that we have seen Canada play a diminished role under the leadership of the Prime Minister. We need to absolutely assert our place as that voice of principle on the world stage.

Specifically, I would reference a National Post headline that reported, “Ex-Tehran police chief linked to rights abuses spotted working out at Toronto-area gym”. That is a headline from a newspaper in our country.

We have seen examples where individuals who have been linked with significant human rights abuses are being given safe haven here, and the ability to prosper and enjoy the rights and freedoms that we have, when they have taken away the rights, freedoms and lives of so many in regimes around the world. Canada has to be better, and I believe that the Conservative vision being laid out by the member for Carleton is that clear vision needed not only by Canada, but also, I truly believe, the world.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot for that excellent summary of Bill S-8 and what it means to Canada, how it falls short and how the government falls short in meeting the challenges of the geopolitical landscape as it is playing out around the world. As the member mentioned, this is simply some amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The bill addresses the issue of sanctions. It would make sure that individuals who have been sanctioned and should not be admissible to Canada do not actually make it into Canada.

The bill is most specifically a response to what happened in Ukraine. The Russian invasion of Ukraine was illegal and immoral. It has devastated a country that was simply looking for peace. As someone who has family roots that are at least in part vested in Ukraine, I, like so many Canadians, was exceedingly angry at what we saw Vladimir Putin do to a country that was struggling to develop the prosperity and security it deserves. Now, with the actions that Russia has taken in Ukraine, the whole global geopolitical and geosecurity environment has been turned on its head. The bill before us purports to tighten Canada's sanctions regime to ensure that no one implicated in illegal foreign acts of aggression and illegal foreign acts of war could enter Canada.

However, right off the bat, I have two comments to make. First, there is no indication right now that foreigners who are inadmissible to Canada are getting into Canada. Therefore, it appears that our

current sanctions regime is working. I do understand efforts to be proactive and plug gaps that might exist. That is the first point that I will make. There is no indication that foreigners who are inadmissible to Canada are getting into Canada.

Second, it is troubling that this bill emanates not from the House, but from the Senate, which, as members know, is unelected. One would expect that the Liberal government, if it considered our national security and global security to be that important, would table that bill here in the House first and then let it go to the other place for further, sober second thought.

Since the bill intends to strengthen our ability to prevent persons who have been sanctioned from actually entering Canada, it does so first by establishing a distinct ground of inadmissibility based on those very sanctions. That is the first part of it. The second part of the bill proposes to expand the scope of inadmissibility to include not only sanctions that are imposed on a foreign country, but also sanctions that are imposed on a foreign entity or organization, or a foreign person, because we want to capture everybody who would be implicated in foreign acts of aggression.

Third, the bill would expand the scope of inadmissibility based on sanctions that are made in section 4 of SEMA, or the Special Economic Measures Act. Finally, the bill would amend the regulations to provide that the Minister of Public Safety would have the authority to issue a removal order on grounds of inadmissibility based on those very sanctions under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

That may all sound very complicated, but the bottom line is this: All this bill does is purport to plug existing gaps. I would suggest to the government, rather than being in reactive mode, why is it not proactive in addressing the challenges that Canada faces on the security front?

● (1725)

For example, why is the government not actively addressing the issue of foreign interference in our elections? Why is it not actively addressing the issue of intellectual property theft by the regime in Beijing? Why is it not addressing those individuals who were implicated in the acts of terrorism and intolerance in the country of Iran, who have now found a safe haven in our country and are seen walking the streets of our cities such as Toronto? Why will it not be proactive in addressing geopolitical security issues, rather than always responding in a reactive way and missing the boat?

We will be supporting this legislation, but it does not reflect a thoughtful, proactive approach to the very real challenges that face Canada today.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

VIOLENCE AGAINST PREGNANT WOMEN ACT

The House resumed from May 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-311, an act to amend the Criminal Code (violence against pregnant women), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the first hour of debate on Bill C-311, the violence against pregnant women act, there was a lot of push-back by the Liberals and the NDP on issues not in the bill. The lack of care and rigour in this debate should be distressing to Canadians who are paying attention at home.

It is abundantly clear that this legislation is about one thing, which is protecting vulnerable women through a Criminal Code amendment. It is very important that this debate centres on what is before us. We are looking to consistency in sentencing across the country as an objective so that pregnancy, as an aggravating factor, is no longer discretionary but mandatory to consider.

I will read the bill in its entirety into the record so there is clarity for all those following the debate.

Bill C-311, an act to amend the Criminal Code (violence against pregnant women), states, beginning with the preamble:

Whereas Parliament wishes to denounce and deter violence against pregnant women by explicitly including pregnancy as an aggravating circumstance for the purpose of sentencing:

Now, therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

The short title states, “This Act may be cited as the Violence Against Pregnant Women Act.”

Under “Criminal Code” it states:

Paragraph 718.2(a) of the Criminal Code is amended by adding the following after subparagraph (ii.1):

(ii.2) evidence that the offender, in committing the offence, abused a person whom the offender knew to be pregnant,

(ii.3) evidence that the offence caused physical or emotional harm to a pregnant victim,

That is it. There is a preamble, a short title, and brief amendments to beef up sentencing if a violent crime is committed against a pregnant woman. This is common-sense legislation that protects women who choose to carry their baby to term.

Nowhere in this legislation is there any reference to the unborn or reproductive issues. Making this debate about something other than protecting women is unfair and uncaring. This is where their fake feminism is exposed.

Just last week, it was reported that Paul Bernardo was transferred to a medium security prison. Conservatives brought forward a unanimous consent motion calling for an immediate return of this brutal serial rapist and killer to a maximum security prison. We were shouted down by the Liberal member for Kingston and the Islands, and that made the intentions of the Liberals clear. They have

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decided to defend one of the most disgusting men in Canadian history, rather than his female victims and their families. This is misogyny.

When the Liberals vote against Bill C-311, they will be voting against women and against choice. They will once again be protecting violent men, not vulnerable women. Conservatives are on the side of women and victims.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the member attributed something that I apparently did yesterday to me. I certainly did not do that. The member might want to reflect on that.

The next time, before she makes accusations, she might want to know what she is talking about.

The Deputy Speaker: That is descending into a fair amount of debate.

The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock is rising on the same point of order.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I was in the House when the unanimous consent motion was called. The member said “no”. I rarely make a mistake about what the member does.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, it was not me who said “no”. This member should apologize, because she is lying right now.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, the member just called me a liar in this House, and then walked out. Now he is back.

That is not only unparliamentary language. We can all check Hansard and see what happened. He—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Check Hansard then before you speak next time.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1735)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I have the floor; that this member is shouting over me when I have the floor is also unparliamentary. He is a disgrace.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for saying that the member was lying. What the member is saying is not true.

She should check Hansard before she makes that accusation in this House, because what she is saying is simply and categorically false.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, that member just turned to me, made a face and gave the finger to me. I do not even know how you categorize that in the House of Commons.

Some hon. members: To all of us.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, he did it to all of us and specifically to me. That member should be sanctioned in the strongest possible terms. He should be thrown out of the House.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

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The Deputy Speaker: I am going to take a break for a second here, and I am going to consult. I was just consulting with the table officers, so I did not see what happened. What I am going to do is review the videotapes, because cameras are on all the time. We will review those cameras. We will go in back and look at it.

I will remind people that we are in the House of Commons, and we should respect each other at all times, even though we disagree, vehemently sometimes, on issues that are before us. To accuse and flip the bird or give the finger is probably something that should not be seen in this House at any time.

I am going to go to the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, and then I will go back to the hon. Conservative whip.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say that I was coming into the Chamber right at that moment. I can tell you that I did see the member for Kingston and the Islands make an objectionable sign with his finger to the opposition.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I clearly saw the member for Kingston and the Islands give the finger, which is a symbol for a very specific phrase. Again, I would agree with my colleague that an apology is in order.

The Deputy Speaker: All right, since I cannot ask someone who might not be here to do something, I will go back and review it—

An hon. member: He is here.

The Deputy Speaker: How about we go back to the item that we are supposed to be dealing with? We are going to go back and look at the video. We will take into consideration the things that we heard. Then we will come up with a response as soon as possible.

The hon. member for Brampton South.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-311, which was introduced by the Conservative member for Yorkton—Melville.

I am proud to stand with my NDP and Bloc colleagues and with Canadian women across our great country—

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize. Before we really get started, I know the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands wants to stand on something.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for the frustration that I exhibited in the last few moments, but I want to reiterate that it was not me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I admit that what the members are indicating that I did, I did do. I unreservedly apologize for displaying my frustration that way.

• (1740)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-311, which was introduced by the Conservative member for Yorkton—Melville.

I am proud to stand with my NDP and Bloc colleagues and with Canadian women across our great country in opposition to this Conservative bill, Bill C-311. This is a thinly veiled attempt to open Canada's abortion debate. I want to be clear that the govern-

ment firmly condemns all forms of violence against women, including against pregnant women, and strongly supports a woman's right to choose.

Throughout debate on the bill before us, we have heard Conservatives allege that this is not about abortion. I find this perplexing, because the sponsor herself has connected the dots. Therefore, members should not just take my word for it. We can review what the sponsor has said about her bill.

The member for Yorkton—Melville rose in the House to advocate for Bill C-311; in the same breath, she said, "Canada has no abortion law." She called this a "legal void" and argued that "pre-born children" should be considered victims. The sponsor also linked a so-called pro-life petition on her website in conjunction with the bill. We are listening to the Conservative members across the aisle, and we hear them loud and clear. This is about abortion. I will also remind colleagues that anti-abortion organizations have praised Bill C-311, claiming that this legislation "affirms the humanity of the unborn."

We have seen what happened to abortion rights just south of our border. On this side of the House, we stand in solidarity with American women who have seen elements of their reproductive health care stripped away from them, as well as with those who are fighting to restore abortion rights. We will always protect Canadian women's reproductive freedom. We will not let them down.

I am speaking in this House tonight from a unique perspective, as a member of both the health committee and the status of women committee. This dual role allows me to witness first-hand the intersection of health care and women's rights. It underscores that access to safe and legal abortion services is a fundamental component of comprehensive health care. This is why the language and content of Bill C-311 raises concerns about potential implications. It is also very similar to previous private members' bills brought forth by the same member that unsuccessfully tried to introduce the concept of a "preborn child" into the Criminal Code.

The history of abortion rights and the ongoing battles to protect and maintain those rights demonstrate the need for vigilance. What we see today is one Conservative's step to chip away at the established legal protections. I am disappointed that I have not seen any Conservative caucus members speak out against the bill, but their silence speaks volumes.

This is about more than a change to the Criminal Code; this is about fundamental Canadian values. Let me reassure any Canadians who are listening that our government will never shy away from standing up for our beliefs. We believe in access to abortion. However, the bill before us would actually weaken existing protections for pregnant women under the law.

Our government takes gender-based violence very seriously; we cannot support legislation that threatens existing legal protections. It is also important to note that judges already have the ability to grant aggravating circumstances if a victim is pregnant. This means that pregnancy is a factor to be considered at sentencing by judges in cases of assault. The bill, as drafted, fails to achieve its stated purpose.

Women's rights organizations have not shown any support for the bill, but it has received substantial support from anti-choice groups and individuals. I will highlight a few organizations that have spoken out against Bill C-311. The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada has condemned this legislation. Abortion is Healthcare, a group from the sponsor's home province of Saskatchewan, called out Bill C-311 for "slowly moving the fetus toward personhood." I thank these organizations for their work in protecting reproductive rights.

• (1745)

In contrast to Bill C-311, the Government of Canada reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding access to abortion and essential health care. As a Conservative bill, Bill C-311 is not an isolated effort. It is the latest attempt to undermine and challenge the hard-fought reproductive rights that women in our country have secured.

Last week, I rose in the House to call on members to build a more gender-sensitive Parliament. Canadians are watching, and they want to see us having healthy debates. Many women had comments on the overall work we do here. Sandra commented that she would "like to see a solution focused culture rather than the abusive environment that is evident today." On this side of the House, we want to advance women's rights, and on the other side, they want to bring us back to square one.

On this side, we are the party of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is our firm belief the charter protects the right to abortion. This charter right is not up for debate in our country, nor are any other charter rights.

Let us talk now about something else that is missing from this bill. That is the work that needs to be done to fight gender-based violence and keep women, girls and gender-diverse people safe.

In budget 2023, the Government of Canada once again affirmed its dedication to protecting and preserving access to abortion, allocating \$36 million over the course of three years for the renewal of the sexual and reproductive health fund. This financial support will guarantee that marginalized and vulnerable communities can access essential sexual and reproductive health care information and services.

The 10-year national action plan aimed at ending gender-based violence is a crucial collaboration between our government and the provinces and territories. It includes a substantial half a billion dollars over five years to assist provinces and territories in its implementation.

We are moving full speed ahead to advance gender equality. Today, we must stand together in opposition to this bill. While strengthening sentencing for crimes against pregnant women may appear to be the intent here on paper, it can have far-reaching con-

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sequences for abortion rights. We must defend the reproductive rights of women and protect the principle that every woman has the right to make decisions, free from interference and judgment, about her own body.

We must not forget the struggles and sacrifices made by our mothers, our sisters and countless brave individuals who fought tirelessly until abortion was decriminalized in 1988. Even as we make progress, there are those who seek to turn back the clock and to chip away at the progress we have achieved.

I want to be very clear. Women's rights are non-negotiable, and abortion is health care. On this side of the House, we will not allow the hard-won victories of the past to be discarded. Canadian women deserve better than this. I will be voting against this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, violence is a devastating scourge on our society. Regardless of the victim or the circumstances, it is unacceptable. Men using violence to abuse a woman is cowardly and ugly. It is unacceptable. Using violence against children is just as cowardly, just as ugly, and just as unacceptable. Violence against a pregnant woman is also ugly and cowardly. It is unacceptable. It is abhorrent. We agree on that, and no one will ever hear me trying to justify such horrible acts in the House. I do not think I could, even if I tried. I would lack all credibility.

Consequently, I imagine I will be asked to justify our position, because yes, the Bloc Québécois will be voting against this bill. The simple explanation is that the Bloc Québécois opposes any attempt to undermine women's rights to decide for themselves. Let us not kid ourselves: What we are talking about today is the right to abortion. It is at the heart of an issue that we all thought had been settled a long time ago. We feel that today's debates on this subject are out of date and I would even say, with all due respect, out of place.

Is it worth reviewing how far Quebec and Canadian women have come in this regard? Abortion was illegal in Canada until 1969, but that was followed by an almost equally dark period, when the right to abortion was fraught with conditions, rules and the need for advance authorization. In order to perform an abortion, the authorized hospitals had to first obtain the approval of a committee. The therapeutic abortion committee had to be made up of at least three doctors, none of whom could be doctors who performed abortions. I will not go so far as to say they were anti-choice, but I think we can all agree that they were certainly not the most pro-choice doctors.

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Dr. Morgentaler's fight kept our courts and media busy for many decades. In the end, he was sentenced to 10 months in prison for performing illegal abortions after the Supreme Court of Canada denied his appeal in 1975. Then came the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was still not enough to prevent him from being taken to court again in 1983, along with two of his fellow doctors, for performing abortions in Toronto. At that time, the court ruled that the provisions of the Criminal Code on abortion infringed on a woman's right to security of the person. The Criminal Code provisions were struck down and they still have not been replaced. As of that moment, abortion was not longer prohibited in Quebec and Canada. The Supreme Court also reiterated in 1993 that the provinces could not restrict the right to abortion to only public hospitals.

Here we have a bill that, perversely, I would say with all due respect, would have us go along with a degree of legal right for the fetus; indirectly, some might say, but still. As the Criminal Code provides and the courts have recognized, acts of violence against a pregnant woman are unacceptable and an aggravating factor that can be considered by the court during sentencing. We agree with that. As I said at the outset, it is unacceptable, it is heinous, and it must be severely punished. Nevertheless, that does not mean my Conservative colleague's proposed provisions are acceptable.

• (1750)

As we saw in *R. v S.W.* in 2021 in the Court of Quebec, and as correctly laid out by professor Lucie Lemonde from the Université du Québec à Montréal in her work entitled *Les menaces au droit à l'avortement et à l'autonomie des femmes enceintes*, “the current provisions of the Criminal Code are sufficient to achieve the goal of more severely punishing an assault on a pregnant woman”.

The Hon. Michel Doyon, then president of the Bar of Quebec, pointed this out himself to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in his letter dated May 30, 2008.

Indeed, paragraph 718.2(a) of the Criminal Code already provides for this important function in subparagraph (iii.1). It says:

718.2 A court that imposes a sentence shall also take into consideration the following principles:

(a) a sentence should be increased or reduced to account for any relevant aggravating or mitigating circumstances relating to the offence or the offender, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing,

...

(iii.1) evidence that the offence had a significant impact on the victim, considering their age and other personal circumstances, including their health and financial situation

As I was saying earlier, the Quebec court had to rule on a case involving a violent man who abused his wife when she was pregnant and even after she had children. Without relating all the facts submitted as evidence, the judge seized with the case rightly ruled that section 718.2 allowed for a harsher sentence for a man who abuses his pregnant wife.

Once again, the Hon. Michel Doyon handed down a similar ruling in 2008, and Professor Lemonde reiterated these facts in her article that I quoted earlier.

It seems to me that they would like us to swallow a pretty big and, above all, dangerous lie. Like my party, I am a strong advocate

for women's rights to autonomy and the protection of their security and safety, which includes the right to abortion.

We do stand in strong solidarity against all forms of violence. With respect to the amendments to the Criminal Code, we have reiterated our position many times in the House. I have no pity for those who commit crimes with firearms, among other things, and I believe that is the case for my colleagues as well. These violent crimes must be severely punished.

The House must pass tough Criminal Code provisions to fight organized crime and combat illegal arms trafficking. We are as much against violence as we are against attacks on a woman's right to reasonable and safe abortion options within our health care systems.

No matter what political party we belong to, we owe it to ourselves to be particularly careful with our legislative power when dealing with subjects as sensitive as this that could potentially endanger the legal advances made in recent years—not so long ago, actually—for women's rights.

• (1755)

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is 2023 and we are in the House again debating something that should not be up for debate: Bill C-311.

While the member for Yorkton—Melville claims that this bill is about protecting women from violence, no organizations that actually work to support and protect women from violence are endorsing this bill. Why is that? It is because the people who care about violence being perpetrated against women understand what is needed to protect and support women. Those are the things that my fellow New Democrats and I have been fighting for in this House for years and the very things that the member and the Conservative Party have refused to support.

They are things like implementing the calls for justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They are things like legislation that would limit assault-style weapons. They are things like a whole range of economic measures that would support women, including dental care, child care and pay equity. They are things like adequately and comprehensively supporting the full range of reproductive rights and health care in all regions of Canada, particularly in northern and remote regions.

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They are things like listening to experts like Julia Anderson, the CEO of CanWaCH, who told the foreign affairs committee just weeks ago, “a 12% average decline in access to modern contraception would result in an additional 734,000 unintended pregnancies.” She also indicated, “A 23% shift from safe to unsafe abortions will lead to an additional 491,000 unsafe abortions.” Acting to provide more access to birth control, abortion and maternal health care would save lives.

They are things like ensuring that Canada adheres to the feminist international assistance program and lives up to the commitments it has made to support sexual and reproductive health rights for women and girls throughout the world by funding health care services like abortion. In fact, this bill, Bill C-311, would do nothing to protect women or to support them. It is nothing more than an attempt to undermine women's rights in Canada, including the right to a safe and accessible abortion. It would take away health care services from women, because abortion is health care. Taking away access to safe abortions does not stop abortions from happening. It stops safe abortions from happening and it costs women their lives.

The right to control our reproductive health is fundamental to our rights as women. This is not the first time the member for Yorkton—Melville has attempted to undermine the right to an abortion and other women's rights. However, I think this may be the first time that we have seen this kind of violence washing: using violence against women as an excuse and a disguise for chipping away at women's rights.

This bill pretends that judges do not already have the discretion to apply greater penalties for aggravating circumstances. This is completely false, and there is no valid justification for this legislation. Our legal system is already more than capable of ensuring that women are protected. Judges already have the ability to add additional punishment.

In fact, there is only one reason for this bill to exist. It is designed to create a legal recognition for the fetus. I will quote the member for Yorkton—Melville's own words: “Canada has no abortion law. The legal void is so extreme that we do not even recognize preborn children when they are victims of violent crimes.”

It is my sincere hope that when members table bills for consideration, they do so truthfully and honestly and they legitimately believe in what they say about their bills. This bill is a blatant attempt to mislead this House and Canadians. There is no need for this bill. There is no rationale for this bill. In fact, this bill is dangerous to women. It is dangerous to women in Canada and it is dangerous to women around the world. It is actually harmful, because we know that at least 40,000 women are dying annually around the world because of unsafe abortions. I want to say it one more time: When we criminalize abortion, we do not stop abortion and we do not stop women accessing abortion; we stop safe abortion and women die.

• (1800)

Limiting access to abortions and reproductive health care does not stop abortions. I cannot say that more clearly. Whenever a woman is denied the power to make her own decisions about whether and how often to become pregnant, her internationally recognized human rights are violated, and her health and life are at

risk. The best way to protect women and girls is to provide health care, provide support and not limit women's access to those things.

I have said this in the House before: I have a daughter. I will fight to my dying breath to ensure that she can access every health care support that she wants in her lifetime and that she will always have the right to choose when she has children, if she has children and how she has children. I would be a horrible person if I could stand in this place and want that for my daughter, and not want that for every woman and girl in this world.

I will continue to stand and protect women's rights, and no matter how many times the member brings backdoor bills forward and tries to take away the rights of women, New Democrats will not support it.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I guess there was a question in this House earlier about whether the member for Kingston and the Islands supported the motion that I proposed yesterday, so I am going to pose the question again.

If you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following—

The Deputy Speaker: Before that, we have a point of order from the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member knows, as does the Conservative caucus, that one cannot bring in a unanimous motion when we have already dealt with the unanimous motion request. To continue to attempt to raise this, as members know, is against the rules.

I would suggest that the member's interrupting private members' hour in order to repeat a motion that was just rejected by a member, or possibly two, as I do not know who said no, is not appropriate at this time.

• (1805)

The Deputy Speaker: Members can propose anything at any time with the unanimous consent of the House. Even though it might have been shot down earlier, it can be brought forward again.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Can they do it endlessly?

The Deputy Speaker: I do not know, because nobody has tried to do it endlessly.

I would suggest to the hon. member that when someone is attacking another member for either shooting something down or saying no, it is probably a bad start to proposing a unanimous consent motion.

The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Mr. Speaker, again, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: that the House call for the immediate return of—

The Deputy Speaker: I am hearing “no” again.

We are moving on to the hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha on this bill.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour and a great privilege to stand in the House of Commons on behalf of my community of Peterborough—Kawartha.

I would like to thank my colleague from Yorkton—Melville for putting forth Bill C-311, which I will be speaking to this evening.

Bill C-311, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to violence against pregnant women, is a simple and straightforward piece of legislation. If passed, it will create accountability for those who commit violence against pregnant women.

Here is the bill summary, which comes right out of the legislation itself:

This enactment amends the Criminal Code to specify that knowingly assaulting a pregnant woman and that causing physical or emotional harm to a pregnant woman are to be considered aggravating circumstances for sentencing purposes.

That is the entire bill summary. The bill is less than one page long.

Let me quote it:

Whereas Parliament wishes to denounce and deter violence against pregnant women by explicitly including pregnancy as an aggravating circumstance for the purpose of sentencing....

It does exactly one thing. It adds longer prison sentences where there is:

evidence that the offender, in committing the offence, abused a person whom the offender knew to be pregnant...evidence that the offence caused physical or emotional harm to [the] pregnant victim

Violence against women has been recognized as a global public health problem since 2010. Violence during pregnancy is of special concern due to the adverse effects on not only the mother but also the developing child. Violence during pregnancy has been associated with negative lifestyle behaviours, compromised prenatal care and poor maternal physical and mental health.

When a perpetrator has been identified and found guilty, the sentence must be required to match the crime. This is something all of us in the House of Commons can agree on. What we know and what my colleague has brought to light is that the Criminal Code sentencing provisions are insufficient. It is well established that the risk of violence against women increases when they are pregnant, yet consequences for their attackers do not.

According to Statistics Canada, intimate partner violence has steadily increased each year for the past seven years, and eight in 10 victims of crime are women. The Canadian Perinatal Surveillance System reported that women abused during pregnancy were four times as likely as other abused women to report having experienced very serious violence, and this is a little graphic for people watching at home, including being beaten, choked, threatened with a gun or knife, or sexually assaulted.

Furthermore, there are more than 80 cases in recent Canadian history of women who have been killed while pregnant. Each of these women was killed by a man who knew they were pregnant, yet sentencing judges are not mandated to take these actions into account under the current law.

Each and every one of us in the House, regardless of party lines, carries the responsibility to do everything we can to make public safety a priority, to ensure that everyone is safe, including our most vulnerable. In existing criminal law, if a pregnant woman is assaulted, depending on her injuries, the offender could face a maximum penalty of 14 years if they were charged with aggravated assault. With this new legislation, that person could be liable to a harsher sentence.

This is a bill designed to increase public safety. This is a bill designed to show Canadians that we care about public safety. Who can argue with that?

When one hears the facts, it seems like a no-brainer bill that would get the support of all members, but sadly that is not the case. So often, it takes a tragedy to change laws. As we have heard, there have been almost 100 tragedies of pregnant women being murdered, and the law still has not changed. Today, we have a chance to do that.

I spoke with Jeff Durham, who I know is watching right now. Jeff was the husband of Cassie and the father of Molly. Cassie and Molly were brutally murdered by someone known to them. Jeff has tried for years to get this law passed, and he expressed his deep frustration with me on the phone, in a very private conversation that he allowed me to share with the House, that he cannot believe how politics continue to hijack this bill.

• (1810)

This country is failing victims, survivors and their families. This country is soft on crime, and public safety is eroding rapidly. Canada's worst criminal in history has been moved to a medium-security prison. What message are we sending to Canadians?

There is no longer an incentive to be a good human, because there are no consequences. It is time we stood with survivors, victims and their families. It is time we showed our support with action.

This bill is concrete action. It puts in place a sentence that matches the horror of killing or assaulting a pregnant woman. We are Canadians. We should be protecting our most vulnerable, and that includes pregnant women. I ask every member in this house to stand up for victims, survivors and their families.

I ask every member in this House, every mother, to think about Jeff Durham when they cast their vote for this bill. I ask them to think about their sisters, their aunts, their daughters or their own mothers, and how they would feel if someone attacked them, or worse, if someone attacked them while they were pregnant. The time should match the crime, and attacking or murdering a pregnant woman is among the most heinous of crimes. The mother is the most sacred of people in our society.

Let us do something to fix it. Let us send a message that it will not be tolerated. Let us remove the politics from this bill. Let us stand with public safety. Let us implement a law that says we will not tolerate this, and let us vote in favour of Bill C-311.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak today to Bill C-311. I trust all hon. colleagues in the House condemn acts of violence.

The member for Yorkton—Melville wants to amend the Criminal Code. She wants to mandate that knowingly assaulting a pregnant person or causing physical or emotional harm to a pregnant person would be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. This is already true, as the member well knows. It has been said over and over again that judges already have the ability to apply harsher penalties when aggravating factors are present in a crime, crimes such as knowingly assaulting a pregnant woman.

The changes proposed in this bill are unnecessary, but of course the member knows that. She knows this bill's true intention takes no genuine action to end the ongoing crisis of gender-based violence. It is disappointing we are having this discussion today because this bill is not about preventing violence. This bill is about something much darker, which is the backdoor codifying of fetal rights, the first step of removing a woman's right to choose.

I want to make something very clear. Our government takes no joy in participating in this debate. It should not be grounds for political points or political gain. On this side of the House, we fundamentally believe in a woman's right to choose, and it is not up for debate.

Access to abortion is health care and it saves lives, plain and simple. It is the Conservatives who insist on bringing this up and who insist on reopening this debate. This is the third such bill that has been brought forward by the member for Yorkton—Melville, and it will be the third such bill to be defeated.

Whether it is about sex-selective abortions, the so-called preborn children act or this bill about violence against pregnant women, we know a backdoor argument when we see one. It is an undeniable fact that violence against pregnant women specifically increases the likelihood of poor health outcomes for parent and child. Perpetrators of this type of violence are most often men and intimate partners, but all types of intimate partner violence have an impact on the mental, physical and emotional health of the victim. Violence against pregnant women is no exception, and the problem is not unique to Canada.

When this bill was first introduced to the House, the member opposite said, "I want every member of my party to have the freedom to vote their conscience." If this bill were truly about pregnant women and the protection of children, the member would have the votes she is already seeking, but it is not.

This debate is not about ending violence against women or children. Anti-choice groups are cheering this bill on because they believe it is the first step toward taking away a woman's right to an abortion. That will never happen under this government. We will fight this bill tooth and nail.

Private Members' Business

Addressing gender-based violence should not focus on pregnant women alone. It should focus on everyone at risk of experiencing this very serious form of violence. We need to focus on approaches that end gender-based violence in our society as a whole, not just in specific circumstances.

Bill C-311 will never achieve that. Because our society is constantly evolving, Canadians are coming to better understand the harmful social norms that contribute to gender-based violence. They also increasingly recognize our justice and social systems too often fail the survivors of gender-based violence. Canadians agree we need a country free of gender-based violence, and they understand we need a holistic approach to get there.

The national action plan to end gender-based violence, which was launched last year, is the strategic framework for action across jurisdictions. Our goal is to support the victims, the survivors and their families, no matter what. We are at the negotiating table with provinces and territories to implement the national action plan right now.

● (1815)

The national action plan is so important to this work because it builds on actions we have already taken to address gender-based violence. We have clarified the definition of consent. We have strengthened laws to address gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence. We have toughened bail eligibility for repeat offenders. We passed Keira's law, meaning judges must be educated on coercive control. We have given courts the authority to mandate that perpetrators of intimate partner violence must wear an electronic monitoring device. We have introduced five paid leave days for survivors of family violence, helping them access the supports that they need.

Acts of gender-based violence are despicable. I believe in earnest that every member in this place supports that notion, condemns gender-based violence and works every day to end it in this country. Fundamentally, gender-based violence violates our human rights. It takes a physical, psychological and financial toll on victims, survivors and their families.

However, the member knows well that bills like this are the entry point for the pro-life movement. They exploit one of the most painful parts of a woman's life. This legislation is a means to an end, which is to criminalize pregnant people experiencing miscarriages and eventually criminalizing abortions. If we follow this path to its natural conclusion, this bill would give more rights to a fetus than to the person carrying it.

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Bill C-311 is not trying to end gender-based violence in our country. To do that, we need to continue working with provincial and territorial governments, indigenous partners, frontline organizations, civil society groups and all people living in Canada who want to find long-term solutions to this problem, which has plagued our country for far too long. We do not need distractions from that goal.

• (1820)

The Deputy Speaker: If I were to recognize the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, it would be for her right of reply.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have laid my private member's bill, Bill C-311, before Parliament, and I will now end this second hour of debate with my closing comments.

The violence against pregnant women act would amend the Criminal Code by adding two new aggravating circumstances to paragraph 718.2(a). In other words, when an individual is charged with causing injury or death to a pregnant woman and has gone through a trial in a court of law and been found guilty, the judge determining the sentence would have to consider evidence that the offender, in committing the offence, abused a person who the offender knew to be pregnant, and/or evidence that the offence caused physical or emotional harm to a pregnant victim.

First and foremost, I stand here tonight in response to the families of victims who have done, and continue to do, so much in the midst of their grief in calling for these aggravating factors to be entrenched in our Criminal Code on behalf of pregnant victims of crime. There is Jeff Durham, who lost Cassie and Molly, and Sherry and Chan Goberdhan, who lost Arianna and Asaara. They are the voices representing so many more who lived through their experience, their grief and their call for greater justice.

It is my privilege to stand here advocating on behalf of those who no longer breathe or have a voice, on behalf of their families who have lost loved ones as their lives were taken in targeted violent crimes, and on behalf of those who face violence daily while living in fear of injury because they have made the choice to carry their pregnancy to term.

This evening, I am incredibly grateful for the endorsement of cultural groups whose work involves a heavy focus on the prevention of violence, namely: the Vedic Hindu Cultural Society, the United Sikhs Canada, the Overseas Friends of India Canada, the Greater Vancouver Bangladesh Cultural Association, the Baitul Mukarram Islamic Society, the Pakistani Canadian Cultural Association and the Sikh Motorcycle Club of Ontario.

It has been an honour to spend time with each of these organizations and to receive their written support for the violence against pregnant women act. I thank them again.

I am thankful for the support of my Conservative colleagues from South Surrey—White Rock and Peterborough—Kawartha for contributing to the debate in this place, and I thank the member for Brantford—Brant, whose legal competence assured me that the claim that this bill could harm pregnant women was a fallacy.

A special thanks to the member for Calgary Nose Hill, whose Substack article on this very issue reached 57,000 positive reads overnight last night, as we weighed in together on this difficult issue. Those people are not the people the Liberals are claiming are putting this bill forward.

I have deep respect for my colleagues and our leader, who know that this clear, concise bill is about one thing: protecting vulnerable pregnant women from violent men. In my speech in the first hour of debate, I referenced the fact that 70% of Canadians and 73% of Canadian women want to see increased protection for pregnant women in our laws, and want to see a woman's choice to carry her child to term have greater recognition and weight in our legal system. This is fact.

I extend my sincere thanks to the thousands of Canadians who have made their desires known through their letters, phone calls, opinion polls, Substack responses and very direct comments of disgust and disappointment on the Liberal social media campaign that misrepresents the intent of the violence against pregnant women act.

Since 2015, violent crime has increased by a third and gang killings have doubled across our nation. Intimate partner violence has steadily increased each year for the last seven years, and eight in 10 victims of that crime are women.

In the first hour of debate, I spoke of a call from a young woman who, while pregnant, feared for her life and the life of her child. With the challenges she is now facing, such as limited income when food prices are skyrocketing, an inability to work while wanting and needing to care for her newborn, waiting for a room in a shelter, finding a home she could afford, and having had her belongings, credit card and bank account stolen by her abusive and threatening husband, she is nothing short of a strong, determined and brave woman. This remarkable woman thanked me for bringing forward the violence against pregnant women act.

Colleagues, every measure we can implement to better care for pregnant women facing violence must be taken. The violence against pregnant women act is one of those measures. Everyone in this place, including lawyers, know this is true, and Canadians await our decision.

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division or wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded vote, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 14, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

There is a point of order from the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Government Orders

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I am rising to deal with the question of privilege response that was given by my—

The Deputy Speaker: May I interrupt for just a moment? If there is new information to be provided about the question of privilege, I would be more than happy to hear it. If it is just a general comment on something, I will make a decision quickly as to whether it is admissible.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED INTIMIDATION OF MEMBER

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): That is fair enough, Mr. Speaker.

I want to address what the member for Winnipeg North said in his response, because in my view, he blatantly misstated things and, frankly, should be withdrawing some of his comments.

I do not have an exact quote here, but the member said the question that I applauded to, asked by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, was basically a sully of his reputation. However, there was no such thing in that question whatsoever. This is what the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes said in part when he referenced Justice Iacobucci:

We have the Prime Minister, who hired his friend, paying him \$1,500 a day. That friend then hired Liberals. He hired Frank Iacobucci, from the Trudeau Foundation. He hired Liberal insiders, such as Sheila Block, and now we have this rapporteur...

That was the end. That was not the way it was conveyed by the member for Winnipeg North, and he should be ashamed for the framing of this. Furthermore, he talked about this being about the Italian community and not the legal community, and this was not necessarily raised yesterday when I spoke. The reality is—

The Deputy Speaker: While I appreciate that we are talking about this question of privilege, we are basically rehashing what was said before. If there is new information or if some responses have been received, I think the Chair would be more than happy to hear that.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, when I raised my question of privilege, the Minister of Justice had not gone to the media, and the member for Winnipeg North had not spoken. This is not about impugning somebody's reputation in the legal community. It is about impugning their reputation in the Italian community.

A member's privilege is fettered when they are intimidated from speaking based on something like clapping. In my respectful view, it should be a foregone conclusion that damaging or sully of someone's reputation in their cultural community is as bad as, if not worse than, sully of their reputation in the legal community. However, we have the member for Winnipeg North reading something, presumably from the PMO, that does just that and justifies it. The Liberals are victim blaming in this case in what is an obvious overstep by the Attorney General.

I will end with this. The member deliberately used the term “thin skin”. I would have challenged him or the member for Kingston and the Islands, who said it to me earlier, to come to work with me for one week when I was prosecuting sexual offences against children to see if they could last. That was a completely inappropriate comment. He should retract it and he should apologize. He should not be doing this to hon. members in this House, because it is dishonourable conduct.

● (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: As I said earlier, the Chair is actively looking at the question of privilege and will come back with a response as soon as we possibly can.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 26—AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS

The House resumed from June 12 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my previous eight minutes yesterday, I unpacked some challenges with what the Liberals are proposing and why I believe that what is more or less a sunset clause, which the opposition House leader has proposed, is vitally important to this discussion.

I would like to conclude my remarks on this by emphasizing something that I believe is causing an erosion of the democratic institutions in this country. We see a growing disconnect between the executive branch of government in Canada and the legislative branch. I bring this up because it is foundational to what makes Canada distinct as a Westminster federal state.

Unlike our counterparts in the United States and unlike other republics around the world, our executive branch of government is represented by a Prime Minister, the first minister among what are supposed to be equals, although that tradition has long since gone away. The government is also represented by the cabinet in the front bench, who are members of the Privy Council. We have seen a growing disconnect between what happens in this place and what conduct is decided upon when it comes to how government operates. This is especially concerning because in our nation, this is the only institution, with senators who are elected from Alberta being the small exception, on a national level where Canadians get to choose who represents them.

In conclusion, I urge all members of this House to think about that, and specifically Liberal members, who seem intent on seeing the disconnect expand between the executive and legislative branches of government. The ultimate result is that it will break the very foundation of what our democracy is supposed to be.

Government Orders

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to note that there are, in fact, two members of my colleague's caucus who have had babies during this Parliament and who have actually been able to participate fully as members of Parliament after giving birth because of the hybrid option available. Since he and his party are opposed to it, I would like to understand how he proposes that his colleagues participate following giving birth to their children.

I would also like to ask him, and I hope he answers honestly, whether he or any other member of his caucus has ever availed themselves of the voting app or the hybrid system. Why does he feel we should not continue to do this? I ask because it is actually enabling more gender equity in this place and is allowing a greater diversity of people to participate and represent their constituents.

• (1835)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting that a minister of the Crown would not have commented on my most recent remarks about the growing disconnect between the legislative and executive branches of government. I think it highlights the troubling trend we are seeing that is causing an erosion of trust in this institution. It is contributing to why Canadians not only do not trust the Liberals, but are simply losing trust in the democratic institutions of our country. Canadians point to members like the minister and the Prime Minister, among others, who are directly contributing to that.

My commute each week is about 12 hours doorstep to doorstep, and I count it as an honour and a responsibility in the midst of the family sacrifice associated with it. Never once have the Conservatives said we should not find accommodation. That is playing politics on what we believe are serious issues. There is a need to ensure we respect our democratic institutions and the more than eight centuries of history associated with them.

I urge the minister and members of all other political parties who seem bent on rushing into these things to take a pause and ensure we are finding the right balance, because simply put, my constituents do not trust members like the minister or other Liberals, as they seem to be putting their political interests ahead of those of the country and our democratic institutions, including those who are pushing for greater inclusion.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as one of the people who believes very much in diversity in the House of Commons and making sure that all kinds of Canadians can participate in democracy, I am a strong supporter of the virtual Parliament measures. I think it is essential to our democracy that Parliament does evolve and change. Next door to me is the member for Victoria, a young mom who is about two days away from having a second child, and because she cannot fly during that period of time, she would be excluded from these proceedings if it were not for virtual Parliament.

I think what we are seeing here is an evolution that makes Parliament more democratic and more representative. Like the member, I have a long commute and I go home every weekend. I do not avail myself of virtual Parliament very often, but that does not mean that I think others should be deprived of that right.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, given the question that was just asked and the comments associated with it, and, likewise, what the minister asked before, I expect they will be supporting the amendment put forward by the opposition House leader. What that does, pure and simple, is ensure that Parliament continues to look at this and its impacts on our ability to do our work in this place. Never once have the Conservatives said that we should not endeavour to increase inclusion, that accommodations should not be made. To suggest that is blatantly untrue.

What we need to do, however, is ensure that we maintain and treat carefully, with the utmost respect, the democratic infrastructure we have. Let us treat this place, this House of Commons, however one participates in it, with the utmost respect to ensure that we are ultimately respecting Canadians. That needs to be our focus. That needs to be our emphasis. We need to be focused on ensuring that Canadians can be represented in this place.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to participate in the debate about making hybrid sittings a permanent fixture in our Standing Orders. I will be sharing my time with the member for Guelph.

I think we are in an era of growing uncertainty. COVID-19 was not the first global health crisis, and we know it will not be the last. The World Health Organization has warned us that pandemics will likely arise more frequently and will propagate at a faster pace in the future. Additionally, we have experienced several challenges in recent times that have caused us to have this conversation we are having today. These increasing threats are due to climate change, security and various health factors. They have the potential to shut down Parliament or make an inflexible, in-person-only Parliament.

Parliament cannot shut down for months. When a crisis occurs, we need to be able to do the work necessary to resolve it. We have to continue advancing long-term projects to deliver results for Canadians and provide parliamentary oversight.

Over the course of the last years, we have developed excellent technical tools and cultivated expertise in our staff that have given us the ability to meet in a hybrid fashion. We need to make sure that we can retain these tools and that we have the capable staff members so that the next time a crisis hits us, one that prevents us from being able to sit in person, we have the ability to switch seamlessly and quickly, without any interruption to the work we do in delivering results for Canadians.

Government Orders

Maintaining hybrid options would pandemic-proof our sittings for the future. Pandemics are not the only events that could prevent us from being able to sit in person. We have also seen, in recent years, the types of security threats that we face on Parliament Hill and in our capital. These threats that have continued to threaten our members in the past mean that Parliament Hill has to be able to be flexible to accommodate people being able to be on hybrid as well. The Hill has not always been a safe place for all of us to congregate. We saw the security threats we had at the beginning of last year. We have these types of security threats that are intensifying as a result. When it is not safe for us to sit physically in the chamber, we have to be able to continue to do our work from our locations.

Likewise, as climate change accelerates, we will see new threats to sitting in person. The most recent example is the poor air quality we experienced in Ottawa due to the forest fires in Quebec. Nobody could have anticipated that, but it indeed had an impact on whether people could commute to work or not. People should not have to choose between aggravating their asthma and not being able to do their job. Having the option of hybrid participation means that everybody would be able to continue to do their job and be able to continue to participate without putting their health at risk. We will see increases in extreme weather events as time goes by, and maintaining the flexibility of hybrid sittings would be crucial in the future.

The paradox is that the times when sittings have been cancelled have also been times when we most needed Parliament to be sitting. During the convoy last year, sitting was interrupted. When we needed to debate the emergency measures the government was bringing in to deal with the convoy, we were prevented from that. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we also needed to sit in order to pass crucial legislation to boost access to employment insurance and other programs, to ensure that money would flow to workers and businesses in need. As Parliament could not sit regularly, the government was granted some extraordinary powers, such as the ability to spend without parliamentary oversight, yet the function of parliamentary scrutiny is most needed during those times of crisis. When the government has been granted extraordinary powers, it is of the utmost importance for the functioning of our democracy that we continue to carry on committee duties and debates, and that we question ministers.

It is of the utmost importance that we ensure that our constituents' voices are heard and integrated into the policies and decision-making, and that this continues to occur. When the government is moving rapidly, in emergency mode, it is our job to check that nothing has been missed. That means we need to continue to do our work. We need to provide the additional perspectives and the scrutiny needed to ensure that the impacts on all Canadians are being considered. This means we have to be able to be flexible in the measures we are using.

On that note, I would like to thank all the staff members who were adaptable, innovative and able to provide the hybrid measures that we have today and that we have all been able to enjoy, making sure that we were able to serve Canadians in such a time. I am sure members of the House remember how under-resourced we were at first during the hybrid sittings. We all remember the technical diffi-

culties when we first got our equipment set up and how stretched thin our technical staff was.

● (1840)

It took us months to get it properly set up to the point where we are now. We have invested the money into these hybrid tools. We have learned how they work. We have hired the highly capable technical staff we need in order to make everything work. If we were to stop hybrid sittings and return to in-person sittings exclusively, when the next crisis hits, it would take us weeks and months to get the tools set up again during the time when we need them most in order to meet and in order to make decisions for all Canadians.

We can keep our equipment in reserve, but we would lose the technical teams we have built over the years and the money we have invested in that. The expertise is not replaceable and it was not built overnight. If we do not use our capabilities, we lose them. We need to maintain a properly functioning hybrid system so that when we really need it, we can actually use it. We have not seen our last smog crisis and we have not seen our last security emergency. We certainly have not seen our last pandemic. We live in a time when events will increasingly threaten our health, our physical security and our environment. Sometimes the best decision in the face of these threats and crises is that it will be safer for us to meet virtually rather than in person, or to at least give the vulnerable members among us that option.

A House that asks its members to threaten their health and safety in order to come to work and do their job is not one that anyone wants to be part of. As pandemic crises and emergencies are bound to happen, we cannot have a Parliament that shuts down for months. Our work is way too important for that. We need to continue to work steadily in advancing legislation, and we need to continue to hold the government to account. It is precisely during these crisis situations, when the government has been granted extraordinary powers, that we need to provide this extra scrutiny. It is precisely then that we need to represent the interests of our constituents and to ensure that the government's response to crises is as good as it can be.

For that to happen, we need to have a seamless transition to hybrid and virtual sittings, and we need to maintain our current system so that, when the next pandemic occurs, we have the expertise and the tools that are well-oiled and ready to make the pivot to hybrid and virtual sittings, to continue our crucial work in serving Canadians.

* * *

● (1845)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate:

Government Orders

That a message be sent to the House of Commons to acquaint it that the Senate agrees with the amendments made by the House of Commons to Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, to make related amendments to the Food and Drugs Act and to repeal the Perfluorooctane Sulfonate Virtual Elimination Act, without amendment.

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GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 26—AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quite disturbed that we are sitting here having this debate tonight on changing the Standing Orders through a forced vote. I have been around this place for some time, since 2004. Whenever there have been changes to the Standing Orders, they have been done through consensus, not by having one party or its collaborators, this time the NDP, ramming it down the throats of all the other parties. This is a dangerous precedent that the Liberals are trying to set. The member mentioned that we needed to do this during the pandemic. First of all, if she missed the news, the pandemic has officially ended, according to the WHO.

Second, we know there was an opportunity during the pandemic, when we were all here, to make the changes that happened to ensure that Parliament can exist through virtual Parliament.

Third, the one thing that happens in virtual Parliament that does not happen here is that there is a lack of empathy. We cannot interact with other members on Zoom like we can in the House. We miss out on the sidebar conversations that happen between all members of the House, not just within their own caucuses. That is the way we build personal relationships. Those relationships were destroyed because of the pandemic, especially for those who were elected after 2019. I can tell members that if we want to repair that and make this place a more inclusive, collaborative chamber, then we need to get rid of virtual Parliament and work side by side on dealing with the issues that are important to all Canadians.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I heard a question in my colleague's comments. I will say that, when the pandemic happened, I was a city councillor. One of the first things the City did was shut down and declare a state of emergency. It took us time to get to a place where we could actually respond to the most emergent and the hardest situations our city was experiencing.

We have now been on the other side. We know that crises like the pandemic and like what happened recently with the smoke outside from the wildfires are challenging situations that impact the health of people and the access to workplaces for people.

We cannot simply sit and wait, acting as if these situations were not already present. We have to take proactive measures to make sure we can still accommodate people to do their jobs. It would be impossible if we could not make decisions that impact Canadians. It was hard when people could not access money to feed their families. We had to come up with every single measure to respond very quickly. I saw it first-hand as a local representative, and, as a member of Parliament I can see how important it is, even now, for the

government to continue to meet the needs of Canadians in such crises.

● (1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I am a bit naive. When I first got here, I naively thought that we would be debating. I thought that democracy was the bedrock of ideas, that we would put forward ideas, that the opposition parties would put forward other ideas, that the government would also put forward ideas, that we would debate them all, and that this would lead to amazing bills. People would look at us and say how incredible we are. I thought that was democracy. As I have said many times here, that is not the case. I have lost count of the number of gag orders this government has imposed. Now we have a fundamental proposal that will change how we debate things for the next 10, 15, 20 or 100 years.

We hope to be long gone by then, because Quebec will have become independent. Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that this proposal is going to be adopted, changing all the rules of the game with the wave of a magic wand. We have just a few hours to debate huge changes to how we conduct debates here. I think that is totally unacceptable.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent presentation. I think he has a brilliant way of expressing himself.

It is not that we are proposing new measures. Our situation has been evolving for some time now, in line with the measures that have been brought in to deal with the pandemic and to respond to the crises we are currently facing.

We are simply saying that the world has changed, things have changed, and we all have to adapt to those changes.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the debate, and I have enormous respect for the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. I do agree with him that we work better when we are here in person.

However, last October, I had a very severe bout of COVID and I had to stay at home. I was not allowed to fly. I was a danger to other people. I could not have participated without virtual Parliament. I know there are others who have had similar experiences. People say that the pandemic is over, but we just had an outbreak of COVID in a child care centre in my riding. It has been very severe. Tons of kids and their parents now have COVID again.

Does the member for London West agree that we are not really out of the woods on these pandemics, that we may need these measures and that we should keep them in place in the interim?

Government Orders

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for making those really important comments that actually prove we are not out of the woods. When the World Health Organization said that we are not out of the woods with pandemics, it meant it. As he said, there was just an outbreak in his community. People are still catching COVID. People are still catching diseases through super spreaders.

It is not just important to make sure we have those accommodations for people who are not able to be here in person because they are going to infect their colleagues. It is also important to think about other reasons we need the hybrid model so members can continue their work. Many colleagues in this room have children; one of my colleagues mentioned that earlier. It is important we build a system that is inclusive for all families and that we make Parliament family friendly.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to take part in this debate on the motion to make permanent the hybrid proceedings in this House. I thank the hon. member for London West for sharing her time with me. In the short amount of time she has been in the House, she has already made a tremendous impact, and it is wonderful to be working alongside her on this and on other issues.

We know these measures were implemented on a provisional basis nearly three years ago. We also know that these provisions have allowed the House to carry on its business during the pandemic. Over time, many members have spoken in public, and some privately, of the benefits of the hybrid model, and there are many benefits.

During the most recent study of the hybrid model by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, or PROC, as it is known, Dr. Jonathan Malloy, Bell chair in parliamentary democracy at Carleton, testified that a hybrid system goes beyond the objective of making Parliament more efficient. He stated that it speaks directly to the purpose that this institution serves, representing the diverse views of Canadians in every region of the country and ensuring that the interests of all Canadians are fairly represented in the political choices and outcomes of this chamber.

I submit many members will acknowledge that this question of hybrid proceedings is not just about flexible work arrangements and technological advancements but is also at the core of how we might change the way we participate in our proceedings to ensure a greater diversity of voices in this place. The more this place reflects the diversity of the Canadian population, the more Canadians will trust our parliamentary institutions.

Let us consider the impact and the benefits of virtual participation in the House and in committee. July 2020, of course, was the first hybrid sitting that allowed members to participate in debate in the House both in person and remotely. Additional corresponding temporary changes to the Standing Orders were made to accommodate these sittings.

These included allowing members participating virtually to be counted for the purpose of constituting quorum, lowering the threshold of the number of members for certain procedural motions, changing the procedure for requesting and granting unanimous consent and allowing members to speak and vote from any seat.

In listening to this debate, I heard other members speak to the tremendous flexibility hybrid sittings have afforded to members of this chamber. It is not for everybody to be using hybrid all the time, but it is available as a tool we can use so that we can continue to participate in the debate.

We used the voting application in 2022 and 2023. Yes, 2023 is the year when we are agreeing that we are at the back end of the crisis stage of COVID, although it still exists, and the original purpose of hybrid sittings has been set aside.

The member for London West mentioned the effects of asthma on our ability to speak in times when the air quality is not good. The air quality is very much better today than it was last week, but when things turn and one is not able to participate, we can use these advancements because we all are benefiting from the flexibility that these technological changes are affording us. It is like having a better opening for doors going into grocery stores. They were there originally to help people with accessibility challenges, but everybody benefits when the doors open more easily for all of us, and this tool allows that to happen in Parliament. It is opening the doors of Parliament for people across the country who are in different situations, such as people who just had a baby, as was mentioned earlier.

I had a medical operation a few years ago and I voted from the hospital. The nurses were not nuts about that. They did not think it was a great idea, but I showed them that it could be done and that I could continue to fulfill my duties to the people of Guelph even as I was under medical care.

● (1855)

Dr. Jonathan Malloy talked about parliamentary reform and democratic reform and how they are inextricably linked. How much extra time has this new way of working provided to spend in our ridings and meet with our constituents? How many more witnesses can access and provide evidence at committee through new video conferencing technology?

In the environment committee, we were able to talk to first nations witnesses across the country. It sometimes takes two days for them to get to Ottawa, not to mention all the time they are away from their communities. The convenience is really improving democracy. It is a tremendous opportunity for us to improve our connections and engagement with the Canadians we in this chamber represent.

Despite the additional flexibility provided to members through hybrid sittings, members continue to participate in proceedings of the House and committees in person. The claim of some members that hybrid proceedings would turn all parliamentary work into a virtual environment is simply not borne out by the facts. If I understand correctly, the current numbers are that about 70% of members continue to participate in person.

Government Orders

As was noted by the hon. member across the way, the conversations we have in person are much different and much richer, so this is not to abolish in-person sittings but to complement them by providing additional tools for those who, for various reasons, cannot be in the House for in-person sittings.

The second most significant change brought about through the use of hybrid sittings is the ability to vote electronically. While this place holds debates on all forms of parliamentary proceedings, it all comes down to the vote and being available to make that decision after all the debates have ended. Many members will no doubt remember that in the early days of the pandemic, each recorded division took up to 45 minutes, because members had to weigh in and state their vote. Now that we have the voting application, we are averaging about 10 to 12 minutes, which is on par with the quickest recorded divisions before the pandemic.

Not only that: With the advantage of the electronic voting application, the House has seen greater democratic participation in voting in the House, which makes sense. If members are available to vote remotely because they cannot be in Parliament, more people will vote, and more people are voting. Having more members vote can be seen as making the House more transparent, more participatory, and definitely more accountable to the people whom we are elected to serve.

Another improvement that hybrid sittings has brought about is the ability to table documents electronically, provided they are allowed to be tabled pursuant to the Standing Orders or a statute. That includes annual reports, government responses, petitions and Order Paper questions. It really helps us with efficiency in tabling documents in the House.

This is not the first time that the House and committees have considered implementing technology to assist our proceedings. During the recent PROC study, we heard from Mr. Léo Duguay, the former MP for St. Boniface from 1984 to 1988. He is the president of the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. In fact, he was my member of Parliament when I was living in St. Boniface during that period. Mr. Duguay was a member of the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform, and he told the committee that electronic voting in the House of Commons was an innovation that members had advocated for over 40 years. He indicated that an “overwhelming majority” of members believed that hybrid proceedings in their day would have had the effect of increasing their parliamentary participation in debates and the voting process, and Mr. Duguay was right: We are seeing it happen in real time.

Also, the member for Labrador was here today. She has returned to the House after successfully fighting cancer. While she was in Labrador, she was able to continue her service to her community through the use of hybrid sittings.

I suspect that some people will want to go back to the good old days, the days when we did not have technology, the days when a riding was really the distance one could ride on a horse to cover one's territory. We have gone past that. At this point, I think we need to urge all Canadians to embrace this technology and consider running for Parliament if it has not been accessible to them in the past.

I will conclude by noting that I really support hybrid sittings and I hope we are able to continue them.

I will turn to answering any questions the members might have.

• (1900)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who sits very close to me, for his wonderful speech this evening.

I believe the hybrid Parliament is a good thing, but I am not in favour of its being abused by members here in the House. It should be available, yes, for somebody who needs it. As the member said, he had surgery earlier this year and was able to vote on the app. I had surgery as well, on February 14, actually, and shovelled snow two days later.

However, it is a privilege and an honour to be able sit and stand in this House as one of 338 people. I spend time here even when I am not on House duty. I love sitting in the House and having people sit around me instead of being in the office in my constituency with nobody. Does the member agree that it is a good policy to have, but it should not be allowed to be abused? People who can be here should be here.

• (1905)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to discuss this in an open setting. Usually our conversations are between ourselves sitting beside each other in the seats.

The abuse piece is one that is critical. We as hon. members need to follow the same principles as if we were here in person. That also means voting. I said that we are averaging 10 to 12 minutes per vote. Last week, we saw that the Conservatives were saying that their electronics were not working or that their connections were bad. That has since proven to be false, but it made our votes last 25 minutes.

We need to continue to operate as hon. members, using the tool to the advantage that it is giving us.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleagues across the way, they might want to see the flexibility that hybrid brings, but in reality, as they just pointed out, it can be abused as well.

The sense of honour of being in this chamber has always been to protect the individual member and to ensure that changes to the rules were done through consensus of every member of this House. I have been here for 19 years and I have actually seen, when changes to the Standing Orders were attempted, one member deny that change. We went for unanimous consent, and it was not there. In light of the fact that these changes to the Standing Orders, the way our Parliament functions, have nothing to do with party affiliation, they should be done through consensus and not through this hammer-fisted unilateral move that we are seeing right now from the Liberals and the NDP.

Government Orders

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member posed the question earlier as well. The provisions for a hybrid Parliament are winding down at the end of June, so it is incumbent on us to give a path forward so that we know how we will be operating in the fall, and it is up to us to operate honourably. Whether we are on social media or we are speaking in the House, it is up to us to follow the rules of honour by which we are elected to serve the people and represent them honourably.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will calm down now.

In fact, I am a bit of a rookie in the House, a rookie in that it has been four years. I was here in 2019, but the pandemic hit soon after. We went back home and sat via Zoom. We returned roughly a year ago.

Honestly, when we are here in the House, that is when I resolve problems the most, by talking directly to the Minister of Immigration, among others. In Longueuil, there is a lot of immigration and we have very difficult and complex cases. Sometimes it is in talking to the Minister of Immigration, and offloading files to him, that we settle some things. I had cases involving Haitians who arrived in the past few weeks and months. If I had not spoken to the Minister of Immigration, I am pretty sure things would not have worked out so quickly.

There is also an airport in my riding. On that issue there is a lot of work to be done with the Minister of Transport. If I did not meet him in person, this would never get resolved. I do not understand why people are insisting on sitting virtually when we do our best work, in my opinion, when we are here in person.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member across the way. I always value his contributions in the House.

The technology we have is a tool. It is not the solution to every problem, but it is a solution to being present in the House when one is not physically present and still wishes to participate.

As the member points out, democracy has to continue to function using this as a tool, but also, behind the scenes, the work has to be done on the desks of the Canadians who are here to help us serve.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will say that I am not an unreserved fan of the virtual Parliament. One of the things I would like to see is eliminating the chairing of committees by someone virtually. We have vice-chairs, and there is no real need to have virtual chairing for committee meetings.

That said, I think there is something to be said for our making Parliament more family friendly, to accommodate all kinds of families. I know we lose some things with a virtual Parliament, and I know some things are inconvenient, but for me, that is outweighed by the factor of making Parliament more family friendly. I wonder if the hon. member shares my concern that we make sure all kinds of families can serve here in Parliament.

• (1910)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to disagree with the member when he makes such a compelling argument. Also, I would say that committees should continue to be chaired by people in person, which is a provision in the bill that we have before us.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by letting you know that I will not be sharing my time with any of my colleagues. I therefore apologize profusely because you are going to have to listen to my voice for about 20 to 30 minutes. I will try to make it as pleasant as possible.

Today we are talking about making a hybrid Parliament a permanent thing for centuries and centuries to come. As people often say, nothing is more permanent than that which is temporary. That is exactly what is happening today.

We have had important discussions about setting up a hybrid Parliament in the past. We were in the middle of a pandemic, so it made sense, and the parties had the ability to make those changes happen at the time.

Now people are acting as if we were still in a pandemic or as if more pandemics will happen over the coming centuries. They are ignoring the fact that we do know how to talk to each other when there really is an emergency.

At the time, there was an urgent need to set up a hybrid Parliament so we could work. Despite the fact that we could not be physically here, members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs took the time to hold meetings during the summer to analyze how to put in place some sort of hybrid Parliament. We consulted experts from other countries. We looked at what was being done in other parliaments. I remember it very well. In the summer of 2020, I was among those who asked experts several questions to learn about the pros and cons and what we should study to establish a hybrid Parliament.

As I said, there was an urgent need for action back then. Despite the urgency, we still took our time.

Government Orders

I see no urgency at the moment. There is no emergency that would require immediate and permanent changes to the way the House works. Still, even though there is no emergency, and even though it will completely upend our way of operating in the House, the motion is being presented to us as if there is an emergency. There is no emergency, yet we are being forced to accept permanent changes to the way we work. All of this landed on us out of the blue on June 8, when the government announced a motion that would have to be voted on before the House rose for the summer. In fact, the government practically threatened to stop us from leaving for our ridings this summer until this system is adopted, despite the fact that, as I mentioned already, there is no emergency.

Before I get to the substance of the motion, I am going to say a bit more about this approach because I still cannot get over the way things were done. The parties were not consulted. Aside from the government talking to the NDP, no discussion was had and no letter sent. We were not told that the government wanted to table a notice of motion containing these elements.

The motion before us is no small thing, however. It is 42 pages long. The government introduced it in the form of a motion that will not be debated at any time other than the few hours we spend on it now. It completely changes how Parliament works with a mere two, three or four hours of debate and, subsequently, a vote without any real opportunity to amend it, discuss it or hear from external parties, experts or people from other parliaments to see how they do things. This is a complex issue that should not be dealt with by way of a simple motion, especially considering that it is, as I said, 42 pages long.

I would like to come back to the question asked by my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, who said that he was not an unreserved fan of everything in this motion. If this motion does not even please the people who plan to vote in favour of it, if they do not even have the opportunity to debate it, to amend it, to improve it, to see how we could be more effective in the future, this is further proof that the *modus operandi* behind this amendment is inadequate, to say the least.

The parties would also have liked to have input on how things should be done, because when the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs deliberated on the hybrid Parliament last fall, eight recommendations were made. Some work has been done on this. Two dissenting opinions were presented by the Bloc and the Conservatives. The parties did have something to say on this. Despite that, the government refused to listen to any input on this motion and completely ignored the work that had been done in the past.

A report was tabled in December 2022 as a result of the committee's work. The committee chair at the time said that the government supported the recommendations set out in the report and intended to table a proposal in the House of Commons to make permanent changes to the Standing Orders, as recommended by the committee. Despite that, the government still decided to ignore the recommendations.

- (1915)

At the time, we suggested it be a best practice for members of cabinet to be present in person in the House to answer questions.

That was the first suggestion that was rejected. These days, cabinet members do typically come to the House to answer questions rather than doing it virtually. It was an internal directive that was basically imposed by the government whip, for one.

However, the government decided against having the motion include this requirement for cabinet members to be in the House to answer questions, despite the fact that it was a recommendation from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. What is more, the committee chair, speaking on behalf of the government, had said that this recommendation would be included in any motion or other form of amendment aimed at overhauling the way Parliament works. The government has already gone back on its word.

As I was saying, we had the right to expect discussions among the parties. It is customary for us to operate by consensus for these types of changes to House procedures. Many other members spoke at length about that, particularly on the Conservative side. There is a tradition in that regard. However, the government is not operating by consensus. It is not trying to debate the motion, to improve it or to try to figure out how we could be as effective as possible.

It makes me think of a quote from Woody Allen, who said, "The dictatorship is 'shut up', democracy is 'always concerned'." The government is giving us a few hours to talk and letting us say that we disagree, but then it is going to force us to vote, and this measure will be adopted without any real discussion or debate and without us coming up with something that is really the product of a consensus.

As I was saying, this is kind of a breach of tradition. In the past, amendments to the Standing Orders concerning procedure were made by consensus. In 2022, the House published a list of parliamentary changes to procedure. With one exception, all were made by consensus.

For example, in 2017, the Liberal government attempted to reform Parliament by instituting electronic voting, similar to what we have at present. It also wanted to abolish the half sittings on Fridays. It wanted to establish what it referred to at the time as parliamentary programming, which would have been a type of process requiring the parties to agree beforehand on the amount of time allocated for debate of a bill. The government would not have had the last word unless the parties could not agree.

At the time, the opposition parties, including the NDP, rejected these proposals. Despite the fact that the government had a majority and that it could have pushed an amendment to procedure through the House on its own, it decided not to move forward because it did not have the approval of all parties in the House for something as important as the reform of parliamentary procedure.

Government Orders

This is part of the tradition that has always been followed in the House, with one exception, specifically when the government, under former prime minister Trudeau, created the time allocation motion. The irony is that he used a closure motion to get his amendment adopted. This shows that it was an exceptional way of proceeding at the time that has since been adopted by this Parliament.

What could have been done to change the procedure? I am still talking about the procedure. I have not yet even gotten to the substance of the motion. There are many other ways the Standing Orders of the House could have been amended. For example, we could have used a unanimous consent motion. That is what we did when the pandemic hit. We temporarily changed the procedure by unanimous consent among the parties. If an agreement had been reached, it would have been done quickly. The leaders could have discussed it, and then a motion would have been moved.

If that did not work, the government could have used the usual method of deliberation in the House. For example, it could have introduced a bill and had a vote on how to proceed, as we did at the very beginning of the pandemic. We could have referred that bill to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The government could have sent its proposal to that committee and asked it to assess it, make recommendations and produce a report. Then, we could have responded the report.

In the end, the government decided to go with a last-minute motion without informing anyone and to force us to vote on that motion before Parliament rises for the summer.

● (1920)

There are several things that have not been considered in all this. We have talked about this many times. I know that my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît talked about it extensively yesterday, so I will not go into all the details.

However, I must mention the interpreters. They were the first victims of the hybrid Parliament, and they are still being victimized. From the outset, those on the other side who are in favour of the change have said that operating in hybrid mode has numerous advantages. We can be in our constituency more often. It is a positive if we have children because it facilitates work-life balance. It makes it easier for us to be everywhere all at once. We talk in the first person but tend to forget that there are people behind the scenes, not just the interpreters. There is a whole group of people who are connected with Parliament who are burdened with additional work. As far as the interpreters are concerned, it is even worse, because they are being physically harmed by a hybrid Parliament.

We know that because of differences in the volume and audio quality when people are participating virtually instead of in person, there is a much higher risk of acoustic shock and toxic sound. We know that the interruptions in the sound chain during hybrid proceedings create dangerous situations for the interpreters. The statistics speak for themselves. Technical difficulties were to blame for 30% of the incidents reported by the interpreters during hybrid sittings from 2020 to 2022. That number may be on the low side, because 45% of interpreters on the Hill are contract employees and may not be reporting the injuries they sustain. Thirty per cent of in-

juries are reported by only 55% of the people. The number of injuries among interpreters is very likely much higher.

Other aspects affected by the hybrid Parliament were already anticipated even before the pandemic. In 2018, a study was done on the different e-parliament models used around the world. The Inter-Parliamentary Union stated that the e-parliament “transforms both processes and relationships, both inside parliament and with outside actors.” These new processes “increase, decrease or alter how well a parliament legislates and deliberates, holds government to account and represents its citizens.” These four things are excluded from this debate, but I would like to address them.

I am going to talk about a matter that concerns the representation of our constituents. Kathy Brock, associate professor at Queen's University, told the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that when members participate in hybrid proceedings virtually, a kind of power dynamic settles in that puts ministers and opposition critics in the foreground, while backbenchers somehow fade into the background. This means that members without a title have a harder time in making their voices heard and representing their constituents effectively. The hybrid format does not put everyone on an equal footing because of a dynamic that establishes itself and is harder to undo in virtual mode than in person, in the House.

I have to mention the spirit of collegiality and the informal discussions we are able to have when we are here in person. My colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert talked about that. When we are physically present at a committee meeting, we talk with our colleagues. While still half listening, we can go and get a coffee with a colleague at the back of the room in order to talk about a certain proposal or one of their recommendations that we want to tweak to make it work. That is something that we cannot do when working remotely. There is only one channel for the sound and we cannot listen to two discussions at once. We cannot have informal discussions, and democracy pays the price.

As my colleague mentioned, it is all well and good to have the right to choose to attend in person so that we can have that latitude and human interaction, but it does not make much difference if no one from the other parties has to be here because they have the option of working remotely. At that point, it becomes rather futile to be present in the House in person because none of the members opposite will be there with us to have those discussions with.

Accountability is also an issue. Let us talk about the fourth estate: journalists. They complained during the pandemic that ministers were not on site and so they could not catch them as they were coming out of the House to ask them questions.

● (1925)

There is a problem with accountability in that regard. It does pose a problem when a minister, for example, is not in the House to answer for their policies or the spending committed or being considered.

Government Orders

One thing we see in the government's proposal for a hybrid Parliament is that there is some sort of imbalance or asymmetry in the proposed amendments.

On the one hand, ministers are no longer required to be physically present in the House to give notices of motions, such as closure motions, time allocation motions, ways and means motions and notices of the designation of another day for a budget presentation. Ministers will be able to do so remotely. On the other hand, with respect to the number of people that must be physically present in the house to oppose something, we are going back to what was in place before the pandemic. For example, opposing a notice of motion to extend a session in the preceding hour requires the presence of 15 members in the House.

During the pandemic, we decided that five members were required to oppose something remotely; now it is 15 in the House. We are returning to the practices that existed before the pandemic. We are lightening the government's burden to present notices, but we are keeping pressure on the opposition for members to be physically present in the House.

It is the same for opposing an urgent motion from a minister that would allow the government to suspend the Standing Orders at its convenience. For that, there must be 10 people physically present in the House rather than five MPs participating remotely, as was the case during the pandemic. For motions during routine proceedings, 25 members need to physically rise in the House to oppose a motion moved by the government during routine proceedings.

There seems to be an imbalance that works in the government's favour when implementing this hybrid parliament. This is basically in line with the sort of overall imbalance that we see with the government side gaining more advantages when implementing a hybrid parliament.

To use the expression about throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we would have liked to debate the details of setting up a hybrid Parliament. Necessity is the mother of all inventions. There were some good technological breakthroughs during the pandemic, and it would be foolish to completely discard them. However, we should have been able to debate about what we want to keep to ensure that there is a consensus and that the aspects that are ultimately maintained will serve Parliament well.

The Bloc Québécois is not entirely against the idea of continuing to use electronic voting. However, we would have liked to be able to set some parameters around the use of electronic voting, such as making it mandatory for confidence votes to be held in person in the House.

There has been a lot of talk about work-life balance being one of the benefits of hybrid Parliament. We agree, but could we not have provided a better framework? I will echo the words of the Speaker who is returning to the chair right now. He mentioned in committee that work-life balance should have been an exception. It should be allowed, but only as an exception and with parameters to ensure that this option is not abused.

Should we completely abolish the use of Zoom for the House? Not necessarily, but we should have been more precise about it instead of applying a very broad measure that may benefit people

who may abuse it. For example, a member involved in a scandal would be able to stay home and not be held accountable here in the House when journalists might want to ask questions.

These should be exceptional circumstances, such as a death in the family, illness or urgent personal circumstances. A framework could have been developed for this. The use of hybrid Parliament is not all bad. It is bad insofar as it is not balanced.

In short, there are many things the Bloc Québécois would have liked to discuss. That is our main complaint, specifically, the fact that a bunch of measures are ultimately being imposed on us with no real opportunity to make changes, improve the proposal or take advantage of the good that might come out of the pandemic. It is being imposed on us at a time when our work is winding down, when, as I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, there is no immediate urgency because the pandemic is largely behind us.

If the government was going to make changes that will affect Parliament in the long term, the least it could have done was to seek a consensus among the parties, as was customary in the House.

• (1930)

This is a letdown that, unfortunately, we have to focus on as the session nears its end.

I am now ready to answer my colleagues' questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member drew an interesting comparison with Pierre Elliott Trudeau passing a standing order change without having the full consensus of the House. It was on time allocation.

If we look at that today, it has proven to be very successful. We have had different political parties in government support it. We have even had opposition parties, the Bloc included, support time allocation. Every party of the House, with the possible exception of the Greens, has supported the use of time allocation.

At times, when we cannot achieve a consensus, we do need to take advantage of the things that have taken place over the last couple of years. It is called the modernization of Parliament. I would like to think that, years from now, people will look back and try to imagine 338 people coming to the House to vote in person for 400 votes, staying overnight for over 24 hours to vote. They will look back and see this as a positive change.

I suspect, if we listen to what the Conservatives have suggested, a sunset clause would enable the Conservatives to support everything. There seems to be a fairly good consensus already.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Winnipeg North had been paying attention to my speech, he would know that I talked about the Trudeau senior government's passage of time allocation in the part of my speech about how things are being done, not the part about the substance of the motion.

Government Orders

We can agree on the merits of time allocation. Perhaps discussions with the parties could have resulted in an agreement rather than the use of a closure motion on the decision to create time allocation. That is the thing I have a problem with.

There could have been discussions about the creation of a hybrid Parliament with minor amendments that might have garnered the government the support of all the parties, or at least a significant majority. At the very least, we could have arrived at something that looks a lot more like a consensus.

Once again, I would like to point out that there is absolutely no urgent need at this time to introduce permanent changes to the way the House of Commons operates by adopting a hybrid system, especially based on the small number of hours that we will get to talk in the House to a government that refuses to listen anyway. It has already made up its mind, with total disregard for a tradition that has been consistently followed, with one exception, that involves finding a consensus with parliamentarians when it comes to changing the rules of procedure of the House.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Jean for her heartfelt speech. I think we agree on a number of points.

Yes, we need to be open to making some changes. However, as she so rightly said, it is important to take the time to do it right. The pandemic is over, and I think that the existing rules should be reviewed.

She talked about several subjects in her speech, including accountability. Ministers need to be present in the House so that we can ask them questions. I came here in 2019, and I worked here in person until March 2020. Then, I started working remotely. I have not really had much of a chance to get to know how things work around here.

Over the past few months, I have noticed that it is much more convenient and important to be here in person. As my colleague from Saint-Jean rightly pointed out that, when we go get a coffee outside the chamber, we can take the time to talk with our colleagues opposite and share our opinions. I think that is important.

We are talking about accountability and discussions among parliamentarians. The work that we do in our ridings is important. For me, the work that I do in my riding is very important. I go back to my riding every weekend to meet with my constituents. However, the work that we do here with the other parliamentarians is also very important. The opportunity to talk to those we are asking questions of is important.

I would like my colleague to elaborate on that.

● (1935)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of elements in that question. It makes me think of things I wanted to say, but did not.

There are other things that could have been considered for the balance between the work we do in the House and the work we do in our ridings. One example that readily comes to mind is the parliamentary calendar. We sit 26 weeks a year. Is it necessary during this time of year to have a constituency week followed by four

weeks in a row in the House, where we sit until midnight to boot? That is no way to achieve work-life balance, and it is not the most efficient formula, either.

In the meantime, after the holidays, the House is shut down from mid-December and we do not return until the end of January or early February. Could we not add some of the final weeks in June to this period so as not to have this six-week gap during which we cannot hold the government responsible for things it could have chosen to put in place during the final weeks in December? We would have the same amount of time in the House, but we would make better use of it and we do not even have to think about the hybrid model to get there.

Many options could have been considered for improving work-life balance and increasing the amount of time we spend in our ridings. There are currently many activities taking place, but we are missing them. Why? It is because we are in the House. Why are we in the House? Do we really need to be in the House nine out of 10 weeks at present?

A simple change to the parliamentary calendar might have been much more beneficial than the creation of a hybrid Parliament to achieve that goal.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with a small correction to the record. The member for Saint-Jean implied that I had said I did not support everything in the motion but was in favour of virtual Parliament. What I said was that I am a strong supporter of virtual Parliament on the basis of its ability to be more family-friendly, to make Parliament more diverse and to include people when they have physical and health challenges.

I did say that I have some concerns about practices that evolved during virtual Parliament. I was happy to hear the member raise the condition of the health and safety of interpreters. They are essential to the operation of the House, no matter whether one is an English speaker or a French speaker. What measures does she think we should be taking now to improve the working conditions for those very important interpreters?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. I am sorry that I misquoted him. He has become a member of the big club of misquoted members. I believe we are all unwilling members of that club.

Government Orders

On the issue of protecting interpreters, if it had not been urgent and if we had had this discussion about the substance and form, we could probably have put in place more mechanisms to protect the interpreters. One that comes to mind is the communication of complaints concerning the misuse of electronic equipment by parliamentarians. When there is feedback, do we really have a good way of ensuring that the interpreters let us know so we can fix it?

Even worse, the Bloc Québécois made a recommendation at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It recommended that rigorous measures to protect the health and safety of interpreters be implemented as follows: by improving working conditions to prevent injuries, by providing good equipment, by having a rigorous protocol for the use of technology, by having a better process for reporting technical difficulties.

That recommendation was not even put to a vote in committee, let alone included in the motion before us today. They could have taken the time to ensure better protection for interpreters. As I said, there was no need to rush this motion. Doing so will hurt the people who help us do our job well every day. That is absolutely deplorable.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, those of us in opposition have very few weapons to use against the government, which has all kinds of ways to control what happens in the House. Some of those weapons are time management, filibustering and opportunities to oppose all kinds of motions.

In this case, the government is sneakily taking many of those tools away from the opposition in this bill. Does my colleague think that this is a mistake on the part of the government, or is it a deliberate tactic to weaken the opposition?

• (1940)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, there appears to be some asymmetry in the measures that the motion sets out for the changes they want to make to the rules of procedure.

The in-person attendance obligations for the government side are being watered down. In contrast, the opposition side is facing the exact same pre-pandemic obligations when it comes to being able to thwart certain government motions. For that reason alone, I get the impression that this is indeed somewhat deliberate.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to join the debate today on amendments to the Standing Orders. I am very pleased to represent the people of Edmonton West. I am actually the ninth MP representing the riding called Edmonton West since the First World War, in 1917. At that time, Edmonton West actually took up one-third of the entire province of Alberta. Now, West Edmonton Mall actually takes up about one-third of the size of Alberta.

The area has been served by various distinguished MPs over the years. In 1917, the MP's last name was Griesbach, and one of our ridings is named after him right now. William Griesbach was an MP for Edmonton West.

We had MP James MacKinnon, who served as MP during the Second World War. Unfortunately, he died in office, which is hopefully a precedent I will not repeat.

Marcel Lambert, who served after the war, was the longest-serving MP in Edmonton West. He served about 28 years. He was a World War II veteran; he landed at Dieppe, was captured there and spent three and a half years in a prisoner of war camp before liberation. He ended up being elected and served as Speaker of the House. We can see his painting in the hallway, the gallery of speakers' portraits. He was the minister of veterans affairs.

As well, serving the area was the Hon. Rona Ambrose, who served as our party leader for a while. Also serving part of Edmonton West, but at the time it overlapped what is now Edmonton West, was a friend of mine, Laurie Hawn, who was an MP for 10 years. Laurie was the very first Royal Canadian Air Force pilot to fly the CF-18, and then he served here for 10 years. Before I ran, he always provided lots of advice for me, but he told me that the best part of being an MP is serving people, and the worst part is the travel. Both are right.

I am blessed in that I inherited Laurie Hawn's staff, Oula Sanduga and Linda Lo, who still work with me today. They are amazing ladies, who have incredible empathy and who know everything about helping people. On my very first day in our office, we were able to help a new Canadian who had to have some paperwork finalized that day; otherwise, he would have lost out on his planned surgery the next day. It was a young boy getting cleft palate surgery. Our office was able to help him.

Laurie was right: The best part is helping other people, and the worst part is the travel. I bring that up because it relates to what I am going to get into about the Standing Order changes, and the main part, which is the hybrid Parliament.

We have all heard about, and we have all experienced, the horrors of airline travel in Canada, especially recently. There has been lost luggage. We have all had missed flights. I have had missed flights and delays; I have gotten stuck in the wrong cities. I thank Air Canada and West Jet. Part of the problem is that we have a near-duopoly, and that allows Air Canada and West Jet to treat Canadians the way they do, which is not very well.

Government Orders

The thing is that I knew about this in advance. The huge majority of us knew about that before we got into this role. We knew that travel was bad. We knew it was part of the job. We accepted that when we ran. Just as we knew that helping people would be the high of the job, we knew that travel would be the low of the job.

It is funny to sit here in the House and hear members talk about how the travel is bad now. It has always been a bad part of the job. To claim that, all of a sudden, it is bad, but it was not bad in 2015, 2019 or 2020 before COVID, strikes me as a bit dishonest, to be blunt. It is almost as if some members showed up here and were shocked to find out that coming to Ottawa 26 weeks a year is part of the job; therefore, they want to mail it in through a hybrid process.

It was bad before, but it was worse for poor Mr. Griesbach, who had to come out by train in 1917. It has been proven that it is still bad now. What has changed, of course, is the access to Zoom. Zoom is very convenient, I admit, but just because Zoom is available and convenient for members of Parliament does not mean it is something we should switch to as a matter of hand. I do not think it is good for democracy or for the health of this place. My preference would obviously be to not have a permanent hybrid process, as the government and the NDP enablers are suggesting.

• (1945)

In 2015, we heard from the government, and we heard earlier today, that we want to make it family-friendly. I always find in this place that whenever the government talks about reforming Parliament to make it family-friendly, it is a code word that means, “We’re going to take away accountability. We’re going to take away powers to hold us to account from the opposition.”

I want to talk about the main problem that I see with a hybrid Parliament, which is the accountability issue. Many times, we have seen elected officials, bureaucrats, show up only by Zoom in committee. A couple of months ago, on the public accounts committee, which I am also a member of, we had 13 witnesses from the public service. Every single one of them was based in Ottawa. Every single one of them decided it was too much to come in person to the public accounts meeting; it was too much to show Canadians respect by showing up in person. Every single one of them Zoomed in. We heard them with delays because of problems with mikes, computers not working and bad sound. Here we had a very important public accounts committee trying to seek answers on behalf of Canadian taxpayers, and we had 13 public servants who did not show up.

We have had committees where ministers would only attend by Zoom. We see Liberal MPs showing up in committees, and I recognize their backdrop, because they are in the Confederation Building. However, they cannot come to West Block downstairs to join the committee.

The reality is that the opposition members, including the Bloc and the NDP, are here to hold the government to account. The Liberal members who are not in the cabinet and are not in the government are here to represent their constituents. That is why we are here. To switch to a hybrid Parliament takes away that accountability for us to hold the government to account; it takes away the ac-

countability of the Liberal members when it comes to serving their constituents here in Ottawa.

Canadians deserve more than just having a minister Zoom in their appearance to committee. They deserve more, they need more, than just having public service bureaucrats, officials, Zoom in to committees. They should be there in person.

We have a hybrid-driven lack of resources in this place right now. Yes, we are sitting late, but even before we started sitting late, we were running out of resources. We are losing committees because of burnout of our translators. We do not have enough translators, and we do not have enough people to run the committees so we can operate.

In the operations and estimates committee, also known as OGGO, or as I call it, “the mighty OGGO, the only committee that matters”, since May 3, we have had three committees cancelled. In just a month and a half, three committees have been cancelled because of a lack of resources.

On May 3, we had the President of the Treasury Board set to appear to defend the main estimates. A lot of people at home, all five of them watching on CPAC and all five of them in the House right now, are probably unaware, but the estimates are why Parliament exists. It goes back to 1295 and the model parliament, where Edward said, “What touches all should be approved by all”. That is the basis of what our Parliament is: the approval of spending, raising taxes and spending them, which is the estimates process. However, here we have the President of the Treasury Board, representing the government’s billions of dollars of spending, and we have to cancel the meeting that she was to attend. The Conservatives, Bloc, NDP and even Liberal members were deprived of the opportunity to question the President of the Treasury Board on the main estimates. What touches all should be approved by all, unless one is in a hybrid Parliament in Canada. In that case, things get cancelled, and the money just gets approved without oversight.

On May 10, also on the estimates process, we were to have two departments come in, but the meeting was cancelled because of a lack of resources, and this lack was driven by the demands of hybrid Parliament. There were two departments. We had Defence Construction Canada, a small side department that does not get in the news much. However, it is the only department I have ever seen noted by the Auditor General as specifically at risk for fraud. I have done public accounts for years, off and on, and I have done the operations estimates for eight years.

Government Orders

● (1950)

Billions of dollars of taxpayer money are at risk. The Auditor General notes that it is at risk of fraud, and the meeting was cancelled. MPs were not able to question the departments on what they are doing to address the Auditor General's concerns, because of a lack of resources driven by hybrid.

At the same meeting, the Transportation Safety Board was supposed to come before OGGO to explain its estimates request. The Transportation Safety Board is as it sounds. It is the safety board that ensures the safety of air, marine and pipelines, and it reports publicly. If Canadians want to freak out, they should google the watch-lists for the Transportation Safety Board.

The Transportation Safety Board was supposed to come before us, and it has several times. We always ask if Transport Canada is responding to its concerns, and the answer is always, "No." I challenge members to look it up on the website. They will see that this goes back through eight years of incompetence by the government and the Minister of Transport, the same one who is leaving Pearson Airport a mess and leaving other airports a mess.

We can take a look at the watch-list. There are a couple of items from the watch-list here. Keep in mind that we were deprived of our ability, on behalf of Canadians, to address this issue. This is from the watch-list, just the air watch-list: "Runway overruns continue to pose a risk to people, property, and the environment." That is wonderful. The next one is, "Runway incursions lead to an ongoing risk of aircraft colliding with vehicles or other aircraft." Runway incursions have doubled since the current government took power. Think about that, Mr. Speaker.

Members can remember Air Canada at Los Angeles, LAX. A couple of years ago, due to an error, an Air Canada flight almost landed on and collided with another plane. The loss of life would have been in the hundreds and hundreds. That is what a runway incursion is. They have doubled in the last eight years. We were deprived of our opportunity to question them to make sure they have enough resources to do their work.

Also on the watch-list is, "Some transportation operators in the air, marine, and rail sectors are not managing their safety risks effectively." Does the Transportation Safety Board have enough resources and people to follow up? We are not going to get a chance to question them and perhaps adjust the estimates for that.

Another issue is, "Crews often work long and irregular schedules, which poses a significant risk." What Canadian out there wants to read this and know we could not ask questions about it, examine it or look at the departmental plans on how they are going to address this, because we have a lack of resources because of hybrid?

The TSB also wrote, "Regulatory surveillance has not always proven effective at verifying whether operators are, or have become, compliant with regulations and able to manage...safety". If I go to its web page and actually read through the watch-list for marine as well, I would not be looking to fly in Canada. I think most of us in this place would be hiding in our basements, Zooming in like the Liberal government is, if we read what is going on.

I joke about that a bit, but this is a serious thing. This is a result of our not having the resources to examine this and make sure the Transportation Safety Board has resources or that its departmental plans reflect the ability to address that.

The next meeting that was cancelled was on June 7. Again, it was the operations and estimates committee. We had departmental officials called to explain why they were refusing an order of Parliament to produce documents. It is right in our rules and procedures that committees can order any document they wish. In fact, the Speaker, who is with us right now, ruled on this about a year ago, regarding the Winnipeg lab, that the committees have the power to order any documents they wish. The government cannot withhold them for privacy reasons or for any reasons. We have the ultimate power.

● (1955)

OGGO, with the support of the governing party, requested documents from McKinsey & Company. We asked McKinsey and we asked the 19 departments that had done business with McKinsey. Guess what? McKinsey approached us and said it would give us everything unredacted, but the government had asked it to redact some stuff. It asked if it could redact that, and we said, "No. The order is for unredacted." It provided that. However, of the government departments we ordered documents from, 19 out of 19 refused to hand over redacted documents.

The Liberal government blocked all ability to report it to the House, so we invited the departments in to explain why they were refusing an order of Parliament. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We did not have the chance to talk to them, because of a lack of resources.

Here we have bureaucrats deciding what laws they will follow, what rules they will follow, not based on what Parliament decides, not based on what the Canadians who elected us decide, and not based on what Canadians want. We have bureaucrats deciding what they will hand over.

We had departments saying that the access to information law trumps Parliament, trumps what this very Speaker said our powers were. We had departments saying that the Constitution forbade Parliament from asking for these documents. We had one department actually claim that releasing the documents it had, that McKinsey had already provided us, would cause people's pensions to be at risk, even though McKinsey said it would hand them over.

We would have liked to ask the departments why they were blocking Parliament, but we never got to that, because of the lack of resources.

We like to say that Canada is a country of rules, and that the Constitution sets out the powers of Parliament and gives us the ability to make laws for peace, order and the good government of Canada. That is generally the case, unless the bureaucrats do not want that, in which case we cannot hold them accountable because we do not have the resources, because the virtual Parliament is burning out our translators, depriving us of this.

One of the more interesting ones that could not be brought before us was ESDC. It actually tabled redacted documents, despite the order, but it did not provide them in French. It was about 1,000 pages in English and 600 pages in French. We all know that, generally, if there are 10 words in English, it is about 12 or 13 in French. It tabled it, despite our Official Languages Act, despite issues that we have in this country, despite it being stated that we have problems with virtual Parliament drowning out French in this place. The government department did not table it in French. "Do not worry," they said, "We will get back to you with it again in a week."

The next week, they retabled it with English mixed in with the French, once again violating our rules. I would sure like to bring them before us, but of course we cannot.

We asked the Liberals if we could perhaps bring this to the House, to talk about why the department was violating the privileges of parliamentarians to have the documents in French. Liberals, with the help of the NDP cohort, blocked that as well.

I had the privilege of serving on PROC as well when we were studying some of the issues, and we heard from some of the translation bureau folks. They were telling us that it was like having popcorn going off in their ears when there were bad connections. We are still seeing, to this day, committee members showing up, Liberal committee members showing up without headsets. We have translators who are going on sick leave.

Again, think about that, the sound of popcorn going off in one's ears. That is with regular headsets.

We have a problem with this. I understand that there are some needs from time to time, when parliamentarians cannot get here. I accept that. I accept, perhaps, in the House, that there should be ways around it, so that we can ensure that our translators are protected, while also ensuring that we have accountability, that we can hold the departments accountable, that we can hold the government accountable, that we can do our jobs.

• (2000)

With how it is proposed right now, under the extension of the hybrid, I do not think we are getting that. I do not think Canadians are getting what they want out of parliamentarians. Parliamentarians are not getting what they want out of this system.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was having a little trouble following some of the discussion around the resources, but one thing that was sticking with me was the image of a person coming to Parliament in 1916 by train. When I made a decision to run, my wife and I made this decision together based on our

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kids being through college and being in that stage of life where I could devote more time to community service. Similar to the person in 1916, there were a lot of white middle-aged males in the House, similar to the way I look.

Now we have young families and people of colour and people of diversity. This tool allows people to make decisions based on any type of stage of life or any type of economic background they are coming from. This tool is opening up Parliament to all Canadians. Could the hon. member maybe talk about how the positive part of this is to involve the potential of any Canadian to serve in Parliament regardless of their background or stage of life?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry my colleague had so much difficulty following regular straightforward stuff.

The reality is Canadians from all walks of life can be elected as parliamentarians. It is offensive for this gentleman to state that perhaps a person of colour cannot fly to Ottawa like anyone else. That is outright offensive. As to regular Canadians being part of Parliament, this place is full of regular Canadians.

If the government had suggested perhaps a system of the House being hybrid but committees being in person, committee chairs needing to meet in person and witnesses having to be in person, certainly I would be open to look at some solutions. A straightforward hybrid for everyone if they wish, including ministers at committee, any time they want does not work for accountability, it does not work for Canadians and I do not think works for parliamentarians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the mother of a 16-month-old daughter, I am following these debates very closely. I know that everyone has a different idea of what constitutes work-life balance. Having tested out the hybrid model with my daughter in my arms, it is not the model I prefer. The issue of quality time, of separating the time I spend with her from the time I spend here in the House, is crucial. I am worried about that.

I also think we should be talking more about what we are doing right now, holding debates until midnight during this entire period until we rise. The House's hours need to be reviewed. That, for me, would do more for work-life balance. Last year, I took part in debates with my infant daughter, who was just a few weeks old, until midnight. I think that is far more unacceptable.

Personally, because I need some separation and need to spend quality time with my daughter, I see major disadvantages to a hybrid Parliament. It may not be everyone's cure-all for work-life balance.

Royal Assent

I would like to hear what my colleague thinks.

• (2005)

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, it has been over year, but I congratulate her on the birth of her child.

There are ways we can deal with this. Certainly we can make adjustments for those who are sick and those who have babies, etc. We can certainly work around that, but we should look toward consulting members about how we can address that. We should look at all sides, and not just at what we are seeing from the government, which is a blanket hybrid for all.

If it was simply on the honour system and everyone showed up in committee when they were in town but we had the hybrid for other reasons as a backup, as the colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke explained with his situation, I would be fine with that, but we do not see that.

In the committee I chair, I see often one member of the government there and I see the faces on the screen of the others sitting in their offices on Wellington or in Confed, or I see ministers Zooming in, or officials. If the system is set up to ensure we can have accountability and those who could be here are here, I would be supportive of that, but this system as it is, without consultation from all the parties and without a real sincere attempt to try to address very valid issues about accountability or caring for families, has not been seen, so I cannot support what the government has proposed.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening intently to the speech by the member for Edmonton West this evening, and I feel as though I have an entire speech of questions I would like to pose, so I am going to try to narrow it down.

The first thing that comes to mind is accountability. I really think that, when we are holding fellow members of Parliament accountable in the House, we have to do some self-reflection with respect to our own parties.

Just the other day, I watched as Conservative members decided they wanted to circumvent a vote. They went on the other side of the wall here to cast their votes through the hybrid voting system. They did not have the appropriate headsets on, which put the interpreters at risk. Therefore, I think we need to look at ourselves.

Currently, the representation of women in Parliament is only at 30%. We can do better to ensure we have representation in this party. To say that everybody has equal access to being members of Parliament and serving here is completely out of touch and unrealistic. Quite frankly, those remarks show an element of privilege.

My question for the member is this: Why does he not believe in the tools necessary to have equitable representation within the chamber?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague keeping it to two questions and not going on for a full 10 minutes, as she had commented.

To the first issue, I would say that those in glass houses should not throw stones. I sit on the operations committee, and I watched

the NDP join the government in a filibuster to block our ability to bring a privilege motion to the House. Our rights and responsibilities had been taken away by bureaucrats who refused an order of the House, and we had the NDP filibuster it. Therefore, I can understand the member's frustration with voting, but it is no different than filibustering to prevent members of Parliament from exerting their privilege.

With respect to the comment on privilege, Canadians do have equal access to be able to run. People are in different stages of their life and in different circumstances. Certainly, we should encourage everyone we can to run. I agree that, if there are ways we can improve access, that is wonderful, but it should be decided among the parties, not just the by the government, with its enablers in the NDP, forcing these changes down our throats.

It used to be tradition that changes to the Standing Orders were done through a consensus in the House. If one person said no, the government would back away. We are not seeing that. At the operations committee, we saw the government try to change the process with the estimates to allow it to have access to I think it was \$7 billion of spending on vote 40. When Scott Brison was the president of the Treasury Board, he tried to change the Standing Orders on the main estimates, which is the reason Parliament exists, to suit himself and the government. Again, it is moving away from consensus to deciding and ramming it down the throats of others, and I do not think that is right.

• (2010)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Edmonton West for his well-argued presentation in the House just now. We have also experienced the same problem at the national defence committee, where we have had meetings cancelled because of a lack of resources.

I want to ask the member for Edmonton West if he would really get down to it, especially as he talked about how this virtual Parliament is impacting the health of our interpreters and how the government is not here with a full cabinet to defend its record. Is that happening because the government wants to avoid accountability; has a lack of respect for members of Parliament; lacks compassion for those who work in the House of Commons, such as the interpreters; or is it all of the above?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, it is all of the above.

ROYAL ASSENT

[*English*]

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

June 13, 2023

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that on behalf and at the request of the Right Honourable Mary May Simon, Governor General of Canada, Christine MacIntyre, Deputy to the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 13th day of June, 2023, at 6:09 p.m.

Yours sincerely,

Ryan McAdam

Director, Office of the Secretary to the Governor General

The schedule indicates the bill assented to was Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, to make related amendments to the Food and Drugs Act and to repeal the Perfluorooctane Sulfonate Virtual Elimination Act.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 26—AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to speak to such an important piece of government business on the hybrid system we have adopted and have been using in the House over the last number of years.

In some of the last discourse, we heard from Conservative members in an exchange that came from a question from the NDP about members not using the technology and tools we have in place for the right purpose. This is given that we witnessed just days ago the abuse of hybrid Parliament, whether it was on Zoom or with the voting application, and the manner that was utilized by Conservatives to delay the vote and use it as a procedural tool.

We saw Conservatives who were voting and coming online through Zoom, and it was obvious they were sitting in the opposition lobby or perhaps had the beautiful stonework behind them from this place. They were doing this intentionally for the purpose of delaying the House. Why was that so obvious? The only members who seemed to have problems from a technical perspective at the time were Conservatives, so it was pretty clear there was an abuse of the system.

Therefore, I would tend to agree with Conservatives when they say that we need to ensure that the system and the tools we have are not abused. I think that we saw a lot of that on those two particular days. I think it was a Friday and a Monday when we saw that happening.

Nonetheless, I reflect on just some of the most recent votes. On Monday, June 12, which was just yesterday, we had a vote that was related to Bill C-33, where 70% of my Bloc colleagues and 66% of my Conservative colleagues used the voting app, according to the records that we have. When Conservatives talk about having consensus to use the hybrid Parliament, I would suggest to them that

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consensus comes through their basic agreement with and use of the technology.

Also on Monday, we had a number of other motions. We had the Bloc opposition motion, and 50% of the Bloc members, on their own motion, used the app to vote when we voted on that yesterday. Clearly the Bloc members favour using this technology that we have, given the fact that half of them, one out of every two Bloc members, used the app to vote on their own motion just yesterday, while 36% of Conservatives used it.

When we had Bill C-35 at report stage, 74% of Bloc members, almost three out of every four of them, used the voting application that we have adopted. Therefore, when the Bloc members get up, as I have heard them do both yesterday and today, to say we should be doing things based on consensus, I think that we have consensus is pretty darn clear when they are using the technology to the fullest of its ability.

We should be concerned that Bloc members might not be in the House, but it even gets worse than that. By the third reading and adoption of Bill C-41, 80% of Bloc members used the voting app. That is four out of every five of them. I do not think that we need consensus from the Bloc members that this is a good tool. They seem to be using it in great earnest.

It goes on. The Conservatives, although their percentages are much better, have been using the application and the tools just as much as everybody else.

I am reminded of just very recently when a Conservative member, a new mother who had just given birth days before, was participating in a House of Commons debate while holding her newborn. I remember it very well because she was speaking softly, and I remember that feeling of having a newborn, especially when they are sleeping, and wanting to let them sleep because we know what it is like when they are not sleeping. The member was speaking softly while sitting in her kitchen. The lights were dimmed, and she did not want to wake the baby. She was giving a passionate speech. I thought to myself, “Wow, look how far we have come in the short period of time since we started bringing on these new provisions.”

● (2015)

We have a new mother who is able to participate in a House of Commons debate literally days after giving birth. Let us imagine trying to convince people in this place 100 years ago that this would one day be the reality, or even 10 years ago, or even just five years ago. The idea would have been foreign.

As a society and as a country, we go through experiences. We went through a horrible experience in the pandemic. A lot of people suffered. There was a lot of financial hardship. There were a lot of people who, emotionally and from a mental health perspective, really struggled, but I think that we also have to realize that we discovered things and perhaps came across opportunities during the pandemic that could improve the quality of life for people who wish to be part of this process.

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This House is not what it was decades ago. This is not a House filled just with male lawyers. Let us be honest: When this House was first established, it was lawyers and it was men, and that was it. Over the years, we have seen that evolve. My predecessor was a scientist, Ted Hsu, who came to this place. We have seen other people come here who were activists or people who were really passionate about certain fields of work and who did not particularly fall into that mould of what a parliamentarian used to be.

As my NDP colleague pointed out in a question that she asked about the under-representation of women in this place, she is absolutely correct. I am trusting that her number of only 30% of the members in this place are women is accurate. How do we get that to a better place?

It is funny. I had dinner this evening with a senator, and we had a really interesting conversation. He was commenting to me that he believes the Senate has changed so much because half of the senators are women. He said it brings a certain decorum to the place, and that the decorum might be from the fact that those who are not being more collegial and using decorum are highlighted. I would be the first to point out, as already happened today, that I am not by any means putting myself in the category of those who always demonstrate great decorum.

I do not want to get off the very important point here. The point is that we need to create a place that does not just represent Canadians. I know the former answer to a question from a Conservative was that this place does represent Canadians. Well, it might represent Canadians in the sense that there is a mix of different backgrounds, but I do not know if it genuinely represents Canadians in terms of gender parity. I think that in particular there is an impediment to many women who have to make the decision of whether they want to get into this line of work, given that it requires so much time in Ottawa.

When we look at the tools that we have been able to develop, test and rely on confidently during the pandemic, why would we not take those tools, if we see them as a way to make this place more suitable, to better represent Canadians, including and in particular as it relates to a gender balance in this House?

I have heard some of the arguments against this. I have been listening and following the debate. I think I have addressed the Bloc's concern over consensus. I hear the concern that comes quite a bit from my Conservative colleagues. I heard the Conservative House leader say that they would be in support of all of this if there was a sunset clause. The way he described it was that one year after the next election, we would have to review and then make a decision on whether or not to move forward. He is trying to phrase it so that rather than making a decision about getting rid of it, we would have to make the decision about keeping it.

I would say that is a nuance. Whether the government of the day wants to bring forward a new motion to change the Standing Orders back to the way they were or whether the government of the day brings forward a motion to keep the Standing Orders as they are, the point is irrelevant. It is going to be exactly the same debate that takes place.

• (2020)

People's positions on things would be pretty much the same. I do not think they would particularly change. The important thing is that I do not think it should be a deal breaker for anybody that would make them just say they cannot support this because they really wanted a sunset clause.

This is my personal opinion. I preface it by saying that it is my opinion. I certainly do not know this to be fact. I would say probably the majority of Conservatives like the tools that we have. They certainly use them a lot, as do my Bloc colleagues. I think this is a bit of partisanship. I think this is about positioning oneself and positioning a particular party to try to put a narrative in place that people are not working, to say that when they go back home, they are not really working and doing their work.

From listening to the speech from the House leader for the government yesterday, we know that anybody who is in this job is working 24-7. When members walk into a store in their riding, how often does somebody bump into them and want to talk to them? Then they are working. That happens all the time.

This is not a nine-to-five job. We will be here until at least 1:00 a.m. tonight, and that is fine. That is part of the job. I think we all accept that, and I certainly accept it. If we can put tools in place to make it even more inclusive, I think we should be doing that.

In preparation for this speech, I was looking back at some references in Hansard for this Parliament. I reflect back to March 28, when my Conservative colleague, the member for Battle River—Crowfoot, was giving his speech. If I have this correct, it was from a city council chamber in his riding. He was commuting to the airport to come here, presumably. He wanted to give his speech and was able to set up a temporary spot to give his speech from a city council chamber. He said:

As we know as members of Parliament, things can change and develop quickly in this job. This has led me to be making a speech from a bit of a unique location. Having seemingly come down with the flu over the weekend, I was delayed in my return to our nation's capital. As a result, I was not able to get on my Sunday afternoon flight, which is my normal commute. Therefore, if you would indulge me, Madam Speaker, I am in a unique location that I would like to highlight.

I am giving my speech from another chamber, actually: the town council chambers of the community of Drumheller. This is the second-largest community in Battle River—Crowfoot in this beautiful area of east central Alberta, and I am proud to represent it.

He goes on after that. I am not saying this in any way to say, "See, I told you so. You love hybrid Parliament and you are using it." I am bringing it to everyone's attention because I think it is unique and important that the member was able to participate. He clearly could not come to Ottawa because of an illness. When he got better, he was on his way here, but he really wanted to participate in debate and made other accommodations to be able to do that.

As much as this motion about adopting a hybrid Parliament might be able helping a newborn's mother participate, it is also about helping people who have come down with an illness, who are on the mend and who might be on their way to Ottawa, as was the case with this individual. On Friday of last week, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan gave a virtual speech on Bill C-41. He is another Conservative colleague of mine.

What I am trying to point out is that we are all using this technology. We all see the benefit in the technology, and it is genuinely allowing us to participate in debate when we otherwise may have been limited. Most of us in this chamber, especially those elected in 2015 and after 2019, know what it was like to not be able to do that. This has given much more opportunity for people to participate by providing another way to participate. We do not have to physically be here. I think it is worth keeping in that regard.

• (2025)

I heard a criticism from a Conservative who spoke before me. It was specifically about accountability, and I heard his comments about accountability in two regards.

In the first regard, he spoke about accountability in terms of ministers answering questions. I know I heard him say that he was speaking specifically about accountability as it related to ministers speaking on Zoom to a committee. However, I do not think that is appropriate, and I can tell members that on this side of the House, and it should be quite obvious from question period every day, no minister answers a question on the screen. No minister answers a question virtually. If a minister cannot be present here in question period, a parliamentary secretary or another minister answers the question. That is not a rule established anywhere, but it is certainly a rule that the leadership on this side of the House has put in place in order to preserve that accountability. Question period is probably the part of the proceedings here that the public watches the most, and certainly that is the time that there has to actually be a physical presence in the House.

The other area of accountability the member mentioned is accountability in terms of individuals who are participating by Zoom in a committee and whether or not they are accountable. Well, we are accountable: We are accountable to the individuals who send us here. If the individuals determine that we are not doing an effective job, they will stop sending us here. We are accountable because we will go into an election at least once every four years.

No two MPs, in my opinion, approach this job in exactly the same way. Everybody develops their approach to the job in how they deal with constituents, how they deal with casework, how they deal with the House proceedings and with committee, how they deal with everything in the spectrum. If our electorate decides “Hey, you have not done a good job in terms of how you are handling your participation and how you are representing us”, it is up to them to hold us accountable. It is up to them to decide if they want us or somebody else. In that regard, I certainly believe that we are accountable. I think we will always have that accountability to people.

We are not like the Senate; senators are appointed, and they are appointed for a set period of time. We have to go back to our electorate on a regular basis and ask for their continued support. That is really, in my opinion, the most important thing.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that I think this is a good motion. I do not believe that putting a sunset clause on this motion can be a deal breaker. It is just as easy for a future government, after the next election, to say that it does not want this and that this is how it should be done.

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I also do not believe that the Bloc is against this motion, based on the fact that there is no consensus. Its members have by far, as a percentage of the political parties, used the voting application the most. They clearly enjoy using it, and I think that if the motion does not pass, many of them would probably be upset that we were not going to continue using it.

I will certainly be supporting this motion. I think it is a way to get so many more people interested in this place and to get so many more people to put their names forward. It is a way to continue to build on the diversity in this House, and particularly, in my opinion, to build on the kind of diversity that will bring us closer to a gender balance.

• (2030)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his reflections on this issue.

I think an important distinction should be made between whether the rules are being used and whether the rules are good for the institution.

I can say that for me personally, these hybrid rules have made my life a lot more comfortable. They have been convenient for me personally, and I have used them from time to time, but I also think they diminish the institution. While they are in place, I will use the voting app, but I think this place would be better off if some of the hybrid provisions were not in effect, which is an important distinction between whether members are using it today versus whether members view these rules as being good for the institution in general.

The biggest problem I have with a hybrid Parliament is the strain it has created on our resources. Before these rules were in place, parliamentary committees could sit basically when they wanted to sit. They could sit into the evening. We have a situation now in the public accounts committee, where Liberals are filibustering a motion, and the committee cannot move forward because it is stuck in these limited time slots.

I will acknowledge that other parties engage in filibusters as well and that it is not just one party, but if committees have work they need to get done or if there is an urgent issue, they should be able to sit more. When I was a staff member, the industry committee sat in the evening for five hours at a time for three nights in a row because there was an issue that justified it.

These rules no longer allow committees to be masters of their own domain. They make committees subject to determinations by the whips in the House about those resources—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Guelph is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering whether we are listening to another a speech or if there a question that is going to be asked.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

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• (2035)

The Speaker: Rather than let the members talk to each other, I will just clarify that it is “questions and comments”, so it could be a question, but it could be a comment as well.

I will let the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan continue.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage members who are so eager to debate the new rules to learn the old rules first, about how questions and comments work.

I have a serious question to the parliamentary secretary. How does he get around this significant problem, in terms of resources, and the fact that it makes committees, which are supposed to be masters of their own domains, now subject to resource decisions that are made external to those committees?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on his first point, a lot of people would say that bringing cameras into this place in the seventies was a bad move because of the theatre it created. A lot of people would say that putting video online so that people could clip it in real time was a bad move. I think that hindsight is 20/20.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I listened to the member, and I am going to answer his questions, if he does not want to talk to me back and forth through the middle of it. I think that it is important to reflect on the fact that maybe decades from now they will look back and say that it was a bad idea, but I can tell members that from my perspective right now, it looks like it is going to allow more people to engage, just based on the participation from Conservatives.

On the member's second point about the resources, we should not spare any expense at making sure our democracy functions in the way it should. If we need to put more resources into that by building out the structure of resources we have, then we absolutely must do it.

To that point, I do not disagree with him that I share similar concerns, but I do not think that needs to be the reason we cannot proceed. What it says to me is that we need to be investing more in the interpretation services and more in the resources, so that we can continue to function like this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, gaining and retaining power by any means necessary is in the DNA of that member and the Liberal Party. It is called Machiavellianism. This member completely misled the public by deliberately confusing electronic voting with the hybrid Parliament.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of electronic voting. The hybrid Parliament is another story. Why is the Liberal Party in favour of a hybrid Parliament? It is simply because it has an alliance with the NDP, and the hybrid Parliament benefits the NDP. The NDP members are mainly from western Canada, and we know that all of that travel is difficult. However, it comes with the job.

Next, I would like to talk a little bit about the respect that this member and the Liberal Party should have for those who provide simultaneous interpretation. Our interpreters are working their tails

off, experiencing hearing problems and burning out because there is a shortage of staff. Obviously, the hybrid Parliament is directly related to that burnout.

If we did not have a hybrid Parliament, our interpreters would be in better shape and more available. They would be able to cover the schedule without any problems.

I care about the human side of things. Let us put our interpreters ahead of such purely political justifications.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on the first point, this certainly is not about me trying to get control or seize power. We are using this system right now, and this system will be here for the foreseeable future. The member says that I am conflating electronic voting with the use of Zoom. I am talking about the two of them. I have made it very clear which I am talking about. If the Bloc's position is it supports the app but does not support Zoom, I have yet to hear that in this House. I have yet to hear the Bloc suggest anything otherwise, and it could be that I did not hear that part of the debate so far, but that is the reality.

When it comes to the interpretation services, I agree, and this goes back to my answer to the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, that we should not spare any expense in ensuring that the right resources are in place to provide the right supports, not just to our interpreters, but to all the support staff we have here.

If that means investing more in their well-being and providing more resources, then we should do that. I do not think it should be an impediment to the democratic process we have set up in this place, so that we can bring more people from diverse backgrounds, and in particular more women, into this chamber.

An hon. member: You don't care about them.

• (2040)

The Speaker: The hon. member has a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I can respect the fact the Bloc member and I disagree, but when he shouted out afterward that I do not care about them, it is categorically false. I am giving my position on this.

The Speaker: I remind all the members to respect each other as much as possible. We are in the chamber, so we want to remember that.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

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Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. We all agree the interpreters are really the foundation of Parliament, and we have to work harder to ensure they have a safe working environment and that we bring new interpreters along so we can really have them contribute in that most valuable way to the life of our Parliament. We all agree on that.

I think where some parties might disagree is that having close proximity to ministers means they are more accountable. I lived through the Harper regime and it was terrible. For nearly a decade, and there were some exceptions like Jim Flaherty, generally speaking there was no accountability by Conservative ministers. We saw that each and every day. They would not answer questions. They would not meet with members of Parliament. That is a red herring raised by the Conservatives.

My colleague pointed out that the Bloc Québécois uses the voting app more than any other party. The Conservatives use hybrid Parliament about as much as any other party. The NDP and the Conservatives are equal in that. The Liberals use it a bit more. The reality is Conservatives voted against and tried to block hybrid Parliament during the height of the pandemic. At the end of 2021 and in June of 2022 when COVID was still raging, they voted against it and tried to block it. We needed to use procedural motions to get the hybrid Parliament back in place to protect everybody.

Why does my colleague think Conservatives have been so adamantly opposed to a hybrid Parliament but use it so extensively?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, before I answer the question, I just want to point out that a member from literally the other side of the country, and I am assuming he is in his riding, is participating in this debate right now. I am so lucky I am an hour and 45-minute drive from this place. If I leave right now, I can be home in two hours, which will happen tomorrow evening sometime. Think of the commute this member has to do in order to participate here. I am not saying he does not want to come here, but I am just saying there are times when it makes sense for him to participate in this manner because he can still participate from his riding. Something that has perhaps been lost in this discussion is the equal opportunity for members to physically get to Ottawa because our capital happens to be located here.

Having said that, why do I think Conservatives have been against this before and against this now? I do not think individually any of them are against it. Collectively they have decided this is the best narrative. They decided they can sow the narrative within the public that the NDP and the Liberals do not want to work and want to just work from home and sit behind their computers at home in their pyjamas and participate in the House of Commons. That is the narrative they ultimately want to sell. We will have to wait for the fundraising videos to come out later on to find out.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see many of my esteemed hon. colleagues participating in this debate. I will be splitting my time with someone who I have had a number of conversations with, the member for Saskatoon West. It is a pleasure.

I come tonight to this debate with a few thoughts on where things are at with regard to hybrid sittings and the importance of continu-

ing that option for members and making some of these changes permanent in the Standing Orders.

I was fortunate enough to have been elected in 2015 in the wonderful riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge by the most entrepreneurial and generous residents across this country and to again be re-elected in 2019 and again in 2021. With that I have the perspective, like many of my colleagues, of having been in Parliament pre-COVID, having participated fully in that session of Parliament, and then post-COVID with the introduction of technology that has improved many aspects of Parliament.

I do attend. I am here in Parliament as often as I can be. I do think it is important for members to participate in person as often as they can, but I do think the permanent changes to the Standing Orders provide a certain amount of flexibility that reflects where we are in society, which makes our democracy more inclusive. My riding is the riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. It is about an hour plane ride from here to Toronto and a 50-minute drive home, but I have the perspective of having grown up in the riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley, which is represented by one of the New Democratic members. If I were its representative, I could understand fully, being that far away, the enhanced flexibility of remaining in my riding for a few days for personal reasons, for reasons to tend to in the riding. I think that is very important. It is not lost upon me.

I am a little bit of a traditionalist in many ways. I care about institutions, I care about our structures and maintaining those institutions. For me to say that these Standing Orders changes should be done is in the right direction, because it reflects where we are in modern-day society.

Here are a few remarks that I have in front of me.

It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to the motion to permanently implement hybrid sittings in the House of Commons. As members know, it has been a subject of debate since the early days of the pandemic, and I am pleased to speak in support of the motion. I would like to focus my comments today on how hybrid sittings can be beneficial not only to those of us who currently share the privilege of serving our constituents in this place, but for future members of Parliament. The subject of my remarks will focus on how hybrid proceedings of the House will benefit under-represented groups contemplating a life of politics and hopefully how the hybrid sittings can help to make our House a more diverse and inclusive place that better represents the communities we serve.

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I would like to start my remarks by quoting a September 5, 2021 article entitled, "Why diversity matters in our politics - and what can be done to support it". The author states that, "politicians today are finding themselves representing increasingly diverse communities that are composed of many smaller communities with unique needs. Having diversity among elected officials is a definite way to ensure these unique needs are identified and brought to the forefront." He goes on to say that "No race, ethnicity, nationality, creed, sex, gender or sexual orientation has a monopoly on talent. The best and the brightest people who care about improving their community do not all come from one particular group" and that there are "barriers that de-motivate female, racialized, Indigenous, LGBTQ and differently abled people from entering politics".

I believe that we can extend this argument to the barriers to participation in the proceedings of this place as a de-motivator for those groups who are under-represented in this chamber. In fact, flexible models of how we conduct parliamentary business would help level the playing field for racialized minorities, and current and future members of Parliament from rural, remote and northern regions.

Allow me to provide an example. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs conducted a study on hybrid sittings last fall, entitled "Future of Hybrid Proceedings in the House of Commons", which was tabled in January 2023. During the study, the committee heard from several current and former members who testified in support of making hybrid proceedings permanent.

● (2045)

These witnesses raised a number of examples of life situations where a hybrid model would be beneficial, including health issues, pregnancy, parenthood, transportation and bereavement. In fact, our colleague from the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Victoria, appeared before the committee on October 4, 2022, and stated that the impact of the hybrid model on her day-to-day life was "transformational". As per the report, the member provided the committee with four examples of how hybrid proceedings gave her the opportunity to keep working when it otherwise would have been impossible: pregnancy, maternity, illness and bereavement.

The member for Victoria told the committee that she was advised not to travel during her pregnancy. Without the hybrid sittings, she would not have been able to continue her work into her ninth month of pregnancy, nor would she have been able to work when child care issues arose with her newborn. Furthermore, the hybrid situation allowed the member to continue working when she contracted COVID-19 and when she flew home to see her father prior to his passing. The PROC report says, "[The member for Victoria] stated that more women need to be encouraged to run for office and that, in her experience, it was 'incredibly hard' to convince them to do so." The member stated that she is certain that women's political participation would increase in Parliament if Parliament were made more family friendly, which is what the hybrid solution allows.

The report also says, "[The member stated] that the hybrid model opened up the possibility for people with disabilities to run for office even though their health or disability might have prevented them from doing so in the past. She considered it to be critical to work towards a more equitable and accessible Parliament." This is

a concrete example of how hybrid sittings can reduce the barriers for women in the House of Commons and also reduce barriers for those contemplating running for elected office in the future.

I will now turn back to PROC's 20th report to highlight testimony provided by the Samara Centre for Democracy. Sabreena Delhon, executive director of Samara, recommended the House of Commons maintain hybrid proceedings for both the chamber and committees. The PROC report includes Ms. Delhon's testimony, which states:

...a variety of minority communities are currently under-represented in the House of Commons. These groups include women, people from [the] LGBTQ+ community, Indigenous people, and visible minority communities. Samara's research has shown that members of the House from under-represented groups often [feel] alienated in Ottawa. Ms. Delhon stated that if these members had more opportunities to work from and within their communities, it would reduce the feeling of alienation that they may experience in the House. She also noted that, in the long term, offering the option of hybrid participation could encourage [Canadians] from under-represented groups to not only enter into politics, but [also remain members].

Ms. Delhon's testimony suggested that hybrid sittings allow the House, "to be more inclusive and representative" and to demonstrate to those contemplating a career in politics "that Parliament is a flexible, responsive, contemporary work environment that is committed to attracting, retaining and supporting top talent". The report also states that, furthermore, "Samara's research has shown that constant travel takes a mental and physical toll on members", particularly those whose constituencies are far from Ottawa and are perhaps located in rural or remote areas that are difficult to access. Reducing the frequency of travel would improve physical and mental health outcomes. This would, in turn, help people to continue functioning at a high and effective level for the constituents whom they represent.

I commented, at the beginning of my remarks, on the use of the app in being able to vote and the use of Zoom for MPs who, for whatever particular reason, are unable to physically be in attendance here in Parliament. Some of my colleagues travel from the interior of B.C. or rural Alberta or northern Ontario. Particularly when they have the option and are thinking that they have been in Ottawa for two or three weeks in a row, and the next week there are some family or personal obligations and things they need to take care of in their riding, they can work from the riding. That reflects modern-date society, and it is one of a few reasons that the permanent changes to the Standing Orders should go forward.

Again, I say this with a great deal of thought and empathy, because I very much, personally, enjoy being here in Parliament. I very much aim to be here when the House is sitting. I do try to go home on Fridays, so I can see my children earlier than usual. The changes we have put in place for the hybrid Parliament are allowing me to do my committee work on a Friday morning from my office, effectively as usual, much like all MPs. However, it has allowed me that flexibility to quickly go home and help my wife with duties, including picking up one of my children from day care and the others from elementary school. That flexibility is what we need to incorporate into the House, but always with guard rails such that we ensure that members try their utmost to be in the House when they need to be in order to vote in person, to be at committee in person, and so forth.

It is great to see so many of my colleagues this evening.

• (2050)

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Vaughan—Woodbridge for his speech. I noted that he articulated a number of conveniences and a number of combinations of duties that a member of Parliament can undertake through a hybrid setting.

Would he acknowledge there are downsides and some risks to the traditions? Those traditions have come about for certain reasons. Would he acknowledge there is a diminishment of accountability with a hybrid system?

• (2055)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Chatham-Kent—Leamington for his question. We have many mutual friends in the area. I know the hon. member is a long-time farmer in the agriculture sector. I have a great deal of respect for everyone in the agriculture industry across this beautiful country and for what they do for us.

The permanent changes to the Standing Orders have provided a balance to ensure that members' asking questions, accountability and transparency and being there for our constituents are maintained. We always need to ensure that our democracy is robust. Our democracy is there for Canadians to participate in. The permanent changes to the Standing Orders in Government Business No. 26 reflect modern-day society but also reflect maintaining accountability and transparency that every Canadian from coast to coast to coast demands.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech. He seemed quite calm when talking about this evening's debate. It is good to tone down the debate a little.

Before being elected, I worked in a pulp and paper mill. I followed the three-two-two-three model. I will explain. I worked three day shifts, had two days off, worked two night shifts, had three days off, worked three night shifts, had two days off, worked two day shifts and then had three days off. I worked weekends, nights and days. I worked at least 12 hours a day and sometimes 16.

Before that I worked on film sets. I worked all summer, 20 hours a day, on American sets. It never stopped. I am probably one of the

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few politicians here who sees more of his family after being elected. I must be one of the few, because I go home every weekend.

This motion is poorly drafted. The government did not come to see us. When considering changing the way Parliament works, the government must discuss it with all elected members. We are not necessarily against the hybrid model, but we were not consulted.

Here is my question: Why is it that, when they want to make such a big change to the way we do things and how Parliament works, they do not come to all the elected members of the House to discuss it and come up with proposals everyone can be okay with?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his important question. I would like my colleague from the province of Quebec to know that I have worked in that area too.

[*English*]

I worked at a pulp and paper mill in B.C., Repap Industries, during the summer for many years. I do understand and acknowledge what shift work means, whether people work four on and four off or four 10-hour days, or whether someone works nights, afternoons or a morning schedule. I worked shift work at a grain elevator every summer, so I do appreciate the member's comments.

We are debating Government Business No. 26 this evening, the permanent changes to the Standing Orders. I think we can all say we have had the experience of utilizing the hybrid option for quite a period of time. We know it does provide enhanced flexibility for members. The member is correct. On the weekends, we do get to go to a lot of events, but we are home with our family members. My hat goes off to the police officers, the firefighters and anyone who works shift work all the time. They certainly have my utmost respect, and they always will.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of being elected by the good people of Saskatoon West in 2019 and again in 2021. My focus has been on what policy changes I can make as an MP to improve the lives of people in Saskatoon.

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Representing voters is a big responsibility that I take very seriously. There are issues like affordability and allowing people to keep more of their paycheques by reducing taxes, like the double carbon tax scheme that will add 61¢ to every litre of fuel. There are issues like crime, and making sure violent repeat offenders are put in jail and not repeatedly given bail. Also, there is providing more focus on addictions treatment instead of handing out free drugs. There are issues like lowering inflation, building more housing, allowing newcomers to work in the field in which they have been trained. These are the policy changes I have been focused on. I did not expect to spend time on a motion like this one, providing virtual options to make the lives of MPs easier. I want to make the lives of ordinary Canadians easier. I am not worried about making my life as an MP easier, and I would argue that virtual Parliament has the potential to make it worse for MPs.

Indeed, virtual Parliament was my introduction to becoming a member of Parliament, as COVID hit shortly after my first election. I did not have the prepandemic opportunity that many of my colleagues had to meet other MPs in caucus, attend committee meetings in person and make direct friendships within their party and across the aisle. Therefore, when an issue arose, the person I needed to talk to was often at home instead of in Ottawa, making it much more difficult to connect with them. For example, there was a man in Saskatoon being deported to Uganda. This was an urgent case, because the man is gay, and Uganda considers this a crime with very severe implications, including death. I had to intervene with the minister in order to keep this man in Canada. Fortunately for him, I was successful, but it involved several discussions with the minister. For issues like this, meeting face to face is always better. That is why I believe MPs are elected to serve and do the job they were elected to do to represent their voters in Ottawa. To me, it is not acceptable to “mail it in”.

I am sure most people watching have no clue what Standing Orders are. Basically, they define the rules on how Parliament functions, what is allowed and not allowed, and how proceedings must be done. However, the motion before us would change the Standing Orders to permanently allow virtual options. This would affect things like voting, speaking, remote participation, how to file paperwork, etc. For example, the Standing Orders allow individual members of Parliament 60-second statements each day before question period begins. Standing Order 31 would be one of the affected Standing Orders if this virtual Parliament motion is adopted. Perhaps I should demonstrate, for those watching at home, what a member’s statement is by actually delivering one on a topic such as our upcoming national holiday:

“Mr. Speaker, Canadians are coming together on July 1 to celebrate Canada Day. In Saskatoon, this means sunshine, barbeques, and fireworks. Canada Day is a day we spend with our families, our friends, our neighbours and even people we may have met just that day, to celebrate our country, our province, our city and ourselves. In Saskatoon, we are proud to be Canadians. It does not matter what one’s ethnicity, race, religion, or sexual identity is; in Saskatoon, everyone is Canadian.”

“Indigenous people, first nations and Métis celebrate Canada with us. Newcomers to Canada, refugees, economic immigrants, or those here for their families are all celebrating that they are in

Canada. July 1 is truly a day that makes us all patriotic and all equal.”

“For myself; my wife, Cheryl; and our two adult children, we know we hit the jackpot because we were lucky enough to be born and to live in Canada.”

“I thank all my friends in Saskatoon West and wish them a happy Canada Day.”

As members can see, the Standing Orders are a wonderful set of rules that give us, as members of Parliament, the ability to speak to issues that are important to the people who sent us here. The Standing Orders govern how debate happens in the House, and they govern how we coordinate ourselves in committees.

Virtual Parliament, of course, has made it down into the committee structure. Conservative members of Parliament understood that while COVID-19 raged, it was important for MPs to keep their distance and undertake committee hearings remotely. However, now we have instance after instance of NDP and Liberal MPs using Zoom to avoid accountability, mute their microphones and look otherwise completely disengaged and bored while in the comfort of their homes during committee meetings. I am not criticizing them for taking advantage of the rules as written; I am criticizing the rules for allowing this behaviour in the first place. This is the failure of virtual Parliament.

We, as opposition members, hold the government to account on committees, and yes, these changes to the Standing Orders directly affect how committees function and how they report to the House. For instance, Standing Order 66(2)(c) would also be changed by what the NDP-Liberals are doing here today. This Standing Order affects concurrence debates on committee reports.

I will give a little background for those who are on the edge of their seat, wanting to know all about concurrence reports. However, first, I must admit that I am the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and I have participated in several of these debates since the election.

• (2100)

In the past 18 months, I have been able to speak to concurrence debates on Bill S-245 regarding the Citizenship Act, the persecution of Uyghurs and Turkic minorities in China, and the special immigration measures for Ukrainians fleeing the war. In practical terms, what do these specific changes to how reports are concurred in mean to the people of Saskatoon West? Perhaps an illustration is in order.

Last week, on June 8, I had the honour and privilege of filling in for one of my colleagues on the status of women committee while it was dealing with two very serious reports in camera. As these reports were in camera, that is to say confidential until made public, I will not comment on what I heard during our deliberations. However, I can say what the topics were, as these are publicly available on the committee website.

The first was women and girls in sport and the second was human trafficking of women, girls and gender-diverse people. When these reports are adopted by the committee, they will come to this House, and any member of Parliament who is or is not a regular member of that committee, such as me, will then be able to move concurrence on the report and begin a debate on that issue in this House. This allows members who were not able to take part in these discussions at the committee level to get their thoughts on the record.

In these cases, they are both very serious issues that unfortunately only get attention when they make headlines, and bad headlines at that. I do not think any of us who has children, girls or boys, wants our children subjected to any form of abuse when they play organized activities or sports. We hear what happens to young girls and teenagers on sports teams. There are horrible stories that run the gamut, from bullying to psychological abuse to physical assault to, in some cases, sexual abuse and rape.

This is totally unacceptable at all levels and must be stopped for all of our children. It must be stopped in organized activities, in sports and in our schools, just as human trafficking of all people must be stopped. Women, girls, men, boys and gender-diverse people are all subject to horrible forms of human trafficking in Canada.

While studying illegal border crossings at the immigration committee last fall, we saw time and time again the RCMP begging us for more money and resources to combat this problem. On November 25, I asked the acting commissioner for the RCMP, Michael Duheme, the following question about human smuggling: “How many charges have you laid for smuggling?” He said, “it’s a challenge to get them to talk.... The idea is, how do you intercept them beforehand so that you can get them to talk a little more?” This is an issue I am clearly engaged in, and I will bring my expertise to a concurrence debate.

I am worried that making virtual Parliament permanent would change how concurrence debates and other parliamentary processes function. Others have raised serious concerns about the workload that virtual Parliament places on interpreters and the resulting diminishing of the French language in Canada. Unfortunately, I do not think a proper study has been done on these issues, nor has proper consultation taken place.

People may ask what the big deal is. Lots of people are working virtually now; why not MPs? Take my son, for example. He works in IT and has spent many hours working remotely from home. For him it works because his job mostly consists of sitting at a computer and writing code or responding to emails. My other son works in a potash mine, a physical job that requires his physical presence.

The point of all this is that some jobs are better suited to virtual and others not so much. I would suggest the job of an MP is best

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done in person. It is a job that requires extensive personal contact for success. It also depends on unplanned interactions in the hallway, in the restaurant or here in this House of Commons. I think everybody here can recall a time when a significant moment randomly happened simply because of being present. It is this work, this significant work, that we risk losing or diminishing.

Ultimately, what this debate is about is not what is best for me, for the Speaker, for the NDP-Liberal coalition or even for the Conservative Party. It is about what is best for the people of Saskatoon West. It is about how we as MPs deliver the best results for Canadians. As much as I would like to stay home and do Parliament via my computer screen, I know I cannot deliver the best results that way. Being an MP is a person-to-person, in-person job. If we want to deliver the best government possible, I believe we need to conduct our business here in person. I urge all members to vote against these NDP-Liberal measures.

● (2105)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not disagree with everything the member opposite had to say about the Standing Orders. However, I would like him to comment on the individuals who are present in the House on any given day during question period. All of a sudden, when question period is over and the Speaker is introducing a vote coming up or is reading what the vote is about, people on both sides of the House are exiting like rats leaving a sinking ship. Then later we will see it come up on screen that they voted virtually. They were sitting here in the House before question period ended, yet they scurried out and voted electronically.

Would he like to comment on that? I think it is wrong. If a member is here, they should stay here and vote. That is just my own perspective. Whether it is the government's perspective or the opposition's perspective, I do not know, but I would like the member to comment on that particular issue.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a good one. I think there are a few things to think about here.

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First of all, and I think this is my point, as we open up the ability to do these things, people will do them; they will take advantage of them. As the member pointed out, it happens in all the parties. I think this is part of the danger. I heard another member speak about measuring this and encouraging members to be in the House. There are no teeth in what is being proposed here to do that, so what I believe will happen is that it will continue to go in that direction. People will just find it more convenient to be home, to not be in the House or even to be in their offices voting, and it is not right. I think the key point here is that I am not necessarily opposed to some of these measures, but what we have not done, and what I think we should be doing, is studying this more intensely to make sure we are making the right decisions.

Second, there should be a sunset clause for this. It should be deferred, possibly even to the next Parliament, so it can look at this again and make its own decisions. Those are things that I think are important and that we should be doing here today.

● (2110)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate what the member said about the disadvantages of not being able to meet in person, but I have been here long enough to have watched friends and colleagues, before the days when hybrid was allowed, drag themselves in here literally from their deathbeds to protect their work because there were no rules to allow virtual participation.

In particular I remember the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier. Some members here tonight may recall when Mauril Bélanger, whose name I can say because he is passed away, had to protect a piece of private member's legislation. The only way under our rules to do that was to show up here physically. It was painful to watch what it cost him in his dying days to physically be here.

I would say to the hon. member that there are so many advantages to hybrid Parliament. I am not unsympathetic to the idea that it should not be a default option, but I desperately want to make sure we never again see colleagues suffering with cancer, near death, who feel they must physically be here to do their work.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, I agree, and that is why I believe the right approach here is a more thoughtful study of this subject and a sunset clause. As the member mentioned, there may be instances, very specific instances, where this makes sense, but as the previous member mentioned, it would just get taken advantage of. That is why I think that with the way this motion is laid out, it has not been studied enough. There are other options and alternatives we could do to allow people, in very limited circumstances, the ability to do certain things, but there should be an onus and some mechanisms to ensure that, when able, people are here in this House, which is where they should be. We should all be here doing our work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech; it could have passed for a Bloc speech.

I feel like the Liberal government put one over on us during COVID-19. We got hoodwinked because it asked for our co-operation and then forced its hybrid Parliament model on us. It is over-

reaching, and that disturbs me a lot. This government does whatever it wants.

This motion is super important. It should have required more than a 50% plus one vote—maybe even unanimity. This is a big deal because it is an attack on the rules of Parliament. It changes fundamental things. It changes MPs' contract with the people. This is a major issue for me, and it cannot go through like this.

The fluidity of member-to-member contact here in the House, when we see each other face to face, is a big deal. It is important for resolving conflicts and problems with our constituents and government departments.

I would just like to hear my colleague's thoughts on what I just said.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, I agree 100%, and I think that really points out the core issue, which is that there was not proper consultation. Certain decisions can be made by a simple majority, but other decisions, like the way we run this place, organization and institution, need to be made by more than a simple majority. They need to be made through agreement by all parties because of the significance and importance of those decisions.

I fully agree with the member's comments, and that is why I believe we should have had more consultation and should have arrived at a unanimous agreement among all the parties.

● (2115)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so honoured, as always, to speak in the House and to speak to the nature of our democracy. I have been here for 19 years. I think I always took our democracy for granted, but I realize that our democracy is under threat. Democracies around the world are under threat, and I think we have to frame the fragility of democracy within the debates we have here. Our obligation in taking on government and in taking on legislation cannot be about undermining the fundamental principles of what Parliament has done and what Parliament stands for.

I mention that because I was here in 2014 at the time of the horrific killing of Corporal Nathan Cirillo. I was here during the shootings on Parliament Hill. I remember the lockdown and I remember the trauma. I remember, early the next morning, feeling that I needed to go to the War Memorial just to be there and seeing people from all over the city of Ottawa who felt the need to be there at the site of that horrific killing.

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I have to say how shocked I was that I was told Parliament was going to meet that day, after the shooting, after the trauma. People were grieving and nobody had slept that night. I remember asking our whip why we were holding Parliament that day. He said to me that we had to show nothing would stop Parliament from working. We went there that day, and that was a really profound moment, one of the most profound moments I have had as a parliamentarian.

In March 2020, we were hit by COVID. I remember sitting in the seats as we were starting to learn about COVID and the fear of COVID and not knowing what was going to happen. Suddenly there was a global shutdown. What did it mean when we all had to go back to our communities? The fact that the technical teams of Parliament put together a hybrid Parliament that made it possible to vote and meet so that we met every single day throughout that time, to me, was a really profound moment. I think that all of us as parliamentarians need to say that this was one of the highlights of what we are as a democracy, that even though we were facing the biggest medical crisis in 100 years and people could not be together, democracy was going to keep going.

That was a game-changer for me. Out of the hybrid Parliament that we created, incredible tools were fashioned that made it possible to vote and made it possible to hold hearings, things that we did not think we could possibly do just three or four months before or even a month before. The fact that our civil service rose up and managed to get CERB together was an unprecedented victory. I know many civil servants who worked through that Easter weekend in 2020 to make that a reality so that people did not lose their incomes, did not lose their homes.

Regardless of our political battles with the government, as parliamentarians we need to say that at times of national crisis, we come together. At times of insurmountable odds, we rise above them. Then we can go back to throwing rocks at each other and kicking sand in each other's faces. However, there are moments when we need to say there are fundamental things that we accomplish.

We accomplished the ability, in a country as vast as ours, to hold democracy together. Do we sell that at the side of the road along with a bunch of old hubcaps and old Elvis paintings and say that we are going to have a yard sale, or do we ask how we keep this going?

I have been here long enough to remember what it was like when I was first elected. There was a real bravado and machismo culture. We always talk about Parliament being family friendly. It is not family friendly. There is nothing about it that has ever been family friendly. We always said that we wanted to be more inclusive. There was nothing inclusive about it. When I was elected, the stories I heard were about marriage breakups and alcoholism, because people left their homes and people were never back in their communities. When my sister died, I was on the road the next day doing my parliamentary work. I never got to grieve because that was just the way it was. We sucked it up and we did that.

• (2120)

What we learned out of COVID was that we all had to see the world in a different light. I want to really stress that what we are discussing tonight is not about us. I know my Conservative colleagues keep talking about people being able to phone it in and sitting at home on their computer. We are talking about the fundamen-

tal change that happened after March 2020 and the way all of us had to relate to the world. All of us began to reassess relationships and what we do.

From Lucretius, the Roman philosopher, we have what is called the “Lucretius problem”, which is that no one could ever imagine a river larger than what one had seen. None of us could imagine COVID. I remember talking to my staff when COVID hit, saying that we could not keep the office closed for a week, that it was impossible. We never thought we would be two years into it and doing work virtually. We adapted. In that adaptation, in my office, the staff rule was that we keep those phones running no matter what happens. If people called, we would answer them. We were there for them. I remember saying to my staff many times, if they were feeling burned out, to just take the day, go for a drive, do anything, but that we were there to help people.

Out of that reality that we lived through, we began to see life in a different way. Many of us realized that some people were way more effective working the phones than having people in the office all the time. This hybrid model was something people got used to. People began to think about their families, about the life they had not had, and said they were not willing to go back to the old way of commuting, sitting in traffic for hours and sitting in their little cubicles. People were demanding an alternate way of doing things to be more effective. I certainly see that with the offices I run. I have a riding that is bigger than the United Kingdom, and I have been noticing how some of my staff have been way more effective with this hybrid model of being able to do some of their intense case work at home and some days going into the office, and that people have also changed how we deal with that.

In terms of what we do politically, I think the issue of accountability is hugely important. The ability of an MP to talk to a minister without having to worry about staff is a fundamental of how we do our job. It was really difficult during COVID to be able to resolve issues, because we could not go over and just sit and talk, and do those one-on-one negotiations. It was really difficult at times to do committee work when we could not talk to each other, but we can do that now.

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At the same time, that does not preclude the ability of people to do their job in a region and a nation where it is 5,000 kilometres for some people to get here to go to work. There is the ability of people to be in their ridings during the fires and emergencies and still be able to vote. The ability of people dealing with loved ones who are sick and dying to be there with them and still be parliamentarians is a profound advancement on the notion of democracy. Democracy is not about a bunch of older white guys like me saying that we roughed it back in the day and so should new members. Democracy is about asking how we can make it possible for other voices and more inclusive voices to participate. That is one of the things the hybrid model has given us.

It means that we will be here the vast majority of the time, where we should be, but it also means there is the possibility that if there is something essential for members to be at in their riding, or sometimes essential to be at with their family, they can do that. That, to me, is what we should be talking about. This is not about us failing to do our job. This is about us recognizing the reality that Canadians are also facing. They want to be able to work more effectively in the wake of COVID, and to do it in a way that is inclusive and respectful and also recognizes the life balance that is needed.

● (2125)

None of us were able to think about what COVID would do to us, and I do not think that any of us are the same after COVID. I know I certainly am not. COVID changed me. It changed how I saw the world. It also changed my voters. We now deal with issues that we never dealt with before. In my office, in the space of two days, I had to call the OPP. That never would have happened before. Our staff deal with pressures that they never dealt with before in terms of threats, in terms of just the social crisis that we are facing and the mental health pressures. Maybe this is all a bad hang-over from COVID, but all of our staff are having to look at this. When I am dealing with the staff who represent me in my offices, I am very much thinking about how I can maintain the service to community, the service to people, while also making sure the protection of my staff is intact.

I am really interested in how we actually came together through the hearings on the hybrid Parliament and how we came through the notion of an incredible technological revolution that happened in democracy. It is funny. I have talked to my provincial colleagues, and some of my provincial colleagues are Conservatives. The first thing Doug Ford did was to kill all of that and go back to the old school, the old way of doing it because they wanted to look like they were showing up for work. They were like, "Oh my God, you guys actually get to do that. Do you actually have a functioning hybrid Parliament that works?" Yes, we do. It is about respect for the vast regions of this country, because not all of us can get on a single flight and get to Ottawa. Not all of us can be there all the time.

If we are going to have an accountable democracy, we need to be looking at ways of doing this that respect and understand difference, diversity and the immense geographic distances. For me, this is not an issue of praising or blaming government. This is about us as parliamentarians coming together and saying that our larger function is to democracy itself, and to be accountable to democracy means that we have to make sure that people can participate in that democracy. In Canada, that has not always been that easy. As I have

said, there was an old school world that I came from and I was very much in that old school world. If someone had said to me that we would have a hybrid Parliament before COVID, I would have said, "Not on my watch. No way. We will stay up and we will vote every night, all night, as long as it takes." That is what we did against the Harper government, and I was proud to do that, but it is also not something that is sustainable.

The fact is that people can do this. I myself, right now, am back home in northern Ontario. I will be heading to Ottawa again next week. I get in the car tomorrow, but we have been through brutal fires in our region and we have had a number of issues. There are issues that have to be attended to by us as parliamentarians. The ability to vote and have the voice of the people I represent heard is, I think, showing that we respect democracy at its most fundamental level, which is that we are just the representatives of democracy for our people. We are there for a time for our people, until our people decide to choose someone else to go in our place, but the ultimate focus of democracy, at the end of the day, is their voices and their ability to know that someone from their region was able to vote, no matter what the circumstances.

The hybrid Parliament has worked. We have to give huge thanks again to the translators, who have worked under extremely difficult situations. It has also taught parliamentarians that they are not really the kings of the planet. They have to also be part of a system that recognizes that our translators can burn out and our staff can burn out. Democracy is about that balance. I think we have managed to do that with this. I think this is something that we can all take credit for.

At the end of the day, when I go to a committee meeting and the minister is not there and he or she is there virtually, I am not happy. I will say that. I expect them to be there in person. I expect that the government does not exploit this. I think that if we are going to make these House orders permanent, we have to always hold government to account. They do need to show up and they do need to be there in person as much as possible, but it is valuable for us to have this space where people can at times participate virtually from their regions or while they are on the road as parliamentarians, such as for committee work, to know that they can do hearings.

● (2130)

Just last week, I had to find myself a library in downtown Toronto to participate in hearings, and it was really exciting to be able to do that, to know that I was still able to participate and I was not cut off from the democratic process, because I had a responsibility to do the work that I was doing while I was travelling, but I also had that responsibility to the people of Canada.

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I am very pleased that we have moved in this direction. I think Canada could be a model to the world. I will urge my colleagues to really reflect on this. Democracy is in a fragile moment. Democracy is undermined. It does none of us any good to burn the house to the ground to score a point. Sometimes we need to say we can actually all work together. Some days we can do better, and then we can go back to kicking the crap out of the government as per our job as opposition.

Let us make sure the system that we built around us is something that is sustainable for the long term, that is inclusive, and that will bring in more people and more voices into a much more diverse Canada. That is the Canada that I want to be a part of.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the member's intervention today, I was thinking about how, over the last couple of weeks, he has been spending a lot of time in his riding, particularly given the circumstances with the fires that we have seen over the last several weeks throughout Canada. I know his area of northern Ontario was heavily affected.

An example for using hybrid Parliament could not be more importantly illustrated than with this member. He was able, from his riding, to be there with his constituents and to be the support they needed, but still deliver their message to this Parliament.

Can he share that experience of how he was able to be with his constituents and represent them, but at the same time be functioning in this Parliament? Does he see the benefit of that, having had that opportunity?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, when we are representing our people, there are days when it just does not make sense to them that we are not there. There were so many times in my previous life, before COVID, when I was not there for major issues that happened in my region. People did not understand that there was a vote on a private member's bill that I had to be at. How do I tell them that? I am still kicking myself for not being at the funeral of Grand Chief Stan Louttit. He was such an important voice in our region, but I was not there because my whip said there was a vote on a private member's bill. I do not even know what we voted on, but I remember I was not there.

These are the impossible situations we are put in, in a democracy. We are there to represent our people. We are there for the tough times and we are there for the good times, but we are there to vote. There are times when maybe we can do both and represent a better level of democracy.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I will say that, as a father of a young family and as someone representing a riding in western Canada, I see personally, from a lifestyle perspective, the advantages of the current provisions, although I have concerns about their impact on this institution. I do support the voting app, because I do not think voting is the same as giving a speech.

I want to put to him a question I put to a government member. The biggest problem I have with how things are working right now is the way the resource crunch associated with hybrid has totally undermined the ability of parliamentary committees to be masters

of their own domain. Parliamentary committees used to be able to sit when they thought it was necessary for them to sit to do the business of that committee. It meant that if the industry committee was dealing with a crisis related to industry, that committee could decide to sit, fundamentally, whenever it wanted in order to do its work. Now, it is some kind of process involving party whips that determines who gets resources and when. It is not the committees, it is not the members of the committee, and there is not the same ability to actually pursue the work that is required.

The parliamentary secretary acknowledged this problem and said we can figure it out at some point. The concern I have is that we have not figured it out. We have had this problem persisting for years. I think it is a fundamental enough problem for democracy, ensuring that parliamentary committees can do their job, that we need to actually consider that when considering how to vote on these provisions.

Does the member have concerns about the way parliamentary committees have been constrained by resources and the way they are effectively controlled in their ability to sit by those outside of those committees? Does he think this is a fundamental enough issue to say that we need to fix that problem before we move forward in any way with the rest of these provisions?

• (2135)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I guess if I were going to speak to the problem, I would say the problem, certainly to some degree, is the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, who just loves to filibuster a committee to stop questions on women's rights and would use up every possible parliamentary tool to block the work of committees.

The work of committees is about getting answers; it is not about a Conservative member filibustering endlessly because of his opposition to women's rights to their own bodies. I think we are probably in a better position now, in that the member cannot go all night, all week and all month to do a stunt.

As for whether it is a very important issue, as in the case of the one that he mentioned the industry dealt with, I would certainly be willing to look at that as a reason to make sure that we had resources for him, but I certainly would not spend any more resources so that the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan can run his endless filibusters against women's rights.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we just witnessed an unfortunate exchange. There was a good question, but things took a turn and sank into partisanship. That would have just as easily happened in a hybrid Parliament as a normal Parliament but, unfortunately, my colleague's question did not get answered.

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No one in the Bloc Québécois is opposed to a new form of hybrid Parliament. We have never said that. I repeat. Voting with the app makes things move faster. If someone is on Parliament Hill, they do not have to be in the House. Therefore, we can speed up the process since committees start earlier. There are advantages to a hybrid Parliament, but the format of this hybrid Parliament has not been discussed with all the opposition parties.

My colleague talked about democracy, the importance of democracy and the respect we must have for democracy, specifically in relation to a hybrid Parliament. Meanwhile, the other opposition parties have no say. I find that unfortunate.

There are people who will have to travel to their riding because of forest fires, for example. I know about that because that is relevant to me in my riding. My colleague is also affected in his riding. Of course we need to be there. There are people who will get sick. We have the technology so, of course, they can rely on the hybrid Parliament. All of that is true.

Now, the government's proposed changes to the rules require an opposition party to have 25 members rise in person to block a motion, under Standing Order 56.1(3). That is the entire NDP caucus. We know that the NDP already got a taste of this standing order when Thomas Mulcair was called to testify in committee on the use of satellite offices. The opposition has to give everything and the government does not even have to require its ministers to be in the House.

I am asking my colleague why we would accept such a motion without any discussion, when we could all provide our two cents' worth and come up with something quite a bit better than this motion.

It is important. It is about the work of Parliament. Parliament is the ultimate representation of Canadian democracy—and that is coming from a Quebec sovereigntist. That is not nothing.

I am just asking my colleague if we can take the time to discuss this between us and come up with something much better than what is on the table today.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I actually thought we were discussing that. I do not know what the Bloc's problem is. Their members did get the chance.

However, I was fascinated by what was said by the member of the Bloc who spoke previously. He said the Bloc opposed “50% plus one”. I thought that was fantastic. It is like the Bloc members oppose “50% plus one” when it is about their privileges as members of Parliament, so I am more than willing to discuss their opposition to “50% plus one”.

I think the hybrid Parliament would help the Bloc. I certainly think we would hear more from the Bloc leader in the House, but I rarely hear from him anyway. If the Bloc members are serious about this, they would not be using the voting app 80% of the time. Nobody uses the hybrid Parliament more than the Bloc does. I think we are bending over backwards to make it possible to participate. I really appreciate hearing from the Bloc members and I would love to talk to them more about “50% plus one”.

• (2140)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would love to have had a chance to amend the proposed Standing Orders with one change, and I would like the member's thoughts on it, although I do not think we would get a chance in this place unless the government makes the change.

If we go with the proposed new Standing Order 15.1, the only condition for participating virtually is that the members participating remotely be in Canada. I would love to add “and have submitted to the Speaker of the House the reasons that participation by video conference is preferable”. It is not a tough condition, but there would be greater accountability for constituents if they knew why their members were participating in video form.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am not really sure what the question is, but I know that if we were making it possible to participate from outside of Canada, the Senate, which lives in Mexico for most of the year, would love it and would probably have most of the Senate hearings on the Mexican Riviera.

That is the best I can answer, but I cannot speak for the Senate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since I have 20 minutes of speaking time, I would like to tell my colleague that when I saw the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, I did not actually see her.

I will say from the outset that I will be voting against Government Motion No. 26, as are all my Bloc Québécois colleagues. We talked about it and reached an agreement. We are going to vote against the motion in order to uphold the conclusion of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which I attended for weeks. I was there for the testimony, the deliberations, all the work. The Bloc Québécois's position takes into account our ongoing concerns, which have arisen from our parliamentary experience since the beginning of the pandemic.

The hybrid Parliament was put in place because it was necessary; it allowed us to continue our work. Otherwise, everyone was simply staying home. How did we manage to make this happen? There was a quick, friendly and consensual consultation to hammer out a plan to work together. As the old saying goes, nothing is more permanent than a temporary solution. I have no desire to live that way.

There is no doubt in my mind that the government is making changes to the Standing Orders unilaterally, without even initiating a dialogue. There has been no attempt at dialogue or discussion with the opposition parties. No one was consulted. Where is the good faith?

Frankly, I find it hard to understand why anyone would do such a thing, given everything we have been through at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We managed to adopt a report, although the Bloc Québécois tabled a dissenting report. The report contained several potential options.

Mr. Speaker, ultimately, much of the report's contents came from certain witnesses, including yourself. Your suggestions were extremely valuable.

Government Orders

Thanks to the agreement with the NDP, the government can pull a fast one on the opposition parties. I look forward to seeing the Liberals when they are in opposition, perhaps under the Conservatives. That is what I am predicting. That might come back to haunt me. Will this motion still be in effect? We will have to see.

The fact is, the government should have sought a consensus. We are trying to work together. I can be honest, because the Bloc Québécois is not looking to be in power. We are seeking freedom for our country, Quebec, so I can say that. When people talk to me about partisanship, nonsense and bickering, I can deflect the blame.

This motion is going to drastically change the rules of the House of Commons and cause dramatic shifts in the dynamics of the work of parliamentarians. Without informing or consulting all of the other parties about the content of the motion, except, of course, the NDP, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons decided to unilaterally announce on June 8 how the representation of constituents and the debates on the issues that affect them would work here in Canada from now on. Come on. That is a major change.

I can see what is happening with our allies, and I think that it would be in everyone's best interest to discuss this together. It requires a lot more respect, but the government is doing this just a few days before we rise for the summer. We finished our study in January. There was plenty of time to discuss it. We would have even had a few weeks before the end of the session.

This 42-page proposal will change the way of doing politics in Ottawa and, obviously, reduce the accountability of government members in their roles.

● (2145)

I fear for our democracy. It must be protected. It is a hot topic these days. Just today at the procedure and House affairs committee, we spent another five hours talking about foreign interference to save our democracy.

I will give some examples. When question period ends and members leave West Block, that is when journalists have access to them. This is important for the people who are watching. If members are in their offices, just a few metres from Parliament, that is a great way for them to hide.

Some will say there are other ways. Accessibility and journalistic rights will be violated. I have proof of that, and all the witnesses reiterated it.

Would a healthy democracy just allow this? Is this really the direction Canada wants to take? Honestly, I am certain that it is not. As my colleague said earlier, it is a Bloc member who is fighting to defend Canada's democracy. It is unbelievable.

As I said at the outset, the government House leader brought this to us a few days before we rise for the summer, with no consultation and no notice. The fact is, he is doing it at the eleventh hour.

There comes a point where enough is enough. I am not going to rant and rave this evening. I already did that the other night, but the government could stop taking us for fools. Right now, we are talking about defending and respecting democracy. As I was saying, we

have been talking about foreign interference in our elections for weeks. We have been asking the government to protect democracy for weeks.

Is the government aware that it needs to restore people's confidence in our system? I would hope so. What has it done? We are trying to figure that out.

This is a collective responsibility that we all have as members. We know what we are getting into. I want to see real action. I want to see the government treat members of the House with respect. I am saying, "I want to see" because I do not want to say, "I would like". Even though I am feeling a little less positive right now, perhaps because we are approaching the end of the session, I believe that we can work together.

Yesterday, we heard the speech given by the government House leader. He was being melodramatic and telling us stories to raise our awareness. It is impossible to be indifferent to that, but I will repeat that he is not going about this the right way. That is what the Liberals need to understand.

I was pretty disappointed to see that the procedure and House affairs committee did not accept the most respectable recommendations regarding the hybrid Parliament. I cannot get over it. With the government and NDP votes, the procedure and House affairs committee rejected a lot of parameters that would have made us more efficient. They were reasonable parameters for establishing and maintaining a healthy parliamentary democracy.

The motion had not even been drafted and moved before the government threatened to not suspend the work of the House for the summer until this and at least a dozen other motions were adopted.

We must add to that several other things, such as sittings lasting until midnight on several nights, though not all, and the excessive use of closure, more than I have ever seen before, to pass bills. Furthermore, forgotten bills are being put on the Order Paper, the bills that are considered a priority by the government are constantly changing, and briefings are held only for journalists before MPs are informed of the content of government bills and private members' bills. The government also refused to listen to the will of the House when we called for David Johnston to recuse himself from the study of the need for a public inquiry into foreign interference.

● (2150)

I could give other examples.

After all that, we are told that this is to further democracy. I doubt that is the real reason. When it comes to respecting the legislative process, the government members are truly arrogant.

Government Orders

At the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, a number of witnesses said that the hybrid format affects spontaneous connections between members from different parties. As an aside, I have a great deal of respect and sympathy for our colleague, the member for Labrador, who has received a lot of praise, three times now in the House. She was applauded and encouraged. I would love to know how these things are done virtually. This is tangible and real. This is changing the relationships between elected members.

The fact that I can bump into a minister in the hallway and talk to him or her about an important issue facing the people of my riding, Laurentides—Labelle, is just as important as oral question period. The informal relationships that we all build with one another help us better serve our constituents. Is that not our job?

We know the answer. We all have to be present to do our jobs properly and to serve our constituents. We must never forget that. I am not talking about reforming, reflecting or perfecting. I am talking about coming to an intelligent and reasonable conclusion. I am disgusted by what we are seeing here.

The thing that irks me about this debate, as I was saying earlier, is the method the government is using. I am against permanently having a fully hybrid Parliament, but we are not against every idea. There are several that are very good and deserve to be looked at. We should do that by consulting, negotiating and talking, not by having deliberations when the outcome is a foregone conclusion.

Some are arguing for better work-life balance. There are several good ideas that deserve to be studied to provide more flexibility to members in exceptional circumstances, like those who live in provinces affected by the forest fires.

We want in-person voting. Let me say it again, just to be safe. We want in-person attendance to be mandatory during all votes that the government has explicitly stated are confidence motions and during all votes on appropriations. I think that is common sense. We have yet to get a response to that suggestion, but that is because there has not been any dialogue.

It should be the same for parliamentary committee chairs. How can the chair sense what is happening in committee, understand and preside over debates if they are not there in person? Imagine the chair of the committee attending virtually while everyone else is attending in person. It has happened before. It makes no sense.

I agree that exceptional measures are appropriate, but certainly not in the format we have seen in recent months. Even the Speaker of the House of Commons came to meet with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. He told the committee that we had to find the best way of doing things, not just something developed in a rush. We had a few weeks to prepare, because the report was tabled in January. That is not what I am seeing tonight, however.

• (2155)

I would like to remind members that, although the summer adjournment is only a few days away, we still have time to sit down together and discuss this.

The Speaker also said that there were issues to resolve regarding decorum, the dress code and connectivity. We do not all have access to the same quality of Internet services yet. However, there is nothing about any of that in the motion.

We want to ensure that a virtual Parliament will not weaken government accountability by allowing ministers to be absent when things get too hot for them to handle. That is one of our concerns. At one point along the way, most of the ministers were attending remotely. That is why we want to limit remote attendance. The witnesses and commissioners absolutely need to be present for committee meetings, as we saw today. That changes everything.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs just finished meeting. When witnesses appear in person, it is completely different. However, we still ran into some problems. Since the NDP whip was participating remotely, she was unable to see that a motion had just been tabled in person. Those are real-life examples that we cannot ignore.

In our opinion, the hybrid parliamentary model has not proven to be the effective parliamentary system that was expected in a country like Canada, which claims to be a model of democracy. The hybrid Parliament, in the form proposed by the government in its amendments document, could jeopardize the parliamentary mechanisms of government oversight set out to protect our democratic institutions. Our allies in other international legislatures told us that they went back to participation in person as soon as possible.

I am thinking about the people who are watching us this evening. We are in the House until 12:30 a.m. and parliamentary business is winding down. I implore us to be constructive. Let us prove it. I implore us to work together constructively. The House leaders of each party need to be consulted. A reform of this scope needs to be made without partisanship. When I think about the people who are watching us, I feel like we are giving them a very bad performance. We need to show we can collaborate, show that we are able to work together.

I will close by saying that the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and member for Waterloo tabled the committee's report a few months ago, but the government is only now reacting. Why is this being rushed through? Let me put it this way: It is because the Liberals procrastinated. As with so many files, they have been dragging their feet, and now they are in a hurry because everything has to wrap up on June 23. It is doing this at the last minute. This cannot happen again.

• (2200)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think it is a bit rich to say we have been taking our time. That member knows that the challenges of getting anything through the House primarily come from colleagues next to the Bloc, the Conservatives, and the games they play to delay anything getting through the House. That is why this has taken so long.

Nonetheless, I heard her explanation of what happened with hybrid Parliament. She says we need to discuss and talk about it, but she sits on the procedure and House affairs committee, and we did talk about it at great length at that committee. Not only that, we have the incredible advantage of having had a three-year pilot project. Since when do we bring forward ideas, legislation or policy where we have had such an incredible opportunity to experience something in real time? That is what we have had here.

I am confused about the Bloc's position on this. Her colleagues with her in the House right now were very critical when I was talking about the number of times the Bloc has used the application. On Monday, in one vote, 60% of the Bloc members used the application to vote. They took great offence to that and said that they are not against the voting application, but they are just against the hybrid stuff, yet yesterday the Bloc brought forward an amendment, which was ruled out of order, that talked about certain times when one has to vote in person. Now, I am hearing that member talk about the voting application as though it were something that should not happen at all.

What is the Bloc's position? Do those member support the app to vote and not the Zoom capabilities, or do they support none of it at all?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, I will answer all three questions even though they were asked by only one person.

First, in my mind, a pilot project must be evaluated for results that can be applied permanently. We had three years of practice. We met with experts. We have a result and that is the report. What I heard from my colleague is that they will not be using all the work we did. It has been shelved.

He said that there were discussions. Unless my dear leader slept all through these last few days, there was no communication about what would be tabled, in this case Motion No. 26. I would like someone to show me the proof and I will apologize for my comments. Otherwise, I did not see the leaders consulting and discussing the report or having any constructive consultations.

Finally, with regard to the voting application, I will slowly repeat my remarks. Sometimes I definitely speak too quickly for the interpreters.

We agree on the application. We used it a great deal. When I talk about in-person accountability, I am referring to confidence votes, which do not happen every week, and supply votes. We intend to use the application for everything else.

Are we going to have to say it 50 times? It seems clear enough to me.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague is on the procedure and House affairs committee with me.

I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois, although it is funny for me as an Albertan to be saying this, considering what I usually hear

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from the Bloc Québécois. However, in the matter of foreign interference, which we are studying at the procedure and House affairs committee, I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois for doing more to defend Canada than the current Liberal-NDP coalition has been doing.

Notwithstanding that issue, the issue before the House right now is hybrid Parliament. Just as a note, we have had to struggle to get resources because the procedure and House affairs committee is so busy. We have now learned that we actually have resources for next Tuesday night's meeting, but it has come at the expense of the declaration of emergencies committee because of the lack of resources.

We have seen the complete and utter catastrophe, as the procedure and House affairs committee has gone through the study on foreign interference in our elections, because a small group of people in the House, a small majority, the Liberals supported by the NDP—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the heckling from the member, we have seen the disaster that came from a unilateral decision of members of the House in the appointment of David Johnston as a special rapporteur. Had the Liberals consulted and gotten agreement from all parties, perhaps we would not have the calamity the government now has at its feet.

Does my colleague think that, when it comes to hybrid, we should have agreement amongst all parties in the House, rather than just a couple of parties?

• (2205)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I have a lot to say about that.

At the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, we do indeed work in a collegial manner. As members know, we in the Bloc Québécois lead with our conscience. We analyze whether something is good for Quebec, for our values. If it is, we vote in favour. If it is not, we vote against it.

That is what happened at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We voted for what is happening right now, which is the real defence of democracy. We are talking about the hybrid Parliament, and democracy means consultation. We used resources to consult experts and obtain results in order to establish a possible hybrid Parliament with rules.

That is being trampled on. With just a few days to go before we rise for the summer, all of a sudden a motion is being rushed through, without any real consultation. Once again, consistent with the list I provided earlier, I am unfortunately very disappointed in the government.

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Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I apologize very much to my colleague that I am not speaking French, but it is late in the House tonight, and my French is not up to the task. However, I work very well with the member on the ALS caucus, and I appreciate the work she does in the House very much.

Obviously, I do not agree with some of the things that the member has brought forward, but one of the things I am worried about is the health of our interpreters and the health of the people who are working to support us. It is a challenge for me and something that I struggle with, because I do not understand how the Parliament of Canada cannot adequately resource the committees for the work that we need to do. This is something that we need to get to the bottom of, and I think that there are solutions there.

I strongly believe in a hybrid Parliament, because I strongly believe that it makes it easier for women and others for whom it may not be as easy to be in this place. It makes it easier for them to be represented here. I think that is one of the most important things that we can do as parliamentarians.

I wonder if the member could talk about the fact that we do not have the resources necessary. Quebec is a lot closer to Ottawa than Alberta is. Certainly, for me, having a hybrid Parliament is really important. Is there a way for us to come up with the resources necessary to make sure that a hybrid Parliament could work?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, indeed, I am very concerned about our resources. When we visit other Parliaments, it is clear that their staffing requirements are different, given that we have two official languages. In fact, what worries me is all the damage that has occurred with the use of Zoom and the resulting acoustic bursts. All the partners who met with us said that the education system needs to be involved upstream, to ensure there are sufficient resources. What is more, when people are working in hybrid mode, they work differently. The equipment is not the same.

Honestly, to go one step further, if our official languages are important, if French is important, if we want quality discussions without interruptions, that is another reason to use the hybrid mode sparingly.

- (2210)

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the wise member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

This is a job like no other, as I am sure all members in this House can attest. There really is nobody who understands what we do other than those of us who have had the good fortune and the humble honour of serving here. It is, in and of itself, an enigma.

The role of an MP is, by proxy, a social one. Not only do we engage with our constituents, but so too do we engage with each other in this House, in its committees and even outside of this chamber.

The uniqueness of our institution is reflected in its rules, which are the Standing Orders. The government is proposing to change 50 of them. This would make the temporary changes to our Parliament regarding hybrid proceedings, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, permanent. This is no small matter, as it is one of the largest overhauls of the rules governing the House of Commons in our history.

With respect to our position, Conservatives are advocating for the return to in-person proceedings while maintaining the voting app.

The Liberals should not be making these changes without the consent of the other opposition parties. Their will to do so indicates that these changes are not being put forward in good faith.

Since Confederation, the business of the House has always been conducted in person. This was, of course, a necessary condition because of the limitations of the technology of the time, although the idea of Sir John A. Macdonald or Wilfrid Laurier debating on Zoom is an amusing one, if we consider it. However, despite these technological limitations over time, there has always been good reason for the business of the House to be done in person. Some of these reasons are obvious, and others might not be. The provinces have all understood this. That is why not a single one of the 10 provinces of this Confederation have maintained hybrid proceedings.

I will start with what should be plain to most, which is the concept of accountability within the parliamentary system. The role of Parliament is to hold the Prime Minister and the executive, which is made up of the ministers of the Crown, to account. This is a process that I have witnessed, over the last 18 years, to be most effective in person. I have had the luxury of watching 15 years of in-person sittings and a handful of years of hybrid sittings. The difference is stark.

Being an effective parliamentarian takes more than just firing up our computer and logging in. All citizens can do that, but it does not automatically make them parliamentarians. An effective parliamentarian works behind the scenes, as well as in the limelight of the House of Commons, committees or media scrums just outside these doors. I would humbly argue that, as important as giving a speech in this place is, it is hardly going to be the catalyst to change people's opinions and minds on a matter that is before the House. That requires legwork, convincing and behind-the-scenes conversations in order to build what I call the "sphere of influence" that we all have as parliamentarians.

• (2215)

We gain our appointed authority by winning an election. Our power as parliamentarians comes from building relationships and influence with each other and with the broader Canadian public. It comes from bringing that influence to this place, convincing our colleagues of ideas and changes that are in the best interests of the nation. I would argue that this would be impossible to do if a member were not able to resist the temptation to stay home and just tune in via Zoom to the House of Commons, check the box that says they were there, make a speech that they could post on social media, wash their hands and call it a day. That is not a day in the life of a parliamentarian. Madam Speaker, you have been here for a long time too. You know of what I speak.

Furthermore, Canada is a diverse country with many regions. It is via gathering in a common place that, as parliamentarians, we have a unique chance to learn about other regions of this massive country. I am looking across at my colleague from another party, who is from virtually the opposite end of the country; we are culturally quite different, but I do not doubt his heart is just as Canadian as mine. We would never have the opportunity to chat, to end up at maybe even a range where firearms are being used lawfully and have conversations about the greater good of the nation. Even though we might be quite different in different parts of the country, we have opportunities to break bread and to rub elbows together. This is where good decisions are made.

When Canadians go to the workplace, they have water cooler exchanges and conversations at the coffee pot, for example, at the back of a committee room. This is where good discussions happen. Parliament takes this concept and expands upon it to a much greater extent. It is what makes this job so unique, so much fun and so challenging.

Members of Parliament may have discussions after their time in the House and in their committee assignments to informally discuss these issues. It could even happen from time to time that we cross paths at a local pub after the day is done. That is where the real honesty, I think, happens. These discussions go on across party lines and within our own party. I do not know how it happens in other caucuses, but sometimes, I hear things in my caucus that make me go back to the coffee pot and ask whether I heard correctly what I thought I just heard. That is what matters, and that is what is lost.

I am encouraged that, in spite of the fact that we have had hybrid Parliament, we do have a relatively large attendance rate here. However, if we enshrine these changes and codify them permanently, there could be changes to this institution. If the effect on this institution that comes to pass is the same as I have seen from the decisions of the government on our other institutions, then I am afraid that this is not a good decision for our institution.

Members do not have to take my word for it. Our former colleague, Wayne Easter, for those who want to take to Twitter, has a seven-part series of tweets that basically call out the government and the caucus that he once belonged to for making this change permanent. He tweets that MPs have a responsibility to be present in the House, not be relaxing at home or even attending something in the riding. Constituency weeks are constituency weeks, and Parli-

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ment weeks are for Parliament. That is just one example of the common sense that we must adopt in this place.

I encourage my colleagues in this House to just pause and think about the traditions, think about the history and make sure that we are actually moving in a direction that protects the sanctity of this institution and the country that stands upon it.

• (2220)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are a lot of things to take in. What we have just heard was a very dramatic exposé about the horrors that hybrid could offer in the House.

For anyone at home who might be wondering, as a mom of young children, I can assure them that if I am ever participating in hybrid at home, I am not relaxing. It is very hectic, and we all have to juggle a lot of things. It is certainly not something that I like to do very often. I am a chair of a committee, so I am here in person absolutely as much as possible.

I would like to ask the member about accountability. Let us focus on that.

Are there existing mechanisms to ensure that this could function without coming to these extreme examples of the traditions of the House possibly falling apart?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, this was the argument that was presented by some who came before the procedure and House affairs committee, but I will just refer to another couple of the tweets from her former colleague, the Hon. Wayne Easter, who has spent years in this place.

He said, “If you don’t want to work in Ottawa during the parliamentary sessions, don’t run to be an MP.”

It seems like harsh language, but I will go back to the comments that I have made before. I have watched decisions made that I consider to be absolutely damaging to the interests of this country because MPs were operating in individual silos on Zoom in their constituency offices, with a general inability to reflect with each other about the decisions being made in this place.

I will go back to 15 years prior, to when I first witnessed hybrid. I had never seen such disastrous decisions being made, because when we were all here and we were all together, we had to work together and we made better decisions.

It is the ideas that come together, the bubbling up through the discussions that we have in this place that make this country great.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, with whom I have had many hours of debate.

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I was wondering about something. I have to confess that, in my two short terms, I have sat the same number of hours in person and virtually. I therefore have little experience in terms of knowing all the benefits.

Considering that my colleague from Alberta has many more years of experience, I am hoping he can help me understand why a decision as important as this is coming to us at the end of a parliamentary session, even though our committee tabled it back in January.

Why is this happening?

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, there is nothing that justifies urgency more than leaving something to the last minute, when closure can be invoked in the name of getting something done before the summer session.

I would suggest to my colleague that this is not an accident. This is simply loading up the agenda at the end of the parliamentary session and getting through it as quickly as possible, with as little debate as possible, so that Canadians do not actually have the time, through their elected representatives, to get the full circle of what is being discussed and debated, and by the time everybody figures out what has happened, it is too late.

My colleague down the way should never fear, because there will soon be a Conservative government that will fix this great nation.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Alberta on being able to bring the issue of guns into the issue of a hybrid Parliament. Well done on his speech.

I listened to his speech and he talked about what is being lost with a hybrid Parliament. I recognize that he feels that this is the case, but I want him to consider those things that are being gained and I want him to perhaps consider the fact that the world does move on. We do not have Blockbusters any more. There was hockey without helmets before. There was a Parliament that did not have women's washrooms before.

I wonder if he could talk about the fact that sometimes things change, that sometimes they change for the better and that we need to be able to look at how to build change going forward that will make it easier for people to participate in our democracy and make it easier for people to participate in our—

• (2225)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, the purpose of this Parliament is for us to come here and serve the people who elected us to come here, and not to come here and serve ourselves and make life easier for ourselves. That is what is missing. We are here as the servants of the people; some in this place appear to be servants of themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just want to acknowledge the excellent work of my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe.

This evening, in his speech, with his parliamentary experience, he talked about the many years he has been a member here, both on the opposition side and the government side. He learned to operate within this parliamentary life that calls for a lot more than just standing up, giving speeches and sharing his positions. Parliamentary life is bringing the voice of the people back home here to Parliament, joining it to the other voices we hear across the country, throughout Quebec, in British Columbia, in the Atlantic provinces, in northern Quebec, to be able to have discussions between colleagues about what everyone is going through. After that, we can make more informed decisions on how we are going to vote, the bills we will support, the discussions we will have in committee. This allows us to see what is happening and what people are experiencing in this wonderful country from coast to coast to coast. Indeed, to me, this is a great country from coast to coast to coast.

At present, the government is proposing 50 permanent changes to the Standing Orders, to make permanent a situation that was temporary during COVID-19. The pandemic was a terrible time. Fortunately, the technology made it possible for us to continue debating. If not for the technology, the government would have preferred that we adopt the majority of laws without debate, without discussion, without committee meetings, because it would have made things much easier for it. However, the technology helped us get through the situation.

The technology also has its faults. We see it today with the arrival of artificial intelligence. People believe that it may revolutionize the world and help everyone, but it is raising many concerns. Hybrid Parliament is not without its faults. The main fault of the 50 amendments that the government is proposing to change the way members work together in this chamber to make Canada a better place is the fact that these changes will impose a new way for the House to carry out its work, breaking a tradition that goes back many years. Major changes to how we work in the House are usually made by consensus.

A consensus means that we agree, that we are working together. This can take time. It can take a while, especially when we are talking about opposing political parties that are not always on the same wavelength. One thing everyone must understand, however, is that we are all here to represent our constituents. We are all here to stand up for our values. We are all here to stand up for our principles in our various political parties. We are on the parliamentary playing field, where we exchange ideas and where these exchanges have been going on for decades in a relatively specific way, based on rules that sometimes seem a bit exaggerated. It is precisely the role of parliamentarians to try to convince other parliamentarians that their point of view is better than any other one. That is how it works.

These are the kinds of discussions that should normally take place to amend the Standing Orders. We should have taken the time to do that. Yes, today's technology allows us to do things that were not possible before. However, these changes should have been made by consensus. All parties should have had time to submit proposals. As long as we do not all agree on a change, we wait and put it off until later.

In terms of the voting app, we nearly reached a consensus. We were almost there. That could have been one change. The first change that could have been made was the remote voting app. We support using this application. I know that my Bloc Québécois colleagues were somewhat reluctant to extend it to all votes, but it was a step in the right direction.

Unfortunately, in committee, when the time came to continue these discussions, one party—which is in the minority—and another party—which has an even smaller minority—decided to join forces and vote for these changes. They chose to work together to make sure things changed. That was the end of consensus.

In the past, there was a majority government. I had just been elected shortly before that.

• (2230)

The majority Liberal government tried to unilaterally change the rules in a rather absurd way with a motion known as Motion No. 6. It was moved in response to altercations that occurred between the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party whip at the time. The Prime Minister and the Conservative whip got into a spat and I would say that the Prime Minister practically assaulted him.

Then, the government said that it was going to put an end to all this nonsense by changing the rules, but that did not happen because all of the opposition parties stood up and decided that the motion was not up to snuff. Still today, we would expect changes like these to require the consensus of all members of the House, particularly given that the government is in a minority position. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

I would even say that the Liberals are braver than usual because they have the support of the NDP. Why are they braver? They now know that they form one party and they have the support of another party; with two out of four parties, that should be enough to change the rules. Canadians will probably not really realize that the government did not listen to the majority of the House, that we did not work on consensus.

This emboldened the Liberals and made the NDP forget their role as opposition. The NDP basically decided to become a full-fledged member of the government in many ways. These changes to the rules are probably part of some negotiation between the Liberals and the NDP to get things that we saw in the budget and to get all sorts of other benefits for a very minor party that is doing business with a party that has a few more members.

That is where we are at. The NDP members are forgetting that they are members of the opposition. They are letting the Liberals do the dirty work of changing the rules without reaching a consensus, but there is one thing the NDP is forgetting. Their party is going to remain an opposition party. There will be a change of government,

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but they will still be in opposition. That is just the way it is. Unfortunately, the party will have to relearn how to become an opposition party, just under the rules it agreed to change when it decided to support the Liberal Party. It will pay for that, one day. Unfortunately, in the meantime, democracy is paying the price.

Democracy pays the price because the hybrid Parliament is a form of Parliament that we are just getting to know. We should have had more time to do a full cycle and look at the pros and cons and come to a consensus.

That is why the Conservatives proposed setting an end date, but not just some random date we pulled out of a hat. We are proposing that the temporary measures come to an end one year after the election of the next government. That would give the next government enough time to see what worked and try to come to an agreement with all parliamentarians on whether the changes should become permanent. This is not something that should be done at the last minute, as my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle said earlier.

This is not something that should be done at the last minute as the summer looms and all the bills are being rushed through with the Liberals' gag orders. We must operate by consensus. That is what gives the Standing Orders longevity. Imposing changes opens the door for successive governments to make changes to the Standing Orders. They will believe that anything goes because the Liberals will have broken the basic rule. According to the Liberals, when they want to change how we work in a democracy, how parliamentarians vote and do their job, there is no need for a consensus and they can do it provided they have one more member than all the other parties.

Unfortunately, it is an NDP member this time. How sad. I believe that it would be better for the Liberals and the NDP to say that they have heard the official opposition and the other parties, that they will take a break, pause this reform and try to obtain a consensus. Small steps take us further than a giant leap into the void.

• (2235)

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, to me, the job of MP is not a normal or usual job. We are seeing that this evening. We are all going to be here until midnight, when we started at seven or eight this morning. That is not normal work.

This openness to hybrid Parliament is an exaggeration or maybe even an abuse of power by the Liberal government.

We accepted an employment contract that had us spending roughly 50% of our time in our ridings and the other 50% in Ottawa. Suddenly, the Liberal government says that this is not working anymore. To help the NDP members who live far away, the government is going to make some changes. Obviously this really bothers me because this is not the job I signed up for.

I would make two suggestions, Madam Speaker. The first would be that you also be allowed to be Speaker remotely, in a hybrid model. Why not? There are no limits, under the current proposal. The second—

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the floor to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

On the topic of Standing Orders, we are not supposed to have props in the House of Commons, and showing a party logo on the back of one's paper to the camera is using a prop.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Indeed, everyone knows that partisan logos are not allowed.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, according to the Standing Orders of the House, it is not a prop.

I believe that we must not go too far or too quickly, and that we must do things properly. I was elected by the people who sent me to the House and who pay me a very good salary. I am well aware that people pay me to be here in the House, and this salary comes with sacrifices that we must accept.

I do not see how I could explain to my voters why I should be able to work at home every other day rather than coming to Ottawa, when the contract I have with them is to come here to do my job.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable for his speech. He knows that I really enjoy working with him. However, I must correct certain facts.

First, we have been working in hybrid mode for three years. It is not like this just started yesterday. There are still improvements that need to be made for the interpreters, but it does work really well. We know that because the Conservatives use it just as much as the other parties, if not more.

Second, we discussed it for a year at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. When Parliament asked the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to do this work, it carried out a year-long study. There was a great deal of consultation, and the Conservatives know as much about it as the other parties do. Therefore, I am somewhat skeptical about the Conservative Party's statements.

● (2240)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I want to give an example to show why it is important for us to be present in the House. Tomorrow evening, I am going to offer MPs the chance to watch a documentary on the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. All parliamentarians have been invited to join me to watch the documentary, to see what happened to residents and what caused the tragedy.

Unfortunately, some parliamentarians will not be here and will not be able to attend the screening. Why? It is because they are currently in their ridings, instead of being in Ottawa to ensure that they are properly informed and up to speed on the issues that concern all Canadians, particularly those affected by tragedies like the Lac-Mégantic disaster, for example.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable. I would like to ask him a question.

I think that his speech, as valid as it was, did not identify the problem properly. Let us think back on the history of innovation in the House of Commons, like when microphones were brought in in 1957, or television cameras in 1977, and then simultaneous interpretation.

Why does my colleague not see hybrid Parliament as another step towards innovation to reform our democratic institutions?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I challenge my colleague to tell me, of all the changes he has just noted, how many of them were imposed through the will of one party. How many of those changes to our rules were made by one party, without consensus from all members of the House?

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to be here this evening to participate in this debate on Motion No. 26. I will be splitting my time with the member for Kings—Hants.

It is my pleasure to participate in this debate tonight because, for me, this is a deeply personal issue. Since being elected in 2019, I have served on the procedure and House affairs committee with many great colleagues whom I am proud to work with every day on that committee.

I was a part of the early debates that happened when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Obviously, our government was intent on continuing to serve Canadians through the pandemic, but it certainly recognized that coming back to the House of Commons at a time when there was a highly communicable disease spreading across the country putting Canadians' lives at risk, we did not want to be a further vector for the spread of that disease. For us, it was imperative that we not come back to the House of Commons physically, but rather work towards innovating and modernizing Parliament in a time of crisis to ensure we could continue to pass legislation, have parliamentary debates, and fulfill our roles and functions as members of Parliament. That, to me, was really important work we did.

During that time, of course, we had very lively debates with members of all parties. In particular, I found the Conservatives to be ideologically committed to being back in these green chairs, despite the fact it could potentially spread COVID-19 across the country by us coming to the same physical location, then going back to our communities, and travelling back and forth. It was pretty clear that it just made no sense. However, for some reason, the Conservative Party wanted to criticize the government in public by saying that we did not want to do the work, while trying to tie our hands behind our backs by not allowing Parliament to function in a hybrid format. We had very lively debates where Conservatives tried to filibuster using hybrid, even in the worst crisis for many in our lifetimes. It is consistent with their approach, I have to say, to see them here today opposing this motion.

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However, I just see it as an opposition to innovating and adopting tools that every other industry has adopted. It seems to me that Parliament needs to modernize to the same degree other industries across Canada have, and within every industry, they are utilizing these tools. We know that Canadians recovering from the pandemic in many of those industries and in many of those jobs are utilizing digital tools to work remotely.

This is not to say that I do not recognize the value of being here in person. I actually choose, as many members of Parliament do, to participate in parliamentary debates and proceedings. If I were to take the Conservatives' position, it seems to me that they thought that, if we introduced remote working capabilities for Parliament, no members of Parliament would ever show up in the House of Commons. However, what we have seen is the opposite, which is that members of Parliament generally wish to be here and prefer to be here, and there are many good reasons for that. That does not preclude the fact that members of Parliament would like the option to be able to be in their ridings.

What we heard at the procedure and House affairs committee, while undertaking this work to look at whether hybrid provisions in Parliament and the changes that are proposed to the Standing Orders should continue, we actually considered and heard from many witnesses, considered many options, and had, again, very lively debates. Unfortunately, we saw the Bloc switch positions. Its members were originally supportive of hybrid provisions, but they switched their position. I am very happy to see that NDP members have stuck with their arguments for how hybrid proceedings make Parliament more inclusive and representative, and they acknowledge the many benefits that we can retain as a result of having these options for members of Parliament.

• (2245)

Why is this so important? It is because it modernizes Parliament. The Inter-Parliamentary Union did detailed research. It has done several reports looking at parliaments around the world. I will mention stats from its extensive report in 2022.

It has done statistical research and said, “84% of parliaments [have become] more innovative” as a result of COVID-19. It said 51% of parliaments around the world have held a virtual plenary sitting, and 77% held a virtual committee meetings. It also said, when surveying members of Parliament from around the world, that 88% of members agree that members are more receptive to new ways of working and 80% of members of Parliament trust digital tools and are more likely to use those digital tools as a result of the innovations that came out of COVID-19.

The report says, “The research shows parliaments going through a phase of embedding innovations emerging from the...pandemic and institutionalizing new ways of working.” They do not see this as a one-off event. It states, “rather, it has been a catalyst for change that will lead to ongoing and incremental improvements in parliamentary functioning. Innovation and strong leadership are vital”.

It talks about strong leadership being vital. The report from the Inter-Parliamentary Union recommends that parliaments around the world take a careful look at the innovations and modernizations of the pandemic to see what can continue to augment and enhance members of Parliament's ability to do their jobs.

Before I move on, I will mention more from the report, which I think is very useful for this debate. It talked about business continuity planning being so important and how many parliaments around the world did not have an adequate business continuity plan. In fact, as a result of the pandemic, they actually modified and enhanced their business continuity planning, which makes parliaments more resilient in times of crisis. Members of Parliament are able to participate in debates in those moments of crisis.

Business would continue. The business of democracy and the business of the nation would continue despite many of the different types of crises we experience today. We can think of floods, wildfires or many of the other crises we have been going through as a country. It is imperative that our Parliament can function.

We also heard from members of Parliament in the PROC committee who came before the committee and testified about their various family situations and the length they had to travel across the country. Many of them are going through compounding health issues and wanting to exercise their parliamentary privilege to participate fully on behalf of their constituents.

Our House leader put it really well. He said we do not have a problem with MPs not working hard enough around here, and I think that is true. Members of Parliament, from what I have seen, work hard every day. They are giving 110% or 120%. They are here until midnight or one o'clock in the morning. They are participating in so many different activities on behalf of their constituents.

The tools we are here to debate, and hopefully they will continue indefinitely, really enhance our Parliament because they not only enable it to be more inclusive and representative, but also ensure that business continuity can continue and Parliament can continue to function. It also accounts for a compassionate, modern workplace that allows members of Parliament and the way that Parliament functions to compete, in a sense, with other industries that have modernized as well.

I appreciate this debate and the opportunity I have had to participate this evening.

• (2250)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, respectfully, I am quite struck by some of the language the member used, like that we have to modernize like other industries. We are not actually just an industry. We play a critical role as the deliberative heart of a nation, which is not an economic activity. It is a fundamental cultural and political activity.

It is also not correct to say this is happening in every industry. There are plenty of people who, by the nature of their job or because they are involved in physical work, such as pilots and members of the military, in many cases do not have the flexibility to not be in a particular place at a certain time because that is what is required for the job.

Government Orders

Of course in every space we look for ways of modifying that work and function well. I support, for instance, the voting app. It is a reasonable modification. However, it cannot be ignored or glossed over that fundamentally something is lost when one is sitting down speaking to a screen compared to when one is participating in deliberation in a chamber as we are.

Does the member acknowledge that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, the member is right that certainly Parliament is different from other industries. There is no doubt that. It is a specific type of function we serve, as is the public service we offer. The very fact we have proven over years Parliament can function remotely discounts the very nature of the member's argument, which is stating that somehow Parliament is like a landscaping job or something else that needs to be hands-on. In fact, Parliament can operate remotely; we have proven that.

The other point I would make is on the recruitment and retention of the highest quality candidates. What we heard from witnesses at committee over and over again was that members of Parliament or candidates for elections would be of much higher quality if Parliament had these necessary flexibilities and options for remote participation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about adapting. I totally agree that we have to adapt on a daily basis.

On the other hand, neither Quebec nor any other province has a hybrid legislature. I would like it if he could name two or three countries in the world that operate in hybrid mode.

Some MPs are giving the excuse that their constituency is remote. My colleague's riding, Lac-Saint-Jean, is a seven-hour drive away. The ridings of MPs from British Columbia are a six-hour flight away. Where is the logic?

• (2255)

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, the member brings up some good points. The Inter-Parliamentary Union report shows there are many parliaments around the world that continue to adopt hybrid proceedings either in committee or in their plenary sessions. They have used digital tools to augment the way they function. Just because some of our provincial legislatures have chosen not to do that does not mean other parliaments around the world have just therefore abandoned the innovations and modernizations they put in place as a result of COVID-19.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, I was able to go back to my community. It is the second anniversary of the death of the Afzaal family, which has significantly changed my community in a lot of different ways. I was able to go. I was able to participate and be there for my community. I was able to be there with friends and family and share in that and try to be a leader in my community, as we are expected to do in this job, in the many facets of this job. I was also able to participate in question period that day and ask the minister a question that reflected the needs of my community, which had to do

with Islamophobia and what the government was doing on Islamophobia.

Could the member offer some additional comments as to why it is so important we can do both things with a hybrid Parliament system?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, I do appreciate the member's comment, and it is exactly the point of this debate and why we need to continue hybrid provisions. It really is to make this place more humane and compassionate. That is what we heard at committee. As well, for members of Parliament to be able to balance their life, family and work responsibilities. I availed myself of hybrid last week when my father-in-law was in the intensive care unit and had to have a major procedure. I was able to go home and support my wife and daughter in their time of need. We heard this from many members of Parliament who have gone through family members either passing away or having issues in their riding they felt passionately about and needed to be there for.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an immense privilege to be able to join the debate here tonight and bring the perspective of my constituents of Kings—Hants. To those who are still watching at home as we approach 11 o'clock eastern time, we are talking today about amending the Standing Orders.

The Standing Orders are the guidelines or rules of how Parliament actually operates. Back when I was elected in this place, in 2019, I was a bright-eyed and bushy-tailed new member of Parliament. I had about 12 weeks. The member for Kingston and the Islands has some concern about the way I framed that.

However, as a new member of Parliament, I was here, I was excited and I was finding my way around this place. Then, of course, the pandemic came. I never had the chance to come back in person until after the 2021 election. There was a large period of uncertainty. I remember having conversations with colleagues in March 2020, saying that we were going to go home for a couple of weeks and suspecting we would be back in April. That is not how it played out. Obviously we did not know the severity of what we were dealing with.

When I think back to the 43rd Parliament, had we not adopted some of these provisions, I would not have had the ability to bring my voice to the institution that is the House of Commons and that is Parliament. It also gave reflection for all 338 members of Parliament in this place about how we could modernize the tools to make sure that we are effective representatives for our constituents here in this place.

However, the conversation has to start with, what is the role of a member of Parliament? What do our constituents expect us to do? If I was to go survey the doorsteps in Kings—Hants, many would not necessarily know exactly what I do in Ottawa every day. They would know that I speak in this place at certain times. They may know that I am part of committees. They do not necessarily know the full scope.

Government Orders

We certainly try to share information and talk about the work I am doing in a legislative sense, the priorities I am trying to encourage the government to take up, what the government is taking on, but there is a lot that goes into being a member of Parliament. Part of it is visibility. I represent a rural riding of nearly 5,000 square kilometres. Part of my role is being visible in my riding to have the conversations with my constituents so I can bring their perspective back to this place.

There are parts of my riding that, frankly, it is very difficult to get to in a given calendar year. We sit in Parliament six months a year. I do not begrudge that reality. I think it is good. It is important that we have robust debate, that we have a democratic process through committees and through legislative means, but the reality is, with the size of the riding that I have, it is difficult to do.

When we look at what the government House leader has tabled as a permanent change to the Standing Orders, it allows us to function, similar to what we have done post-pandemic, which is to allow there to be a virtual option for members of Parliament to use.

I remember a year ago when we were having this conversation about the extension within a year, there were certainly concerns from the opposition bench about ministerial accountability and about making sure that members of Parliament are in this place. What I have observed in that year since then is, by and large, members of Parliament are here in the House. There are certain exceptions.

We saw the member for Labrador, for example. She had a very moving S.O. 31 today. She had to go through a really difficult health challenge. We are proud of what she has done. Rightfully so, she took some time away from her role as a member of Parliament, but she would have had the ability to participate notwithstanding that her health required her to be in another part of the country. She could not have physically been in this place.

We can look at the ways we could use the tools available to us. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan talked about the virtual voting tool. I agree with it. I have used it very sparingly, but there have been two instances in the last year where I have chosen to use the virtual option as a way to be able to participate in this place.

Madam Speaker, I believe you were at the national caucus last year in New Brunswick and would know that part of the bargain with my wife, for me to join this place, was that we had to get a Bernese mountain dog. Sadly, at Christmastime 2022, we found out that our Bernese mountain dog had developed bone cancer. He sadly passed away early in 2023, around late February, early March.

• (2300)

I ended up going home to spend time with my wife. I know it is not a child, but he was our fur baby, he was our guy. That same day that we were putting our dog down, Bill C-234, which is a really important piece of legislation that is now before the Senate, was up for debate. I went home to be with my family. I had the opportunity to still participate and give my perspective as the member of Parliament for Kings—Hants and to bring the perspective of my constituents to this place because of those virtual tools. I would not have had that ability had these rules not been in place.

When we look at the whole, in terms of the balance between the work that members of Parliament have to do in Ottawa in terms of their legislative function in the House and in committees versus the role of being back there and in front of constituents, hearing the concerns and driving certain initiatives, whether on projects or case files, constituents want to see us at home. They want to see us being able to make things happen for our community. I do not think they are necessarily troubled if on an odd occasion a member of Parliament will use these tools.

Therefore, I am in support of what the government House leader has put forward. What this House could consider in the days ahead is if we are concerned, whether the opposition or a majority of members of Parliament, about the use of these tools and whether they are being used in a way that is not bringing us together in the House in the way that it should. Look, it is pretty lively in any given question period when I sit in here. There is usually a pretty good quorum. There may be a few seats of members of Parliament who are not there, but even before these rules were in place there would have been instances where members of Parliament were travelling and were not able to be in the House physically.

On the whole, there is merit to what is being discussed. It is a way for members of Parliament to be able to balance their rigid duties here in the House but also make sure that they are being true and honest, and not only to the constituency concerns but to family concerns.

I had the opportunity to read Andrew Coyne's article in *The Globe and Mail*. Of course, he had suggested that this is not a great step, moving forward. My concern with his article is that he suggests that members of Parliament do not want to show up in this place.

I want to be here because I agree with some of the comments that have been made tonight. We cannot replicate the ability to participate in a human-to-human interaction here in the House, to be able to go over and talk to a colleague across the way and to be able to pull aside a minister and have a conversation on something that matters. That still matters and if one wants to be an effective member of Parliament they will show up to this place. If they choose to use the virtual tools in a way that is not the way that they should be used, in terms of their never showing up to this place, well the opposition, the media and their own constituents will hold them to account and start asking questions as to why they are not in this place. Absent a reasonable excuse as to why a member may be using those, there are enough mechanisms for us to hold members of Parliament to account and the fact that they are here.

Again, one was a family issue. The other was that I had a grandmother who was ill. Thankfully, she has come through that period. I wanted to go home. I wanted to be there in that moment. I would not have had the opportunity to balance my parliamentary duties and also be a good grandson at that time. Let us not have this dichotomy where we suggest the only way to be a good member of Parliament is that we have to be physically in Ottawa for every single thing that we do in a parliamentary sense.

Government Orders

The last thing I want to address is the provision that it would actually require committee chairs to chair the committee in person. I fundamentally agree with this. I have the privilege of serving as the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Any time I cannot be in Ottawa, I give way to my vice-chair, the hon. member for Foothills, because I know at the end of the day it is better to conduct a meeting when we can actually work alongside our clerk. There are a number of challenges in trying to be able to read a room and in trying to be able to facilitate a meeting when we are thousands of miles away. That is a reasonable compromise.

My last suggestion would be that as we move forward in this place and we start to identify issues, we can come back and address them, similar to what was done on the committee chair piece and their being in the room. That is a reasonable compromise. Let us move forward. Let us continue to drive important changes to how our Parliament works.

• (2305)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I sympathize with some of the very human circumstances the member talks about. There are obviously things that, in different forms, all members of Parliament deal with.

I take issue with the general assertion from a number of members that things are working well now. The government's premise seems to be that it has been doing this for years and everything is fine, so why not continue it? Even if relatively few members take the opportunity to speak using a hybrid system and use it in a limited way, the hybrid provisions are creating massive resource challenges that make it difficult for parliamentary committees to function in any way resembling the way they used to function. They are not able to set their own agendas or sit for longer periods of time when necessary. They are not able to control their use of time in order to move items forward. It makes it easier for members to delay committee proceedings if committees cannot sit for extended periods of time at will. That is the reality.

I wonder if the member will acknowledge the existing problems and the need to get a handle on them before we move forward in a permanent way.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, one of my hon. colleagues in the NDP from Edmonton hit it right on the head. It is a bit ironic that the hon. member opposite is asking this question when his party has been involved in a lot of filibustering. If he wants to talk about resources, he should think about the ad nauseam delays at the finance committee. We just finally got our budget bill through.

I sympathize with the member's point. If he feels as though committees do not have the ability to chart their own course, I think that is a conversation about trying to hire additional resources to support them. However, let us not compromise what he admitted was not necessarily a problem. Very few members of Parliament are utilizing the virtual provisions. It is not compromising his ability to hold this government to account. Let us hire more resources if he is concerned about committees, and maybe let us not filibuster.

• (2310)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, we need to have healthy debate in the House. This evening, we are having a healthy debate. Since we are parliamentarians who respect our democracy, we will continue to have this type of calm, healthy debate.

Now, I am looking at what is happening today. This debate should have been held before the motion was moved. The member across the way gave us several examples to illustrate why we should adopt the motion on hybrid Parliament. In that case, why did the Liberals not explain, in the parameters of the motion, the situations where it would be appropriate to use the hybrid Parliament? For example, it could be for health reasons or family reasons.

Before being elected to the House, I worked at a pulp and paper mill. I also worked crazy hours on set. I was paid a quarter of what we get paid here. The people watching us on television are telling us to do our work the way we used to. Those who have health problems or family problems can use the virtual model, but we need to do our job.

[*English*]

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I would say a couple of different things. If we try to delineate every plausible rationale for why someone could use virtual, we would perhaps be too narrow in its application. Then this question would arise: What about this case?

If there is a concern moving forward by a majority of members of Parliament, then we can start to put in parameters such as a certain number of days that could be used virtually, a certain proportion of a caucus that could be—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kody Blois: I have the floor, Madam Speaker. I would ask my colleague to listen to my response.

Parameters could be put around this.

The member gave the examples of forestry and the film industry. I have great respect for other industries. We do very privileged work in this place that is different from when I used to build pallets at home in Nova Scotia, but the reality is that this should not prevent us from finding reasonable ways to make this place function better.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague. He has a beautiful suit on today.

One of the things he spoke about was making sure that people can participate in this Parliament. I think about representatives in the Yukon and representatives in rural and remote northern communities and how difficult it is for them. It is a very different reality than when we have, for example, people representing ridings in Ottawa. I think it is important that we make sure all of those constituents are equally represented.

He brought up the idea that Canadians ultimately choose who represents them. That is the cornerstone of our democracy. People will still be able to vote if—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. member for Kings—Hants time for a very brief answer.

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I am thrilled that the member opposite thinks I have a nice suit on tonight. I will take that compliment.

I agree with her that when we look at transportation across the country, in certain places members do not have very easy access to transport to get to and from Parliament. Hybrid is allowing them to be situated to have the same equity and access in this place.

I agree wholeheartedly with her comments.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I begin this debate tonight, I will state that this is not an easy job to do. I will be the first to acknowledge that. I love what I do, and I think every member in this place loves what they do. They have a passion, energy and desire to build a better country.

I have been here three and a half years, and like many members, a few who have spoken tonight, I am from the class of 2019. We had a few months of normalcy after the 2019 election. We figured out where the offices and washrooms were. We figured out how things ran here. Then the world changed, both in what we talked about in policy with the pandemic and in how we operated here.

There are many different facets to the role we have as members of Parliament. I am thinking of the work we do here in the chamber, at committee and back in our constituency offices on case files. We are present in the community at riding and community events and get feedback. Of course, now that we are out of the pandemic, we are getting to different parts of the country to get the message out from our caucuses and leaders and so forth. However, I will say this. Despite the changes in 2019, we are now, at this point, in this debate tonight, out of the pandemic and back to what I would say is a semblance of normalcy.

I knew what I was signing up for in 2019 when I took this job. Every member of Parliament has challenges in the work they do here on the Hill. There is no denial there. There are family responsibilities, circumstances that change and travel as well. I often chuckle that I have a pretty easy commute, being from eastern Ontario, to get back home. It is about an hour and 10 minutes to my riding.

I consider myself very fortunate. For me, the member next door in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes and members in the national capital region, it is a blessing to get home quickly. It can also be a curse some days, because constituents know I can go back for a passport clinic, a community event or whatever it may be. However, all that said, given the point in time we are at now, when we are talking about the strengthening and protection of our democracy and its integrity and all aspects of that, the debate we are having tonight is fundamentally important to getting the basic stuff right.

Government Orders

I am in favour of change. Change naturally happens. I remember being a mayor at the municipal level and having to navigate a lot of that. It is not always easy to do. However, sometimes there is change for the sake of doing something, and sometimes change goes too far.

As I was preparing my comments for the debate tonight, I thought of the words of a colleague who is no longer in the House, Wayne Easter. The former member for Malpeque had a great comment on Twitter this week: “Let me put it this way: If you don't want to work in Ottawa during the Parliamentary sessions—don't run to be an MP. A hybrid Parliament made sense during Covid but it should never be permanent. I strongly oppose gov't's move to make it permanent.” I could not agree more with what Mr. Easter said on that point, and I am laughing when thinking of his Zoom discussions with the member for Carleton, the leader of our party, at the finance committee. They were certainly navigating some very interesting times.

As I share my time tonight with my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, I am reflecting, in a sense, on certain provisions from our side of the aisle. As we have said in our dissenting reports and talked about at committee, some aspects can stay. Electronic voting is an example of that. How we can make that work could be open for discussion, as an example.

However, the idea is to be here on the floor of the House of Commons, to travel here and speak on behalf of, in my case, the people of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry from the perspectives of my riding, my community and my personal lived experience, whatever the benefit may be. That needs to happen in person.

I have seen things I take for granted. In the last few months, we have gotten traffic back in our caucus meetings, on the floor of the House, in committee and, yes, in the hallways for the networking and different connections we do at different times of the day. There is a value to being in person. It adds to our democracy; it does not take it away.

When we talk about these things, like making permanent the idea that somebody can Zoom in from their home or from their base-ment, I think we are at a point now where we can be compassionate. We can make changes to help adapt to difficult family situations and circumstances. I think the whips in our parties have given better flexibility over the course of the last couple of years to recognize personal and professional needs where need be. We can keep the core foundation of what we are talking about here.

Government Orders

I always joke that we are not normal. Most Canadians watching this would ask what the heck a standing order is. We are talking about the fundamental rules of how this House operates, and I think a way to describe them is they are the character, the tone and the nature of the way we do our business. I am very concerned that we are making Zoom aspects permanent so that people will be able to Zoom in for all of this.

• (2315)

Another part that is very concerning is the manner in which these changes are being made, the magnitude of these changes given our normal traditions here in the House and the way we have gone about this generally, with unanimous consent by all parties. We have this motion supported by the Liberals and the NDP. The Conservatives have raised some serious concerns in wanting a difference and the Bloc Québécois has done the same.

I cannot say it was for the entire Canadian history and our entire tenure of Parliament, but for the overwhelming majority of the time, changes to the Standing Orders and the rules that govern the House have been done by unanimous consent, by all parties giving and taking, figuring things out, throwing things at the wall, seeing what they can find a consensus on and making changes. Those changes, I think, have been for the better over the course of time, and this has been the best way to build confidence from Parliament to Parliament on these core essential functions.

One thing we have in here is a change to have committee chairs in person. I think that would end a lot of the chaos that happens in certain committees. With all due respect, I am thinking of numerous times at the heritage committee that we watched a natural technological filibuster of checking headsets, the chair not knowing what is happening with the committee clerk in the room and somebody calling a point of order. Consider the amount of time lost in a two-hour committee. Members of Parliament here talk about the efficient use of time. Our clerks are there. The interpreters are there. The IT team is there. The amount of time that was lost is probably into the hours over the course of the last couple of years simply because the chair was not in the room.

The fact that this is changing is a step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough. We talked about having the appropriate resources. When having these Zoom capabilities and all of these things going on, the resources are not backing them up.

I have heard several times tonight members of the government say, well, these are all things that could be adjusted and talked about. They should be done in the amendments to the Standing Orders. These things should be figured out now, these guardrails or barriers, to make sure we have protections so that committees can run when a majority of members of Parliament want to meet and they have work to get done, bills to go through, studies to do and witnesses to hear from. Because of a lack of resources, we are shutting things down.

That, still two years in, has been acknowledged many times. In all fairness, it is often to the benefit of the government. If something gets contentious and they are starting to negotiate which committee gets cancelled, it is not fair and it is not balanced. To colleagues who say that those are things we could have a conversation about, I would say these things should have been settled and done

the way they have been done in parliamentary tradition in this country for many generations: all parties coming to unanimous consent, unanimous agreement, on how we can get to that.

Another thing we talk about is that there are some other tools already here that could be used more. If an absence is requested, there are pairing opportunities. There are leaves that can happen. There are tools. We have made a lot of advances here in recognizing the diverse geography of the country. As we have had more parents, different age groups and different circumstances, we have enhanced child care options and added designated travellers. All of these things were done to help make our work better and function better.

Tonight, as I wrap up, I think of my comments about these amendments to the Standing Orders. There was a time and a place for Zoom, but now is the time to get back in person. Our jobs are unique. It is an honour and a privilege to be one of only a few hundred members of Parliament in this country. When we speak for our constituents, there is no reason why that should not be done on the floor of the House of Commons. I think of the United Kingdom. I think of the United States. I think of many other countries' parliamentary structures that are similar, like Congress. They are back in person. They are doing the work. They are making it work.

Canadians expect us to get back to work in person and get the job done. As our leader likes to say, we need to bring it home.

• (2320)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member very effectively argued his perspective and I found it very interesting. Something that has come up with some of our Conservative colleagues has been the separation between the voting app and participation in speeches and debate in the House. I would argue that our most important function in the House is actually the voting piece.

I am wondering how the member is separating those two and if he could further explain his position on that.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would actually elaborate on what my colleagues on the PROC committee said in our dissenting report about separating the voting aspect. I have heard more. Again, I wish there was a better opportunity to discuss the amendments. There is a more narrow path on that, but I will go back to electronic voting. Personally in my case, I and many colleagues in our dissenting report on PROC alluded to a compromise, a negotiation that we would have to do.

Government Orders

I think that across the country, people are battling illness, people are in bereavement and people have family issues. They probably are not ready for a 10-minute speech on the floor of the House of Commons with questions and comments. They can keep their votes and they can keep representing their constituents and have that balance.

There are some tools we can use to modernize ourselves. Now that we are out of the pandemic, I think that Zooming in from somewhere like a home basement to talk about an important issue today when 98% of us are here is not required anymore.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my grey hair bears witness to the fact that I have learned certain things in life. One of them is that changes need to be explained and justified. Intelligent arguments must be presented. People need convincing. That is not what I am seeing in this motion. These changes are being imposed and have not been properly thought out.

The government should remember that, during the pandemic, we were eager to return to work here after two years. We were glad to see one another and to work together again. Today, we are hearing the total opposite from the Liberals. We are being asked to accept that the work will be done from home under certain conditions that are as yet unknown.

That is not what we signed up for. Our voters did not put us in power or elect us to do that. Changing the rules midstream is never healthy. I would like to have—

• (2325)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague from the Bloc about the different issues and some of them being untested. Yes, we had tested them during the pandemic when we were not able to travel and were unable to get around our communities and do the work that we needed to do. Now that we are in the time frame we are in, I think there are some areas we could have found agreement on, but in this situation we are breaking a massive tradition that has generally held through the entire tenure of a number of Canadian Parliaments over many generations, which is unanimous consent to change the Standing Orders.

I go back to say that there are many things we are doing to help parents, help families, help people with health conditions and help people with bereavement. That does not mean we have to allow Zoom to come in. There are some things we can do. There are many things we are doing and there are more that we can do. We were absent from that conversation. It was the Liberals and the NDP who worked together to put this motion forward that we have tonight. It is very frustrating and frankly unnecessary, in my opinion.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not say that I also am admiring

the member's nice navy blue suit, as it has been a theme of this evening's conversations.

Oftentimes in our conversations about the rules of this place, we fail to recognize that many of the rules were designed and set up to keep many of us out of this place for a very long time. I am one of those people. This is not a place that was necessarily built for a woman or for members of many other equity-seeking groups in this place.

One of the things that I strive for when I speak to people who are talking about becoming more involved in politics and perhaps running for office is the importance of flexibility and a work/life balance. Certainly for women, who have very many child care obligations, that is a key point. To be able to attract that diversity of candidates who run for positions such as ours is key, and hybrid is a part of that key.

Could the member please talk about the importance of that diversity and how we need to provide choice in this place?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will just repeat what I started my speech with. I am the first to admit that this is not an easy job. It is at a high pace, it is busy; it is multi-tasking and it is a heck of a balance between work, life and family, community and all the different balls that we are trying to juggle up in the air.

What I will say is that there are many opportunities and that there have been advances that this House has made to make it more family-friendly, to attract a more diverse group of Canadians to represent ourselves in this House. I do not believe in having the Zoom option. I think it takes away from individuals having a better voice. Their voice is best served on the floor of the House of Commons here in Ottawa, working with our colleagues in the House, in caucus, at committee and in this precinct. That is where all MPs belong.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful for the opportunity to address the assembled House tonight on this government's proposal to make permanent changes that it has been tinkering with, experimenting with, over the last number of years on hybrid Parliament, which would allow members of Parliament to address the House both from the floor of the chamber and via Zoom.

I think we have a role, as Conservatives, to advocate for conserving the best traditions of our past, but that does not mean that we oppose change in all its forms. It means that we are appropriately cautious, I would say, about change in that we want to ensure that, in the process of changing fundamental institutions and other aspects about our national life, we do not lose things that were important about the previous forms of those institutions, which we were maybe not always fully conscious of.

Government Orders

Members of the government and of the NDP have repeatedly asserted that the current system is working. I think many members are relatively new in the House, and I was only elected in 2015. Those who have been here for a long time I think will notice how these changes have fundamentally changed aspects of our institution already and generally for the worse. It is important that we notice the ways in which the current provisions are not working and the problems that they are creating. As we deliberate about what the new rules should be, we ensure that we are pushing for solutions to these problems instead of allowing these problems that the government has created with this new model to simply continue to exist and fester.

The most critical concern I have about the way the current approach to hybrid Parliament operates is the way that it has shifted the role and powers of committees in this place. Previously, without the hybrid provisions in place, committees could sit largely whenever they wanted. They had designated time slots, but they had a great deal of flexibility in terms of going beyond those time slots.

As a political staffer, I recall times when we were dealing with critical issues in this place where committees would say “We decreed a new subcommittee and that subcommittee is going to meet for five hours Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday night to deal with whatever the issue is.” There was flexibility for committees to do what they wanted to get to the bottom of issues that had to be addressed. Committees could also extend if there was some unresolved issue, and I am thinking here, to some extent, of the filibuster that has been alluded to.

Yes, the filibuster is a legitimate technique that is used by all parties. I think Mr. Christopherson of the NDP still has the record for it. We have a filibuster ongoing with the Liberals at public accounts and, yes, from time to time, some people I know in our own caucus may have used that tool once or twice. However, the point is that the filibuster is a tool that seeks to create a balance between the majority and the minority in committee. Generally, filibusters are resolved by committees sitting for extended hours, which forces members who are filibustering to maybe come back to the table. However, when we have hybrid provisions that limit committees to only sit in narrow time slots, it actually makes it much easier for members to filibuster. That is why there has been an explosion of the use of the filibuster by all parties in the House since these rules have been put in place.

These resource limitations constrain committees in their ability to sit for extended periods of time to actually resolve conflict that may exist in the context of those committees and to dig deeply into issues of concern for our national life. An example I remember vividly from my career is the process by which the Uyghur genocide was recognized in this Parliament. It was the subcommittee on international human rights sitting for two days solidly, because the committee members wanted to look at the situation of Uyghurs in China. At the end of those two days of intensive sittings, the committee was able to come to a particular conclusion. Now, with the hybrid provisions in place and the resource limitations, it would be much more difficult for any committee that wanted to look in a deep way at any issue to be able to do that.

Committees, in order to access resources, need to go to the whips of the various parties who then are able to make determinations

about the allocation of resources. So, control over committees is no longer in the hands of the members of those committees to decide when they sit. Control about when committees sit, how they sit, what time slots they have available to them are made by the central controllers of the resources that are going to be available. These central controllers, the whips, in some form, decide if they are going to allow industry, public accounts or foreign affairs to have that narrow slot, and committees have to get that approval to get access to those resources in order to sit.

So, the way this place has changed is that committees no longer have autonomy. They no longer have control. They no longer have the ability to delve deeply into issues as required, because it is the central controllers as opposed to the members of the committee who decide who gets resources. I think there has been some acknowledgement that this is a fundamental problem, a fundamental change in the way our institution operates. However, members opposite have said, “Well, this is a problem. We need to solve it, but we should just move forward anyway.”

• (2330)

I would submit to the House that we have been dealing with this problem ever since we have had hybrid Parliament. Members have repeatedly raised concerns about it. It may be an issue of available dollars, or it may be an issue of available people who have the experience and expertise to do interpretation. I do not know exactly what the source of the problem is, but the point is that we have been doing this for years, and we still have that problem persisting.

I would say, if we are going to move forward with some kind of a hybrid framework, we have to do so in a way that protects the fundamental rights of committees to be able to do their job. That means resolving these resource issues in some way. This is the most important point that I want to make tonight. The hybrid provisions undermine the ability of committees to act autonomously. For all members, in all parties, who care about the functioning of parliamentary committees, we cannot push forward with these permanent changes to the Standing Orders without resolving that issue of committees.

I want to make a few other points as well. It is inescapable that a member standing in this place addressing members of Parliament is fundamentally different, in terms of the kind of communication that takes place, than a member sitting at home, in front of their screen, often reading off the screen, and able to completely shut out any other noises or interruptions. The back-and-forth taking place now, as Liberal members gesture and communicate, is part of what has made the House of Commons a great institution for over a hundred years. I relish that. I welcome the heckling. I welcome the back-and-forth.

If I were sitting at home, sitting in front of a screen, reading off the screen, and able to shut out any noises from the member for Kingston and the Islands and others, that would be a completely different kind of exchange. Something is lost. Something is being lost in the tone, in the lack of exchange that exists in Zoom calls and speeches.

Government Orders

I support the move to a voting app because I think we have seen how nothing is lost in the transition from standing votes to a voting app. However, I think we can see very clearly how a great deal is lost in the quality of exchange that takes place when we go from what is happening right now between members on the floor of the House and what happens when someone sits in front of a screen, shuts out any kind of other sound or noise or interaction, and simply delivers what is front of them.

On the issue of family friendliness, I live in western Canada. I have five young children, and this is hard job. There are many hard jobs. There are many jobs in this country where it is simply a reality that, to do the job properly, people have to travel and spend time away from family. There are certain opportunities that we have as members of Parliament that many do not, by the way, and we are able to have our families travel with us from time to time. However, the reality is that there are challenges.

There have been ways in the past that the House has accommodated these challenges. There has been the convention of pairing, for example. If a member needed to be away, they would engage a member of another party and both would agree to mutually absent themselves to preserve the balance. Members would cover for each other. This is what happened in the past.

However, as we move forward, I think the voting app reduces the need for pairing. Members could still vote. Only one member can speak in the House at a time, one out of 338. If a member needs to be away for a couple of weeks, and they are not able to give speeches but are still able to vote, I think they could effectively represent their constituents for that period of time without being able to speak remotely. We could preserve the flexibility and the family friendliness by having that voting app, while still preserving the idea that speeches in the House of Commons should be delivered from the floor of the House of Commons.

Finally, there has been discussion about diversity, about getting people with young families and more women in politics and such by giving more flexibility. However, it is important to note that changes to the Standing Orders the government is proposing still have a preference for members who are in person. It is odd to me that the government says people should be able to participate fully virtually, yet we can see in the changes to standing orders 26(2), 45(1), 53, 56(1), 62, 98 and one new standing order they are proposing, there are many cases where the Standing Orders say that members have to be in person to stand to object to the passage of a particular motion.

I think it is quite unfair that the government would say that we are going to bring in more women and more working parents as members of Parliament, yet subtly putting in place, in the Standing Orders, measures that would limit the full participation of those individuals.

● (2335)

We need to conserve the critical aspects of this institution that we have had for a long time. We can make some changes, but we should conserve the essential aspects of being in person, especially for speaking and for deliberating. This is the heart of our deliberative democracy, and something is lost with these hybrid provisions, something we need to conserve.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize to the member. We were chuckling while he was speaking, but it was not for anything he was saying. It was just for the rich and incredible irony that we were hearing oohs out of that side of the House of Commons, because it was only a short three sitting days ago that the member spoke in the House on Bill C-41 by giving a virtual speech through Zoom. I am assuming he had good reason not to be in the chamber to do that and there was a really good reason he needed to do it by Zoom, and that is what put him in the position to not be able to be here physically.

The reality is that, from time to time, all members of this House need the ability to do that. Would the member like to address our concern over his hypocrisy for his speech about needing to be in the House as a member of Parliament when he delivered a full speech on Bill C-41 on Friday on Zoom?

● (2340)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member knows what the word “hypocrisy” means. I have been clear that I think the rules, as they presently exist, weaken this institution. As such, I do not think those rules should be in place.

I also believe, though, that it is legitimate for the members to use the tools as they exist. I do not think it is hypocritical at all to observe that these rules should not be in place, but insofar as they are in place, members can use them. The fact of the matter is that a speech is qualitatively different when it is delivered on the floor of the House of Commons. That is why I think all members should endeavour to be here as much as they can and that the rules should maximize the presence of members in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not have much parliamentary experience. Soon, I will have been here for a mere four years.

However, like everyone else, I have noticed something that even the Liberals who are moving this motion have noticed. For at least two and a half years, there have been major problems with interpretation. There are issues with availability, and the interpreters are experiencing more and more hearing problems. All this irritates me because this motion runs completely counter to that; it does not take into account the interpreters' health and hearing needs.

If we care about our staff, we should look after them and look out for them, for God's sake. This motion does the exact opposite. Hybrid Parliament puts a lot of pressure on them.

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

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I share the concern the member raised about interpreters, and I think this is linked to the resource challenges we face. From what I understand, the pressure this has created on interpreters is what has reduced the availability of time and resources for committees to be able to sit.

The most important point I raised in my speech was around the issue of how this new system is limiting the autonomy of committees and the ability of committees to do their job. That is linked to the point he raised, which is the impact on interpreters. The government's solution that we can just hire a bunch more interpreters and that money can just solve the problem shows a misunderstanding of why we have this problem. The problem of resources is not just about putting more money into the system; it is about the pressure on interpreters that is created, which makes it difficult to have the kind of flexibility with committees that we used to have.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, does my hon. friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan see no context in which we need to continue to have the availability of hybrid rules? Even with a voting app, without the rules we adopted post-COVID, members of Parliament who were actually dying had to come in here. They had to be physically present at a stage in their private member's bill, and there was no way to do it remotely. Is that what he foresees for the future, which is no options for hybrid participation?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the problem is when we use the exceptional case to justify what is not actually going to be the median case. We can try to find ways of dealing with the exceptional case. For example, in exceptional circumstances, we could consider a member present who is not physically present. However, the vast majority of uses of these provisions are not going to be members in that situation. I believe that, in the future, we are going to see ministers who find it more convenient to have officials sitting beside them and handing them a paper instead of being in the House of Commons. These kinds of cases have to be dealt with, and they are not dealt with in this motion.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, being able to pick up exactly at this moment with my hon. colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, I do not disagree. I find the notion worrying that, virtually forever, we are going to have a blanket equivalency between participating virtually and participating in person. I do not take it as something that is an automatic modernization or an automatic improvement.

Tonight, we are here debating something called Standing Orders. They are the rules of procedure. I always liked a quote from a British parliamentarian of some note, a member of several cabinets in the Labour government, Jack Straw. He said, "Procedure may be boring to some, but it's about the distribution and exercise of power. It really matters."

I wish we had a really good opportunity to debate all the Standing Orders to get through some of the issues that really matter but that are not about hybrid Parliament versus non-hybrid Parliament. Over time, the Standing Orders have increasingly privileged back-room political party approaches as opposed to the individual member of Parliament and our rights and obligations as individuals to represent our constituents.

It was a while ago now, in 2008, that the Centre for the Study of Democracy and Diversity at Queen's University commented that Canada's Parliament was particularly "executive-centred, party-dominated and adversarial".

Back in 2016, I prepared a very long list of possible changes to our Standing Orders and delivered it to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, PROC. The list included such things as, "What would break down partisanship in this place?" and "What if we were seated alphabetically instead of by party group?" It would be very hard, as we routinely violate the standing order against heckling. Would we really heckle someone who was sitting right next to us, for instance, if I could sit with my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan? We have an ongoing debate about whether heckling is more clever than obnoxious. I land on the obnoxious side; he thinks it is clever. However, we are friends anyway.

The Standing Orders could be really examined for how we could improve democracy in this place, but that, unfortunately, is not the topic for this evening. We have a fairly narrow group of Standing Order changes. They are dramatic, of course, but there is much in our Standing Orders that could be improved.

I will just mention a few of the things right now. Obviously, we already have a rule against heckling, but we are not very good at seeing it enforced.

I speak of this in the generic sense of "Speaker" to my hon. colleague, who is our distinguished Deputy Speaker, but over the years, this is the only Westminster parliamentary democracy anywhere on the planet where the Speaker of the House has ceded his or her unique and totally in-the-Speaker's-hands control of who gets to speak in this place. I think this bears mentioning. No, the party whips hand the list forward. The speakers, the people who will be recognized in question period, are not wondering if they will catch the Speaker's eye; that has become entirely fiction. They have to please the party whip to get the floor of the House of Commons. This is a power imbalance. It would be so much better if they had to be well behaved so that the Speaker might give them the floor, rather than pleasing the party whip. That accentuates the partisanship. It is completely unnecessary, and we do not even have to change the Standing Orders. It has been done voluntarily, and there is no rule to enforce it.

Similarly, there is a rule against reading speeches. Those things also would help us control and manage this place, but those are things we do not even have to change in the Standing Orders. We just have to get enough consensus from all the political parties that the Speaker can use the rules we actually already have.

Government Orders

With respect to the question at hand today, we have a number of changes to the Standing Orders. This question is unlike the proposed legislation that we usually debate in this place. When we debate proposed legislation, it is proposed. We know we can make a change. We can amend it. We can go to committee. That is not going to happen here. It is going to be an up or down vote. Either we are going to accept the changes to the Standing Orders that are proposed today, or we are going to reject them. That is a shame, because there are one or two changes that I would desperately like to make, but I am certainly not going to vote against continuing the access to a hybrid Parliament and the ability to participate virtually.

• (2345)

I am mostly not going to do that for the reasons I have mentioned. It may be the extreme case, but the extreme case in the absence of hybrid possibilities was actually Mauril Bélanger, the member of Parliament for Ottawa—Vanier. He was in hospital, dying of ALS, and he literally had to struggle in here so that his private member's bill did not end up in the trash heap just as he was dying. It was appalling.

We have also seen it with our distinguished colleague Arnold Chan and from the comments that are in the report from the procedure and House affairs committee from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt, his widow, who now occupies his seat in this place. She reflected on what it took from him while fighting cancer to have to exert the energy to come back and forth from his riding to participate as the member of Parliament in this place. He was one of the finest members of Parliament I ever saw, but we did not have that option at the time. I would not want to go back to those days where we do not have an option.

For some of the other arguments for why we should maintain a hybrid format, in terms of getting more women into politics, I just want to be clear. If we want more women in politics, if we want more diversity, the most effective thing to do is not to tinker with the Standing Orders. It is to get rid of first past the post.

Every democracy that uses fair voting, consensus-based voting or any form of proportional representation increases the number of elected women in legislatures. Moreover, it increases the number of equity-seeking groups, and it improves representation by minorities. Fair voting will do far more than hybrid Parliament in improving the ability of women to be elected and of equity-seeking groups to be here.

The literature on this is voluminous. I will just quickly reference it. If anyone wants to check it out, look at *Patterns of Democracy*, the definitive text by a California political scientist who hails from the Netherlands, Arend Lijphart. It is clear from looking at 40 different democracies over a period of decades.

There is no doubt that, without access to hybrid, there is no such thing as a work-life balance as a parliamentarian. It has made a huge difference, and not just for women with small children. I remember during COVID, when we first started being able to use virtual participation, I was speaking to men in this place, fathers, who said they never knew how much they missed being with their children.

That has been the foregone conclusion for decades, a century, of parliamentarians in this place, particularly when they were mostly men. They did not look after their children. They hardly knew their children. Other members in this place have talked about the old days. I think it was the member for Timmins—James Bay earlier tonight who said we saw a lot of divorces and alcoholism.

If we want to make better decisions, we should try to keep ourselves healthy, although I am a very bad example tonight as we approach midnight and have a late show as well. I have been working the last three weeks, three nights out of every week, until after midnight. It has been 19-hour day after 19-hour day. I am a very poor example of taking good care of our health in this place, but we really ought to try to make it possible for people to see their spouses, care for their children and actually be fully formed human beings.

That said, let me dive into one or two quick points about what I would like to see fixed here. I am absolutely baffled by one change in the Standing Orders. I cannot find any reference to it in the PROC report that led to these changes. Yes, there was work done. Yes, it was done in PROC. No, not every member of Parliament got to participate in those discussions.

There is no reference there to removing the reference to the Sergeant-at-Arms in Standing Order 11(1)(b). This is for the moment when the Speaker decides that somebody is violating the Standing Orders, and they are so obnoxious and loud that they should be removed. At the moment, the Standing Orders read as follows: “the Speaker shall order the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove the member.” The new rules would just say that the Speaker shall order the removal of the member.

I am a bit troubled by the idea that we do not know who is going to do the removal. I am figuring out that it must be that they want to make sure that there is some way to remove a member virtually, and the Sergeant-at-Arms' sword is not really intended to deal with the IT department. I do not think the sword is intended to deal with us either, but it is impressive. I would like to know why we are making that change, and I cannot find out.

• (2350)

The other thing I would really like to see change is the one qualification on our right and ability to participate by video conference. It is not based on having a problem and therefore needing to go to video conference. The way the Standing Orders will be interpreted and will be read, because that is the plain language here in the Standing Order changes, is that the only limitation on members' participating virtually is that they must be in Canada. That is a perfect place to insert one other concept: that they, participating remotely, must be in Canada, and I would have liked to have seen it say, “and have submitted to the Speaker the reasons that require their participation by video conference.” I would love that improvement.

Private Members' Business

It would not, in my view, be appropriate for the Speaker to decide that an excuse is good or that an excuse is bad, but the excuses would be available to the public, so that the constituents of a particular riding would, as in some of the examples we have heard tonight, be able to say, "Well, if the hon. member had to, at that moment, show up for chemotherapy, then it is a damn good reason, and the fact that the member wanted to continue to work through that experience and participate remotely is a good reason." I think that would improve our Standing Orders.

Now, the brake on that, of course, and the only thing about this that makes me feel a little less troubled by passing this holus-bolus as written, is that in the recommendations from PROC, which did the study, there is a recommendation to all of us. We do not get to approve it, because it is not in anything we are going to vote on, but the PROC committee report that recommends these changes to the Standing Orders does say that the committee itself must review the changes after a year and tell us if we are seeing abuse. It does not say the last part; it just says it will review the changes. One assumes that the committee wants to see whether the full-on access to hybrid, post-COVID, is actually working or whether there are signs of it being abused.

I absolutely agree with the member for Whitby in his earlier speech; members want to be here. We work better when we are here, when we can look into each other's eyes, when we can find agreement, when we can enjoy a joke, and when we can talk to each other in the corridors and try to persuade people that there are real things going on that we ought to be paying attention to, like "We are in a climate emergency" and "The country is on fire." There are things we should be talking about, and I am able to reach people more easily here in person than on Zoom.

In the hopes that maybe someone might like to fit in a short question, I am honoured to have had a chance to put in some thoughts about the Standing Orders. I hope that, before too long, we can review more of them, and review them in a way that involves all members of this place, hopefully in a way that achieves consensus where all parties in this place agree with the changes.

● (2355)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for keeping us abreast of many situations happening around the world.

The member raised the issue of first past the post, and I obviously agree wholeheartedly with her. She also brought up an interesting idea that maybe we should sit alphabetically. I was in Finland this year, and Finland's parliamentarians sit geographically; they do not sit by party. I think that is another interesting thing. As someone who sits on both sides of the House as part of the NDP, I think it would change the way we view our colleagues, so I agree with that very much.

However, I also know that the member lives in one of the most remote ridings in this country, and it takes her an awful lot of time to get here. She has been here for some time, and I wonder if she could comment on whether or not there is a correlation between how far individuals have to travel to get to this place and how long they choose to serve, because it is a very trying thing for families. It

is very difficult, and it is very different if one is a representative in Gatineau versus a representative in Yukon, for example.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, there is another aspect that is really important. As I have been a climate activist since 1986, it bears mentioning that my biggest carbon footprint is getting to work. I do appreciate a chance not to have to fly. It definitely takes a toll. Jet lag definitely takes a toll and flying is physically exhausting, but I love being here. As far as I am concerned, I am on the freedom 85 plan, folks, and I am not going anywhere.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (2400)

[*Translation*]

LEBANESE HERITAGE MONTH ACT

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.) moved that Bill S-246, An Act respecting Lebanese Heritage Month, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to speak on behalf of the people of Halifax West.

[*English*]

Today, as a proud Lebanese Canadian, I am honoured to speak on Bill S-246, which would designate the month of November as Lebanese heritage month across Canada.

First I want to thank Senator Jane Cordy for shepherding this bill in the Senate chamber. The bill had its origins with my private member's bill, Bill C-268, last year.

It was a special honour to testify at the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology when the bill was being considered at that place, not only because I represent many Lebanese Nova Scotians in Halifax West but also because I have worked throughout my life to share, celebrate and preserve Lebanese culture, language and traditions in Canada.

I speak to this bill as the daughter of first-generation Lebanese immigrants to Canada from the tiny village of Diman. I also spent years of my childhood growing up surrounded by grandparents and elders of the village before fleeing war and reuniting with extended family and community back in Nova Scotia.

I joined, at the age of 15, Diman Association Canada, a group that was founded in 1973 by second-generation teenagers whose parents emigrated from the village of Diman. This group continues to flourish and celebrates its 50-year anniversary September 30.

I also joined the Canadian Lebanon Society of Halifax and was elected for the first time in 1993, over 30 years ago, as the first female president, serving six terms. The last was in 2013, when I entered politics. This organization, founded in 1938 and headed by Lieutenant Edward Francis Arab as its first president, is one of the oldest such organizations in North America.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

It was founded by first-generation Lebanese immigrants who wanted to stay connected to their heritage, their culture and their mother tongue.

[English]

We mark its 85th anniversary this November.

I am also a former parish council member at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church. In Halifax, there are two Lebanese churches, Our Lady of Lebanon and Saint Antonios Orthodox Church, and each year each church hosts a summer Lebanese festival, one in June and the other in July, for all to enjoy.

A week ago, Our Lady of Lebanon hosted the Lebanese Cedar Festival with food, music, dance performances and so much more. It was a proud moment for me to see my children volunteering at the festival and my grandchildren doing the Lebanese *dabke*.

It was a welcome source of fun and community building and a chance to show our love and provide support to feed Nova Scotia and others in the community.

[Translation]

Through my involvement in all these groups, I have met people and groups across the country.

[English]

I know how significant this recognition would be, as the provincial recognition was significant when we proclaimed it in Nova Scotia in 2018.

When our Senate colleagues spoke to Bill S-246, they shared the stories of Lebanese Canadians from across the country, such as the Lebanese peddlers and fur traders who arrived in the late 1800s and early 1900s in P.E.I., Victoria and Edmonton.

• (2405)

[Translation]

There is business owner Annie Midlige, the first Lebanese immigrant in Ottawa.

[English]

There is George Shebib, who introduced the card game tarabish to Cape Bretoners in 1901.

[Translation]

There is William Haddad, a shopkeeper's son who became one of the first Arab judges in Canada.

[English]

There is Nazem Kadri, the Stanley Cup champion, and those who gave their lives for Canada, such as Charlie Younes and Lieutenant Edward Francis Arab, after whom we have named a street in the Westmount subdivision of Halifax.

[Translation]

There are also high-performance athletes like John Hanna, John Makdessi and Fabian Joseph from Nova Scotia.

[English]

There are artists as varied as singer Paul Anka, Drake collaborator Noah "40" Shebib, documentarian Amber Fares, Order of Ontario recipient Sandra Shamas, visual artist Jay Isaac and Order of Canada recipient Consul Wadiah M. Fares, just to name a few.

[Translation]

There are academics and rights advocates.

[English]

There are civic leaders from all levels of government and political parties, including former senators and former members of Parliament, as well as my two federal colleagues from Laval—Les Îles and Edmonton—Manning and my former provincial colleagues Patricia Arab and Zach Churchill. There are, of course, Canada's first premier of non-European descent, Premier Joe Ghiz, and later his son Robert Ghiz, and so many more.

Indeed, Lebanese Canadians have had a strong presence in our country since the late 19th century. Today, Lebanon is represented in Canada by its embassy in Ottawa and has a general consulate in Montreal with consulate offices in Halifax, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. There are notable communities in Edmonton, London, Ottawa, Gatineau, Montreal and Laval, Toronto and the GTA, Windsor, Halifax, Vancouver, and Calgary.

[Translation]

We also have smaller enclaves in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Winnipeg and elsewhere.

[English]

Global Affairs estimates that the Lebanese community in Canada includes between 200,000 and 400,000 people and that an estimated 40,000 to 75,000 Canadians live in Lebanon. From my experience, there are, sadly, many who have either forgotten or have lost their Lebanese heritage or even, at times, suppressed it. It makes me emotional because I have seen it. I have had those conversations. It is part of why this designation would be so important for so many people.

In my time leading the Canadian Lebanon Society, I met many who were the first of their families to arrive to this country. I would hear about how they lost their language, how they worked hard to erase their difference and how they anglicized their names. It is easy to forget this today in the diverse and welcoming place Canada has become, but there was a time when it was seen as embarrassing to claim one's heritage.

[Translation]

The assimilation and prejudice that Lebanese Canadians faced, the need to hide their roots from others, had a major impact.

[English]

I can tell members about the children and grandchildren of Lebanese immigrants I have met, who grew up never telling people they were Lebanese because of what their families endured when they first came to Canada.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

If there is one thing that is true about Lebanese people, it is that we are very resilient, like the cedar on the flag of our homeland.

[English]

In fact, the marginalization past generations experienced only pushed them to build closer bonds with others. I think of my own father in the early days of his immigration journey, when he worked a number of jobs, including at what was then the local Coca-Cola plant, and the friendships he forged with his African Nova Scotian peers.

I note the stories Senator Simons shared in her comments on this bill, recounting the relationships built between the early Lebanese fur traders in Alberta and the Cree and Métis trappers. These industrious folks learned the indigenous languages to forge friendships and do business, yet for too many their Lebanese heritage may be lost or hard to rediscover.

I can tell members that the designation of Lebanese heritage month in my home province has sparked many people to rediscover their Lebanese heritage, to do the digging and to share the stories of their grandparents, folks like Charlene Rahey-Pedersen in Nova Scotia, who reached out to me when she heard we were working on designating a heritage month and initiated the North Sydney and Area Lebanese Heritage Group.

That is one reason why these recognitions matter. They prompt discovery.

This project to designate November as Lebanese heritage month has prompted so many parliamentarians to approach me to share stories from their constituencies and provinces. I know many.

● (2410)

[Translation]

Since the arrival of Abraham Arab in 1894, many Lebanese people from Diman have chosen to make Halifax their home.

Many families like mine can trace their roots to that sacred place. Their impact is so profound that 10 years ago, *The Globe and Mail* published an article on the many big developers from Diman who built the city of Halifax through major projects such as the Nova Centre, The Trillium, King's Wharf, The Vuze and so on.

We also have the Sisterhood of Diman, a group of pioneering women such as Cristine Goshen Kahil who have worked hard over the years to raise money for the education and emancipation of the next generation.

[English]

The spirit of Lebanese Canadians shines through their hard work, determination, and love for their family and community. We work extremely hard because so many of us came from such humble beginnings, and when we succeed we give back so the road is easier for those who come next, and the communities we call home see success as well.

I want to mention the Lebanese Chamber of Commerce in Nova Scotia, a volunteer-led organization that for two decades has brought the Lebanese business community together in my province.

I am not aware of many such volunteer chambers of commerce in Nova Scotia, which I think is a testament to the keen entrepreneurial instincts of Lebanese Nova Scotians who are so deeply enmeshed in our broader social fabric.

Of note, the Canadian Lebanon Society of Halifax has for decades run the Lebanese Heritage Language School, a critical institution that helps ensure that our young people still have that linguistic capacity, that connection to the mother tongue and where we come from.

[Translation]

I know that many members of the House can appreciate how important this is.

[English]

As a former principal and volunteer, I was immensely proud that, in 2020, Nova Scotia selected the school as an approved course provider for Lebanese Arabic grades 10 and 11, two full credit courses to allow high schoolers to learn the beautiful Lebanese Arabic language. As the member of Parliament who now represents nearly half of those who speak Arabic in Nova Scotia, that matters a lot to me.

[Translation]

As far as language is concerned, I would like to remind my francophone colleagues of the deep bond that unites the Lebanese people with the French language. Indeed, French is a more common second language in Lebanon than English.

That is why, as someone who spoke French before speaking English, I worked hard to foster collaboration in my community between the Canadian Lebanon Society and our local chapter of the Alliance française.

[English]

Locally, we have also been blessed in Halifax to host film screenings and I want to highlight the work of the Lebanese Film Festival in Canada.

Those recognitions of our proud cultural communities matter. They are not partisan endeavours, nor are they symbolic. When we collectively decide to mark a heritage month, we spotlight a community and give those people a new platform to tell their stories, gather, dispel myths and further their enmeshment in the great Canadian multicultural fabric.

[Translation]

We enable them to be seen and make them feel more at home here, while learning more about our neighbours and becoming more supportive citizens.

● (2415)

[English]

My colleagues have debated the merit of similar bills and motions before, so just before I conclude, I will share a personal anecdote that speaks to this.

My staff put WhatsApp on my phone late last year. I got a call through it. I was hesitant to answer but I did. It was a community leader in Lebanon. They were collecting donations of \$10 so children could have a little something for Christmastime. She requested that I take a moment to stand in front of something recognizable and record a video to send a message to the children, something to show those struggling in Lebanon that there is hope, something to show them that, here in the diaspora, we are thinking of them, because people around the world are watching us. When we affirm the value of diversity and of our diasporas, it matters.

To those who are here, to those who dream of being here, to those who may have lost their heritage and to those who may never visit our shores themselves, this matters.

To all those listening to me tonight at midnight Eastern time, I say *shukran*, “thank you”.

I look forward to celebrating this from coast to coast to coast.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank the member for her intervention. As a Nova Scotian, it is great to be chairing this tonight because I have many friends who of course are of Lebanese descent.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine there will be a voice opposing the creation of this recognition of the significant contribution of Lebanese Canadians to the life of Canadians. I found it very touching that our hon. colleague was asked to send a video from Nova Scotia home to children in Lebanon. I think the more we improve our ties with that country and welcome the Lebanese diaspora to Canada, the better off we all will be.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to all colleagues in the House.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the hon. member is Lebanese, as I am, and we both share probably very similar experiences.

How does she see the Lebanese community being more involved and being able to contribute more to Canada as the community itself is growing very fast these days?

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleague and across all party lines to ensure that all people of Lebanese heritage in this country see themselves not only in this Parliament but also in all fields in all the life of this country.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Halifax West for a tremendous job in presenting this bill here in the House, for her tremendous work on behalf of all Canadians and, indeed, for her proud Lebanese heritage.

In Kings—Hants we actually have a pretty sizable Lebanese population. I think about people like Rob Bitar and Lino Ruhabahi. I think about the Al-Qadr family and Mount Uniacke.

Can the hon. member for Halifax West talk about the conversations she has had with her constituents, and indeed with many in

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the Lebanese community, about how important and meaningful this bill is for them?

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Mr. Speaker, this is very emotional. To be frank, what I will say is this: I think I speak for all the Lebanese in this country but also for those in Lebanon. This is like being nominated for the biggest Oscar possible, and going and receiving that trophy or award. I just feel like I want to stand here, thank my God, my family, community and everybody. Honestly, I want to thank everyone from the House and the Senate for shepherding this through.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to thank the member for Halifax West for her years of dedication to this, but also for her tremendous will to highlight her community.

At a time in Canada when so much feels lost to so many folks, sometimes all we have is who we are. Lebanese Canadians from coast to coast to coast can find solace in the fact that there are champions, not just in this chamber but right across the country, whether they are persons who work in the local grocery store, local business people or folks who have contributed to our Canadian history in ways that will not be forgotten, especially now with the hopeful passage of Bill S-246, designating November as Lebanese heritage month.

I want to speak a little to two fronts. One is about how the impact of Lebanese Canadians has affected me in my life, but in particular the community of Alberta. It is no secret that in Alberta there is a long-standing tradition between the Lebanese community and indigenous people in particular. Harkening back all the way to the fur trade, we knew that there were folks who were willing to join indigenous people in what would be the frontier of a new era, an era that would bring peace and prosperity but also a tremendous new way of life to the prairies, one which Lebanese Canadians are builders of.

There is a community in central Alberta called Lac la Biche. Lac la Biche is a small northern Alberta community that is home to some of the most vibrant Lebanese family members who I am sure many in the Lebanese community know. The member for Halifax West spoke about this. They have made huge contributions, not only to language diversity in Canada but also to indigenous culture.

I want to speak about a unique story in my community. Many of the Lebanese immigrants actually came to Alberta during the fur trade, and then learned languages, like Cree, Dene, Ojibway and Michif. They learned many indigenous languages and then took that with them to all walks of life. Many community members of Lebanese descent in Edmonton, Alberta, are from a little town called Lala. There was actually a teepee built in Lala. I remember as a young person seeing pictures from fellow Métis people of this community, far away, where we had relatives. It happened to be in the community in Lebanon, the tiny town of Lala.

This relationship is truly remarkable. It is one that I think emphasizes the tremendous contributions of Lebanese persons to the prairies and to places from coast to coast to coast, and in particular in Atlantic Canada.

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I want to share a story about how my community in Edmonton was built. It was built by some remarkable Lebanese folks. One remarkable Lebanese person I want to talk about today, and one I hope we could all continue to speak about in many of the heritage months to come, is a woman named Hilwie Jomha, who was from Lala, a small village in the Beqaa Valley, what is now Lebanon, in 1905.

She was the daughter of a leading family in a village whose culture was of mixed Sunni, Shia, as well as Christian and Jewish faith. Hilwie's future husband, Ali Hamdon had come to Canada in the early 1900s, together with relatives and friends from the same valley she was from. He became a fur trader in Fort Chipewyan, in northern Alberta, where many of my family members were also fur traders. There is no doubt they would have known each other.

After he set up home there, he returned to Lala and to Hilwie. She immigrated with him in 1923 to begin her life's work in Canada, a kind of sacrifice that many make still today in the community, one that is not always easy, sometimes tremendously difficult, but one she took courage in and one that she found a home quickly in.

She adapted to life in Alberta. She quickly struck up deep friendships amongst the Jewish communities in Fort Chipewyan. After Hilwie had children, the Hamdons moved to Edmonton where Hilwie truly made her mark, not only as a citizen in Edmonton but as a community leader.

The city's small but fast-growing Muslim community had a big problem in the 1930s. Like everywhere else in Canada at that time, they did not have a mosque. Imagine that, not being able to have a place where one could gather with their friends, extended family and community. Prayers had to be held at individuals' homes, but they were limited in what they could do without a common meeting place.

Hilwie had a natural gift for connecting people. It was almost like a superpower, something that she was able to do not only as the new burgeoning community of Lebanese were there but also amongst all Edmontonians. She brought Muslims together for Ramadan and became a fixture of the local community during the 1930s. It was a decade when Arab businesses in Edmonton were making their mark on the city's business scene.

● (2420)

The Arab community in Edmonton had great strength and it began to have discussions about building a mosque of its very own. Hilwie was at the heart of these conversations. Soon these talks quickly turned into action, and Edmonton's Arab community hatched a plan to build North America's first mosque. Along with a group of Arab businessmen, Hilwie approached the mayor of Edmonton about buying some city land for the mosque, but there was a problem: The mayor wanted \$5,000, quite a large sum at the time. However, the community members were not going to be let down, so they organized, but there was not a central body to do it.

To solve this problem, the community came together to found an Arab-Muslim association. Hilwie was at the heart of this community organizing. She marshalled the whole community, including people of various religious groups, to build the mosque. Hilwie went

door to door on Jasper Avenue, in the heart of Edmonton Griesbach today, and asked business owners to support the project. These efforts allowed the group to buy the land for the mosque and build its foundations.

However, there were more challenges. The initial funding was not enough to complete the mosque. When money ran out, Hilwie and the community sprang into action and made appeals for funding to Muslim business owners right across western Canada. This final push toward that work resulted in the construction of the Al Rashid Mosque, which finally opened its doors in Edmonton in 1938. Al Rashid not only became Canada's first mosque but also one of the earliest in all of North America. It quickly became a fixture of local communities and still is to this day.

I am pleased to share the story of Hilwie, an incredible human being who helped not only to build the first mosque in Canada's history but also helped build our city, helped build our province and helped build our country. It not only speaks to the strength of Edmonton's Lebanese community; it is also a testament of what Canada is and what Canada can be. Lebanese heritage month would ensure that we have an opportunity to honour and celebrate remarkable Canadians like Hilwie every single year, which is something I am more than proud to stand to recognize.

I want to mention that as this bill proceeds, the New Democratic Party and I are pleased to support it in all stages.

Before I end, I want to mention some other remarkable people of Lebanese origin in my life, like the El Safadi brothers, who opened the doors of the first Lebanese grocery store in Edmonton. It became a mainstay of Arab Edmontonian diets, and I am sure that many of the Lebanese folks watching know very well, if they have ever visited Edmonton, that it is a staple.

Another example is the Canadian Arab Friendship Association, which wins the heritage day every single year, placing first in the festival. This year, as a matter of fact, the festival is being hosted in Edmonton Griesbach, and it has won that award for 17 years.

To conclude, I want to mention someone who is quite special in my life and special to the New Democratic Party, and that is Anthony Salloum.

Some members may know Anthony Salloum as the person in our opposition lobby, but Anthony Salloum is so much more. He is a remarkable human being who has served the New Democratic Party for over 20 years in an official capacity, and I am sure much longer than that unofficially. He is not only the person who sparks up a smile when someone walks by in the lobby or consoles them when they are having a bad day; he is also somebody who is going to reach across many party lines, because for him it is not about party but about people, just like many in the Lebanese community right across our country. He is someone who demonstrates the spirit and heart of the Lebanese community, like those in my community and right across Canada. The goodwill, the nature of community and the ability to support others is a staple that is huge in my life. I know I have been able to stand in this place with greater courage, with greater power and with a greater voice because of him.

To Anthony and to the many Lebanese right across our country, I want to thank you for your contribution and thank you for building your home here. This is truly home to us all.

• (2425)

The Deputy Speaker: I think that with that, you should give Anthony the day off tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on August 4, 2020, an explosion devastated the city of Beirut in a country already grappling with economic insecurity and a refugee crisis.

The explosion was caused by ammonium nitrate that was improperly stored. The blast rocked the entire city and destroyed the largest port in Lebanon, the country's main entry point for food imports.

Lebanese authorities rejected multiple judicial requests to lift parliamentary immunity and allow questioning of security officials. The government also failed to execute arrest warrants against a former minister. In February 2021, Judge Tarek Bitar was appointed to lead the investigation. According to a UN special rapporteur, he faced increasing obstacles and threats to carry out his work. Up until that point, no one had been tried for the August 2020 explosion, which 215 people died, 6,000 injured and 300,000 displaced.

Earlier this year, to everyone's surprise, the lead judge decided to resume his investigation into the explosion despite enormous political pressure. Victims of the explosion and their families have been demanding justice for more than two years. In late January 2023, the judge in charge of the investigation defied the authorities by laying charges against Lebanon's top public prosecutor, a decision that was unprecedented in the country's history. Two senior security officials were also charged with homicide with probable intent.

Today, a large part of the population associates this tragedy with the corruption and negligence of the ruling class, which tried to put an end to the investigation to avoid charges. Since 2019, Lebanon has been plunged into an unprecedented socio-economic crisis largely associated with corruption and negligence on the part of the

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ruling class. Earlier this year, demonstrators blocked streets in Beirut and other cities to protest against deteriorating living conditions and the weakening of the Lebanese currency. The situation has only gotten worse.

Eighty-five kilometres north of Beirut, an ambitious architectural project is also falling into disrepair, a sign of the various governments' failure to properly manage the country for years, even decades. That does not inspire much hope. Fortunately, however, UNESCO urgently added the 70-hectare site between the historic centre of Tripoli and the Al Mina port to the List of World Heritage in Danger.

To give a bit of history, in 1962, renowned Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer was mandated by the Lebanese government to design an international fair in Tripoli. The goal of the project was to put Lebanon on the world map and attract investors. Lebanon and Tripoli were confident in their future knowing that they had an inspirational heritage. The work began in 1964.

I know that people are wondering where I am going with this, but a connection will soon become apparent. The site for the international fair is gigantic. This complex was supposed to have an exhibition hall, three museums, an experimental theatre and an open air theatre. It was a massive undertaking. The purpose of this incomparably large site was to promote Lebanese culture and traditions to the world. In the end, the project was abandoned because of the civil war in Lebanon, which started in 1975. Since then, the buildings are no longer maintained.

Despite many efforts by architects and artists to draw the attention of the Lebanese authorities and the world to the importance of preserving this exceptional complex, today to some it has become a symbol of the failure of past government decisions and, of course, the unfulfilled dream of its architect, the Brazilian we were talking about earlier.

The place is huge, but mostly deserted. It is like stepping into a dream, far from the hustle and bustle of Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest city. It is a grandiose place with a futuristic flair, yet little known outside its borders. Despite the lack of financial resources, despite the negligence of the Lebanese authorities, it remains standing, proud, a reflection of the people and of the MPs of Lebanese origin who sit here in the House. I want to mention the member for Edmonton Manning, who will speak after me, the member for Halifax West, who spoke earlier, and my great friend from Laval—Les Îles, whom I adore.

• (2430)

I would be remiss if I failed to mention my dear friend from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, who has Lebanese roots. Despite all our differences of opinion and our political approaches, I can still tell when someone is proud. He stands up for his constituents, the people he represents. I want to recognize that tonight. He is even in the House tonight. I am pleased to say that.

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Our colleague from Halifax West said it best when she pointed out the strength and resilience of the Lebanese community in the preamble of Bill C-268. The purpose of Bill S-246, which is before us this evening, is to encourage Canadians and Quebecers of Lebanese origin “to promote their traditions and culture and share them”. If passed, this bill designates the month of November as Lebanese heritage month.

Of course I support this initiative. The Bloc Québécois will support it wholeheartedly. I hope that my colleagues from the other parties will do the same. I fail to see how anyone would not do the same. The month of November is very important to the culture of that country, particularly because it celebrates independence, which was recognized on November 22, 1936, and became effective in 1945, after the Second World War. Independence is important.

A nation's desire to protect and pass on its culture, traditions and characteristics alone is often the strongest incentive to achieving sovereignty. Like a flame, culture warms people's hearts in uncertain times like the ones people in Lebanon are currently facing. Culture gives a glimmer of hope to those who are suffering.

That is why, in this period of uncertainty that has been going on for far too long, I want to assure the people of Lebanon and citizens of Canada and Quebec—because one day Quebec will be independent—of Lebanese descent that the Bloc Québécois supports the bill and supports them in their desire to make their unique traditions and culture known in Quebec and Canada, the traditions and culture that they were able to protect by becoming independent.

I will close by saying this. Every time a people becomes independent, they become a model for nations that are also trying to protect their traditions and culture. The road to independence is long and often fraught with challenges. To quote one of the greatest actors that Quebec has ever known and who just happened to be my grandfather, despite everything, “Independence will always hold a place in our hearts, with luminous clarity. It is self-evident”.

I would say that Quebec is my only country, but the Lebanese can say that Lebanon is their only country.

• (2435)

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was born in Lebanon, a land known for its beautiful mountains and magnificent valleys. Now I live in another country known for tall trees, beautiful mountains and magnificent valleys. Canada is my home. I grew up in a country with hot, humid summers and, in the mountain areas, lots of snow in the winter. I moved to a country with hot, humid summers and lots of snow in the winter. Canada is my home.

The people of Lebanon are proud of their history, heritage and symbols. Perhaps none are more famous than the cedars that adorn the national flag. Canadians are proud of their history, heritage and symbols, and they too have a famous tree. The maple leaf on the flag shouts to the world “Canada is here”. In Lebanon, the people have learned to live together in harmony and work together to build a society.

When I came to my new home, Canada, I discovered that the people here had learned to live together to bridge their differences. French, English and first nations laid the cornerstone for a country where language, race and creed are not as important as who we are as a person. Those founding groups have opened the door of this country to the world. Millions have come to Canada looking for a fresh start, including those from Lebanon. I was one of them.

My story is not unusual. I came to Canada to seek an opportunity that was not possible in Lebanon at that time. The land of my birth had suffered from years of civil war. The rebuilding was going to take time. Jobs and educational opportunities were limited. It made sense to come to Canada, at least for a short period of time. That short time has been more than 30 years now, which is more than half of my life. When I came here, I did not know I was going to fall in love with this country. I am proud of my Lebanese heritage, but Canada is my home now and always.

I am not alone in this feeling. There are more than 200,000 Canadians of Lebanese heritage. We are proud of our background, but prouder still to be a part of the greatest nation on earth. I am also proud to support Bill S-246 to establish Lebanese heritage month.

It is time to recognize the contributions Lebanese Canadians have made to this country since the first Lebanese immigrant came to Montreal in 1882, Ibrahim Abu Nadir. His Canadian name was Abraham Bounadere, and he came from Zahlé, a city about 50 kilometres from my hometown Aaiha. I feel a certain kinship with the young man who took a leap of faith to come to Canada, never dreaming what the future would be for the Lebanese people here.

Abraham was the first in the wave of immigrants coming to Canada looking for a better life and new opportunities. The first to come to Canada from Lebanon were mostly men with little education. Everything about the country was new to them, from the language to the climate to the ways of society. They discover that Lebanese values are Canadian values, including hard work, good manners, generosity, courage and honesty. Despite their different background, they found it easy to fit into Canadian society. They brought their families to Canada and built a community.

Those of Lebanese background have become part of the fabric of Canada, and this dominion is stronger because of that. Wherever we Lebanese have found ourselves, we look for ways to strengthen the community. That is another similarity between Canada and Lebanon. Our common values include a desire to serve and work to help those around us.

I am very much aware of the contributions of Lebanese culture and Lebanese people to Canadian society. We have had an impact greater than our numbers. It is a proud heritage, one that has shaped me and made me who I am today. When we think of the impact of Lebanese Canadians on our country, probably one of the first things that comes to most people's minds is business. The entrepreneurial spirit is stronger in Lebanese people. One could say that we prefer to be the boss.

Leon's Furniture comes to mind. It was a small family business started by a Lebanese immigrant, Ablan Leon, more than a century ago. It has now grown to more than 10,000 employees and 80 locations across Canada.

• (2440)

From small restaurants to major corporations, when we look at almost any business in Canada, we find someone of Lebanese background involved. However, it is not just business. When we talk about law, politics, medicine, music, academia or film, Lebanese Canadians have made their mark. Indeed, it was the grandson of a Lebanese immigrant who made one of the greatest Canadian films of all time.

In 1970, working with a shoestring budget, Donald Shebib told the story of a couple of young men from the Maritimes, who felt homesick in their new life in the big city. *Goin' Down the Road* became an instant classic, a story that was true then and remains true today. It is a story that captures so much of what it means to be Canadian. We are a nation in progress, and sometimes we do not realize that life is pretty good just where we are. Today, many young people still leave Atlantic Canada looking for a new life elsewhere, and they discover that, in a big city, their hopes and dreams are not always fulfilled. However, that does not stop people from hoping, dreaming, persevering or achieving.

Lebanese immigrants and people of Lebanese ancestry, full of hopes, dreams, perseverance and achievement, have been a central part of the Canadian experience for 150 years. We have come to this land from far away, and it has become our home. We are fond of Lebanon. We are enthusiastic about Lebanese culture, and especially Lebanese food. We are also passionate about Canada.

The nation, culture and community that we call Lebanon has been around for millennia. The border of the Lebanese state has sometimes changed to adapt to political fortunes in the Middle East. Lebanon once again became an independent nation on November 22, 1943, 80 years ago this year. It seems to me that this anniversary date makes it appropriate that we designate November in Canada as Lebanese heritage month.

I am proud to speak of my Lebanese heritage. I am prouder still to be able to call myself a Canadian. I love the land of my birth, and I still have family and friends there. However, Canada is not only the present but also the future for me and my family.

Let us celebrate Lebanese heritage month. Let us celebrate the contribution of those early immigrants from Lebanon and their descendants to making Canada the great nation it is today. Let us also celebrate who we are today, proud of our heritage, but prouder still to be Canadian.

Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-246, An Act respecting Lebanese Heritage Month, be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (2445)

The Deputy Speaker: I have received notice from all recognized parties that they are in agreement with this request.

All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will say nay. It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to, bill deemed read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 5, I rose during question period to ask the emergency preparedness minister a question in regards to the devastating forest fires and wildfires raging across northern Alberta. I particularly asked the minister to recognize the complete devastation of one of the communities known as the East Prairie Métis Settlement.

Before I get too far into that, I want to speak directly to how important the work of reconciliation really is here in Canada. The government was clear that the most important relationship was to indigenous people, a nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship that would hopefully begin the healing journey for many indigenous people who are caught not only by the traps of history and cycles in which we fall into, but also the cycles of natural disaster and jurisdictional loopholes that continue to plague indigenous communities like the East Prairie Métis Settlement.

I spoke about the important need to ensure that there was immediate temporary housing for the many families who have lost so much. I have a quote here from members of the community of the East Prairie Métis Settlement that they provided me, which has given evidence of what is needed right now in the community.

However, I want to reference the fact that when I asked the minister this question, he was not actually even certain as to which nation I was speaking of. He responded with the Métis National Council, and although I am a supporter of the Métis National Council, the Métis Settlement of East Prairie is not a member of the Métis National Council nor is any Métis settlement in Alberta. I also want to mention that Métis settlements, which are land-based communities, are only present in northern Alberta, and the minister failed to recognize this unique quality, despite the fact that the government's most important relationship is the nation-to-nation one.

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I want to speak about how important it is, during a time of emergency and crisis, if we truly are in a nation-to-nation relationship, that our partner is truly there. This was not present in the response by the minister, and I want to make clear how important it is to ensure that we support indigenous communities when emergency strikes.

The minister has certainly heard of Jordan's principle. That principle says that when an indigenous person, in this case, Jordan, approaches a government, whether it is the provincial or federal government, it is that government that takes action on behalf of that person, who in this case was a child. Jordan died because of living in a jurisdictional wasteland and being tossed back and forth.

I am asking for a Jordan's principle approach to this natural emergency that is taking place in northern Alberta. We have 14 houses that were destroyed, 14 families who are now homeless in northern Alberta, and the community is asking for \$900,000 to ensure that these families can continue to live without having to face the brunt of homelessness any longer. There is also a bridge, at \$4.5 million, that was lost in that community. It is the only way in and out of that community. These are critical infrastructure projects that the province has neglected to deal with, because of the population being Métis and the fact that there is a jurisdictional battle currently taking place between the province and the federal government as to who is responsible for this community.

I am asking that the minister take his responsibility and his commitment to indigenous people seriously and work with the East Prairie Métis Settlement to temporarily house these families until something can happen and prepare the community to ensure that they can actually re-enter their home by assisting in the construction of a bridge. These are basic asks of any Canadian when disaster strikes. It is even more important that, as the federal government has the power to act on behalf of Métis people, confirmed by the 2016 Daniels v. Canada Supreme Court decision, it should use its power and responsibility to actually do the right thing. Will the minister do the right thing and help this community?

• (2450)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach for raising this matter for further debate in this chamber.

Let me begin by acknowledging the devastating impact these wildfires have had on indigenous communities and Albertans across the province. I very much recognize, as the hon. colleague has previously raised in the chamber, that people of the East Prairie Metis Settlement have been among those who lost their homes. Our thoughts are with them and all affected Albertans in the face of this devastating loss.

First, I have a quick update on the current situation in the province. As of June 12, there are 82 wildfires burning in Alberta and 29 are out of control. Some 14,046 people are currently evacuated from their communities. Five indigenous communities in Alberta are among those reporting evacuees.

We are continuing to follow the latest developments in Alberta closely and have been working closely with the province to ensure it has the support it needs to deal with these immediate threats. To that end, on May 10, the Minister of Emergency Preparedness approved the request for federal assistance from the Province of Alberta, activating federal resources to help it combat the ongoing fires.

In response to this request for assistance, the Canadian Armed Forces have been deployed to provide firefighting support resources, airlift resources, including the evacuation of isolated communities, and engineering support. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is a Natural Resources Canada supported entity, is also coordinating the movement of firefighters from other provinces and international partners.

Employment and Social Development Canada has been supporting impacted Canadians with enhanced Service Canada hours, outreach to evacuees and deployment of mobile units to evacuation centres to support applications for services such as employment insurance.

The Public Health Agency of Canada's national emergency stockpile has been engaged and has shipped requested supplies. PHAC is standing at the ready to provide additional supplies if required.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has been working with the Province of Alberta and telecommunication service providers to keep people connected.

Other departments involved in supporting emergency response include Public Services and Procurement Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Transport Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Indigenous Services Canada's emergency management assistance program is also supporting the response and recovery efforts for Alberta's on-reserve indigenous communities currently experiencing the devastating effects of these wildland fires. Such efforts include resource coordination, evacuee supports and recovery support for repairs to on-reserve community infrastructure.

With respect to an issue that I know is important to the member, I recognize, as my hon. colleague is likely already aware, that negotiations regarding a reconciliation agreement with the federal government and the Metis Settlements General Council are ongoing. While this work is being led by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, these important conversations are helping to strengthen our government-to-government relationship with all eight Métis settlements in Alberta.

When the cost from a natural disaster exceeds a province or territory's ability to respond on its own, the federal government can provide assistance through the disaster financial assistance arrangements. This can help with up to 90% of eligible recovery costs and can include uninsured damage to principal residences.

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Let us not forget that the current wildfire risk remains extremely high. Our government will continue to work with all partners, including provinces, territories and indigenous communities, to help keep their communities safe in the immediate term and to be an effective federal partner into the recovery.

I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent advocacy on this critical issue.

• (2455)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for highlighting and giving fact to the reality that this is truly something the federal government has a role to play in, not just the province. I am encouraged by his words citing the disaster recovery assistance program.

Will the parliamentary secretary work with me and the East Prairie Metis Settlement to ensure that the community has the kind of capacity and support required to access that program in a timely manner and to ensure it does not have any families left out in the winter? These are reasonable requests and ones that I am happy to support the government to try to achieve as the government continues its work on a nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationship. It is one that I invite the minister to share with me.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, the people in the East Prairie Metis Settlement who have lost their homes are going through the unimaginable right now. While the federal government generally provides disaster assistance directly to provinces and territories, we can cover up to 90% of eligible response and recovery costs. While there are no final costs yet, we know the damage caused by Alberta's wildfires is already significant, and we are prepared to work with all partners to ensure that all communities are supported.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising tonight in Adjournment Proceedings, at a later time than usual, with it being just about one o'clock in the morning, to follow up on a question I asked in question period on April 27. Just before Earth Day, the Government of Canada approved a massive nature-destroying project, a controversial one that has been fought by British Columbians since 2013 when it was first put forward. It is called the Roberts Bank terminal expansion.

I asked the hon. Minister of Transport how it could be justified, with the opposition and the clarity the environmental impact assessment, itself, found, and it is very rare to get such strong language from an environmental assessment review, that there would be significant and irreversible adverse effects that threaten the survival of a number of species. Still, as the Minister of Transport explained, the project was approved because it had 370 binding conditions, and somehow this devastating project was going to be magically purified through those conditions.

I also included in my question my favourite of the conditions, number 14.7.1, which requires that they paint the cranes to be used at this massive port expansion in a colour that is compatible with the surrounding landscapes. The minister responded that there were other conditions as well. I have gone through all those conditions, and there is no doubt that this project threatens the survival of numerous endangered species. The Fraser River estuary is rich in bio-

diversity, and the environmental assessment points to numerous endangered species with 102 species at risk.

The findings of the environmental impact assessment were so strong that many people did not think the Government of Canada would approve the project. The Minister of Transport responded to my question that day, April 27. I do not think the Minister of Transport knew what an obscene and grotesque thing he was saying because I do not think that those at the ministerial level actually read the environmental assessment report to know how bad this thing is. It is a \$3.5-billion project, and it is going to add \$3 billion in added GDP, so what are a few species when we really come down to it? This is an absolute violation of everything the government says it stands for.

The Minister of Transport, in the aforementioned obscene thing, said, "the economy and the environment go hand in hand." No, the economy goes to the bank. The species at risk go to their graves. This will cause species at risk to go extinct.

Besides the very endangered southern resident killer whales, besides the endangered salmon and so many species, I want to mention one in particular because it is so clear that it cannot be moved somewhere else. One of the conditions says that the people are going to find places in mud flats to create more food for this particular species, the western sandpiper. It has a very interesting, almost hairy tongue that manages to get into something called "biofilm" and gets all its nutrients from that. Over 3.5 million western sandpipers, which makes it look like it could not be endangered, but that is the whole global population, stop at some point every single year on Roberts Bank. The biofilm is specific to that area. People cannot move it around. Experts say they cannot move this bird around, so "endangered" mean nothing to the government when its eyes are flashing with dollar signs.

• (2500)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her questions regarding the Roberts Bank terminal 2 project.

[*Translation*]

Canada's transportation network is essential to the transportation of approximately \$1.2 billion in goods between Canada and international markets.

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[English]

However, congestion is a major problem on Canada's west coast because there is no redundancy in the system. Recent supply chain disruptions such as floods, fires and pandemics have shown the results of insufficient transportation capacity, higher prices, lower business competitiveness and ports congested with vessels and containers. Port backlogs affect the entire supply chain. This hurts all Canadians, including families who need to pay for more goods, businesses whose deliveries are often late and local communities who must cope with vessels at anchor.

[Translation]

There will be more congestion if we refuse to build new transportation infrastructure. That includes more container handling capacity required to support Canadians, including the millions of new residents that we plan to welcome to our country in the next few decades.

[English]

Roberts Bank terminal 2 is expected to increase the Port of Vancouver's ability to handle containers by about 50%, addressing critical container handling capacity issues while also helping Canadian businesses gain access to growing international markets. In addition, Roberts Bank terminal 2 is expected to support more than 1,500 jobs at the terminal, potentially 15,000 jobs off the terminal and countless more jobs across the country in manufacturing, retail and agriculture.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada takes its environmental responsibilities seriously. The positive environmental assessment is based on a strong, scientific assessment carried out by an independent review panel and comprehensive consultations with local communities and indigenous groups.

Consequently, the project is subject to 370 legally binding conditions that protect the environment.

[English]

The conditions include protections for marine mammals, including for Southern Resident killer whales. The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority will be required to ensure that the project does not increase underwater vessel noise in the Salish Sea, an important part of minimizing disruptions to the whales.

[Translation]

These conditions rely on the existing and planned work by the Government of Canada, including all the protection measures in place to reduce the impact of marine traffic on the southern resident killer whales. The announcement in budget 2023 of \$152 million to protect endangered whales shows our commitment to doing this important work.

The other conditions imposed on the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority include more than 100 measures to protect the local fauna, as well as develop and implement an adaptive management approach to prevent any adverse impacts on migratory birds. They also set out the requirement to use emissions free handling equipment

and to provide enough provisions to the ships when they are docked at the terminal.

[English]

With these strong measures, the Government of Canada is committed to protecting the environment while ensuring that projects critical to Canada's economy, workers and businesses can proceed in a responsible manner.

Approval of Roberts Bank terminal 2 is an important step in securing Canada's supply chains for the future.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to know what to say in the face of the list of what jobs are going to be created. Let me just perhaps talk about the people in British Columbia worried about jobs. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union says that this approval of Roberts Bank threatens jobs because the way the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority wants to operate it is automated. The union thinks it is going to wipe out jobs.

By the way, let us look at the other alternatives. There was another proposal from Global Container Terminals for half as much footprint and less environmental damage. It was not great, but they decided to go with the Roberts Bank, the biggest and most damaging project.

It just puts such a lie to all the fakery, God damn it, the fakery of saying, "We care about whales and we care about species." They approve this? They are causing extinction, and they cannot reverse it.

● (2505)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, we are taking concrete steps to protect the marine environment while supporting economic growth. This includes Canada's oceans protection plan, which is providing over \$3.5 billion to protect Canada's coasts and waterways. The budget also announced the renewal of Canada's whale initiative, committing \$152 million to the protection and recovery of the endangered Southern Resident killer whales.

We look forward to continued collaboration with Indigenous groups, marine stakeholders and communities to reduce the risks vessel traffic poses to the marine environment, while balancing our commitment to the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am back to continue following up on advocacy for the Canada disability benefit in the early morning hours as it comes back up for debate.

I would like to start by reading an email from a constituent with a disability that I received earlier this evening:

Adjournment Proceedings

I was once extremely proud of being a Canadian, but that pride has been crushed under the boot of poverty. It has been absolutely demolished by the Liberal Party and years of suffering. We do not want platitudes, we don't want condescension, we don't want empty promises or assurances that we "just have to be patient". People have died. People are dying, and still they don't show any care in the world for our wellbeing.

For my part, I will reiterate what I have said in this House before. It is that if the governing party were serious, it would have done what it did with child care when it was serious. It put funding forward first, then agreements with provinces and territories, and then came legislation.

Of course, with the Canada disability benefit and people with disabilities, it was the opposite.

All that being said, this is still a milestone we are at today. Bill C-22, the Canada disability benefit bill, will finally be back up for debate, having come back from the Senate, and it is my hope that parties will agree to support unanimous consent for it to move forward more quickly.

We are going to need to continue to push, though, first of all for the amendments from the Senate to be supported, including one that would prioritize people with disabilities ahead of the insurance industry. The government's response should be public shortly after I finish this speech.

We need to continue to push for strong regulations once Bill C-22 passes into law, hopefully within a matter of days. It would make most of the decisions about the benefit. We are going to have to continue to push for the government to budget the benefit, which it has yet to do.

With my remaining time tonight, I just want to thank the people and organizations that got us to this point. Any progress made on the Canada disability benefit is because of them.

First are the federal organizations: Disability Without Poverty, with people like Rabia Khedr, Michelle Hewitt, Clare Li, Sabrina Latif, Al Etmanski and the rest of their team; the March of Dimes, with Amanda, Victoria and their team; Inclusion Canada, with Jeff Ferguson and the rest of the team; the MS Society, with its strong advocacy from Julie Kelndorfer and others; StopGap Ottawa with Kenzie McCurdy; Citizens for Public Justice, with Natalie Appleyard; Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, with David Lepofsky; Leadnow, with Ellen Trotter, Jesse Whattam and Shanaaz Gokool; Spinal Cord Injury Canada, with Bill Adair; Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, with Rebecca Pauls; Canadian National Institute for the Blind; La Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle, with Samuel Ragot; and Michael Prince and Vincent Calderhead. They all pushed, among so many others.

In my community, there is Extend-A-Family, with Al Mills and their team; KW Accessibility, with Edward, Ron and team; Bridges to Belonging, with Donnamarie Dunk; Independent Living Waterloo Region, with Janet, Sheri and others; The Social Development Centre, with Aleksandra Petrovic; and Christian Horizons, with Janet and Dave and team; and people with disabilities in my community and their allies, like Michael K, Alex Y, Mike Ashkewe, Rebecca Munzy, Marina Wahab, Anne Jensen, and Lorna Aberdein.

We are here because of all of you.

• (2510)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his continued advocacy on behalf of Canadians with disabilities.

All of us are working hard and working together to make sure we restore the pride the member had mentioned, and restore financial security for Canadians with disabilities.

I would like to especially acknowledge the work and advocacy of the hon. Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. The minister has been working tirelessly throughout her career to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

I assure my colleague that we share his sense of urgency in seeing Bill C-22 passed into law. We are doing everything we can to ensure it is passed before the summer recess. We are working with all parties to get it done.

The passage of Bill C-22 will be a major milestone in our strong and unwavering commitment toward creating a barrier-free Canada. That work began in 2015, with the appointment of Canada's first-ever minister responsible for persons with disabilities.

In 2016, Canada became the 20th country to sign the Marrakesh Treaty, and did so with the support of all provinces and territories.

In 2018, Canada acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In 2022, Dr. Laverne Jacobs was elected to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was the first time that a Canadian has held a seat at this important international table.

In 2019, the Accessible Canada Act came into force. The passing of this landmark legislation has undoubtedly been one of the most significant achievements for disability rights in the history of our country. The act has been the foundation for National Accessibility Week and for the establishment of Accessibility Standards Canada.

In October 2022, we released Canada's first-ever disability inclusion action plan. The action plan has four pillars: employment, accessible and inclusive communities, a modern approach to disability and financial security.

Throughout all of our consultations we kept hearing the same thing, that financial security is by far the most urgent priority for persons with disabilities. It is through the pillar of financial security that we will create the historic Canada disability benefit to help significantly reduce poverty and improve financial security for hundreds of thousands of persons with disabilities. That is why we need to get this legislation passed quickly.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would once again like to thank the member opposite for his question, his continued advocacy and his teamwork.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words from the parliamentary secretary, and his advocacy within the governing party caucus, as well as the minister's work to get to this point.

Let us be clear. The words he shared were that the Liberals would do everything they can to move as quickly as possible, but the way to do that is to ratify every single one of the Senate amendments and get it passed here so it does not have to go back to the other place again.

Will he commit to doing so here, which we are going to learn about literally in a few minutes' time?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Speaker, the passing of Bill C-22 will be a major milestone in our strong and unwavering commitment toward creating a barrier-free Canada.

I assure the member for Kitchener Centre that we share his sense of urgency in seeing Bill C-22 passed into law. We are doing everything we possibly can to ensure Bill C-22 is passed before the summer recess. We are working with all parties to get it done.

Again, I thank the member for his question and his advocacy.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank everyone for all their hard work today.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until later this day at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:14 a.m.)

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