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# House of Commons Debates

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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 20, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

### INDIAN ACT

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (for the Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario)** moved that Bill C-38, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, *kwe kwe. Ullukkut. Tansi.*

I am honoured to be speaking today in Canada's Parliament, situated on the traditional lands of the Anishinabe Algonquin people, on an incredibly important bill on behalf of the hon. Minister of Indigenous Services Canada, as her parliamentary secretary.

I represent the people of Fredericton, an unceded Wolastoqiyik territory, the people of the beautiful and bountiful river, as well as my family, my husband and my two children, who are also Wolastoqiyik and status Indians under the Indian Act.

For over a century, Canada passed laws and introduced policy with the express goal of expropriating land using tools that ripped apart families and attempted to destroy culture, language, tradition and identity. The Indian Act essentially reduced first nations identity to status and then used this status to strip away access to what most would consider the bare necessities. Sex-based and other forms of discrimination were used to segregate and assimilate, with the ultimate goal of removing indigenous identity or ending the “Indian problem”.

Today, I am speaking directly to the descendants and elders of those wronged. Despite these repeated and oppressive measures, they persisted. They were resilient. They retained their culture and language. Identity is not a status the government gives, but a way of

life and a feeling of love and belonging. It is a way of seeing the world.

It is thus fitting that we rise today to discuss an incredibly important bill that would advance reconciliation and do what is necessary to fix some of what was broken right here in this place through previous pieces of legislation. I am incredibly honoured to have the opportunity to be a part of this process.

To peel back the layers of our colonial history to right the wrongs is exactly why I ran for federal politics. I ran for my kids and their home community of Welamukotuk, a good place to fish. I ran for my students: for Justice, whom I wish Justice a happy birthday, and for Desiree, Brianna, Kitarra, Chrystal, Amber, Bailey and so many more. I ran for my former boss, Bob Atwin, at First Nation Education Initiative. I ran for Billy at Sitansisk and for all Wabanaki nations. Sometimes this place feels very far away from home, but I feel them with me today in this chamber.

We have heard from our partners and we have heard from Canadians. Identity is something that one cannot give or take, but something inherently ours. We are putting the power to determine this identity back in the hands of those who should have always had the power over it. The bill before us today would make important progress by addressing several major inequities in the Indian Act and by responding to long-standing concerns raised directly by first nations about the registration and band membership provisions of the act.

More specifically, this bill proposes to address four key issues. First, it would address the legacy impacts of enfranchisement and help more first nations regain their status. Second, it would return autonomy to registered first nations by allowing them to take their names off the Indian register. Third, it would recognize the rights of all first nations individuals to their natal band membership, ensuring women can maintain critical connections to their home communities. Finally, it would eliminate stigmatizing language about first nations persons with disabilities that is currently part of the Indian Act. If passed, this bill would help return agency to the first nations families that lost their status in this colonial process called enfranchisement.

### *Government Orders*

The minister promised to address these long-standing issues and in December 2022, she introduced this bill and followed through on that promise. The legislators of the past put these harmful policies in place, setting in motion the pain that so many families still feel today, but we are the legislators of a new time, one that reflects an honesty of history and a true commitment to a Canada that lives up to the promises and commitments our predecessors made in treaties and other agreements. Reconciliation is a process. It requires a deep collective commitment to the truth and to action.

Although the Indian Act itself is an inherent problem and partners across this land agree it is a tool of colonialism, many indigenous peoples, leaders and nations see that those approaches to ending this tool of oppression requires steady, honest transfer of control over the delivery of programs and services back to first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. This proposed legislation is a step in the right direction. It addresses the most foundational element of reconciliation, and that is self-determination.

The people at home might be asking why we are proposing these changes at all, why we cannot just get rid of the Indian Act with its discriminatory title altogether. The Indian Act is archaic, it is paternalistic, it is rooted in racism and Canada must continue to work toward its end. This work is, in fact, a major part of the mandate for the Minister of Indigenous Services.

• (1005)

The last number of years, we have engaged extensively with first nations on the best ways to move away from the Indian Act and protect the rights of people at the same time. We have made significant progress in developing successful alternatives to the Indian Act for first nations in relation to land management. We will continue to work with partners to transfer control and stand up self-determined policies and programs.

In the meantime, thousands of first nations people continue to face discrimination under the Indian Act. The amendments we are proposing in this bill reflect policy first nations have been calling for the federal government to adopt for many years. Past amendments have not addressed these wrongs.

In 2012, through a formal exploratory process, options for reform were studied with first nations and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations. The study concluded Canada should work with first nations to proactively address the issues with registration and membership under the Indian Act.

In 2018 and 2019, the same themes arose during discussions with more representatives from 200 first nations, who told us that Canada must address these issues and fix inequities in registration and citizenship. What is more, first nations and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations have told us that addressing the existing issues with the Indian Act must happen before communities can regain full control and jurisdiction over membership, registration and citizenship. In other words, partners told us that passing this bill is a necessary step on our path toward restoring full control of membership and community function to indigenous peoples.

This legislation is not proposed unilaterally by the federal government. The solutions proposed in this legislation represent

amendments to the act that indigenous peoples have told us are necessary to move past the act and reclaim their sovereignty from colonial systems.

The first, and most significant, amendment we are proposing to this bill addresses the discrimination caused by a family history of enfranchisement. Members will recall enfranchisement was a policy used with the expressed purpose to eradicate indigenous culture and assimilate first nations people.

Just a few examples will give all Canadians a better idea of how enfranchisement was used to segregate and tear first nations families apart. First nations members lost entitlement to registration and membership in their home communities if they wanted to vote in Canadian elections, own land, serve in the Canadian military, marry a non first nations person or keep their children out of residential schools. This last mention should highlight for all just how painful this legacy has been for some.

For some, enfranchisement was involuntary and happened when first nations achieved professional status like becoming a doctor or a lawyer. For others, it was voluntary, by application, severing talented professionals from their heritage. I use the word “voluntary” reluctantly as this was not a real choice. Imagine having to choose between keeping one's connection to one's community and protecting one's children from residential institutions. It is an impossible decision, but it is one the Government of Canada forced many first nations parents to make.

With these false choices, it is no wonder so many people forfeited their status. I have heard many stories from parents who gave up their status without a second thought to spare their children from the same unthinkable traumas and abuse they faced at residential institutions.

With her permission, I can share the story of Kathryn Fournier, who is here with us today, the stories of her grandfather, Maurice Sanderson, a residential school survivor from Pinaymootang First Nation in Manitoba.

Because of provisions in the Indian Act, he was not able to vote or own property unless he enfranchised, meaning he had to give up his right to Indian Act status. In 1922, Maurice made what Kathryn describes as a “strange and difficult choice”. He applied to enfranchise in order to have the same basic rights as other Canadian citizens. As a result, his wife and children were automatically enfranchised as well. Kathryn put it this way, “He made a very difficult choice that shouldn't have been imposed on him in the first place.”

Kathryn's grandfather's and grandmother's assimilation under the policy of enfranchisement may have provided them with some of the rights of Canadian citizenship, but today, generations later, the ripple effects of that policy continue to have negative impacts. The way historic policy erased connection to ancestry and culture continues to be felt. The process of enfranchisement was a deliberate effort by the federal government to colonize and to decrease the numbers of indigenous people who had rights.

Following a pattern of coercion and deception, this proposed legislation continues on Canada's journey to address and amend those decisions of the past that have hurt so many families. Over the last few decades, the government has been trying to reverse these policies by restoring status to first nations who lost it.

In 1985, the government acknowledged enfranchisement was a discriminatory policy, and it was removed from the Indian Act with the introduction of Bill C-31, an act to amend the Indian Act. At this point, people who had been enfranchised could reclaim their status.

- (1010)

The inequity we seek to remedy today is the inability for those with a family history of enfranchisement to transmit status to descendants in the same way that those without an history of enfranchisement are able to.

I ask the hon. members here today: should the family members and descendants of these people continue to be penalized? It is clear that enfranchisement is discriminatory and we need to eliminate all of its residual impacts. To do so, it is proposed that section 6(1)(d) and 6(1)(e) of the Indian Act be repealed.

Individuals currently registered under these categories will have their registration category amended to a 6(1)(a.1) if they were the individual who was enfranchised and (a.3) if they were the child or descendant of the individual who was enfranchised.

The amendment on enfranchisement addresses the concerns brought forward by the Nicholas civil action lawsuit and it will fulfill the recommendations on this issue heard during previous broad engagements. I am proud to acknowledge that Ms. Mary Sandra Lovelace Nicholas is Wolastoqiyik from Tobique (Neqotkuk) First Nation. We are grateful for her courage and trail-blazing as a fellow New Brunswicker.

The second inequity addressed by Bill C-38 concerns the ability for individuals to remove their names from the Indian register. The Indian register is the official record of people registered under the Indian Act in Canada. It is maintained and managed by the Indian registrar, part of Indigenous Services Canada, and exists to determine who is registered under the act and entitled to programs and funding across federal and provincial governments, for example, on-reserve housing, non-insured health benefits, education or tax exemptions.

However, there is a major gap in the authorities of the registrar. While they can add names to the Indian register, they have no formal legal authority to remove the names of registered individuals even when the individuals request deregistration. This is an issue

### *Government Orders*

that first nations have called on Canada to address and today, with this, we are doing just that.

For some, deregistration is a matter of having control over their own identity. For others, it is a barrier to gaining membership to other indigenous groups. This has prevented a number of people from accessing important services and benefits through a group they wish to identify with that they should be entitled to.

To fix this issue, this legislation will provide individuals with the right and ability to have their names removed from the Indian register.

That said, individuals who deregister will still be eligible to re-register and their decision to deregister will have no impact on their or their descendants' entitlement under the Indian Act.

This means that the children of deregistered individuals would still be entitled to status. It can only be done at the request of the individuals and protections will be made to ensure that it is not used with mal-intent.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the implementation of this amendment will be co-developed with indigenous partners, to ensure that the needs of all impacted groups are well served.

Bill C-38 also addresses a sex-based inequity related to band membership provisions. Bill S-3 received royal assent in 2017 and eliminated known sex-based inequities in the registration provisions of the Indian Act.

Because of the limited scope of that mandate, however, we were not able to address these sex-based inequities in band membership. This inequity arises from the fact that, until 1985, first nations women who married first nations men from a different nation were automatically transferred to their husband's band list.

While these women did not lose their entitlement to registration, they did lose connection to and membership in their natal band, along with any associated treaty rights, benefits, settlements and services. These women were automatically disconnected from their home communities even if they may have wanted to restore their social and cultural connection to their natal band.

The bill we are proposing today will amend the Indian Act to allow first nations women to seek re-affiliation and membership with their natal bands. This is significant. Supporting and empowering indigenous women is key to supporting indigenous communities, tradition, language and culture as a whole.

The final amendment in Bill C-38 addresses some outdated and offensive language that still remains in the Indian Act today. The act refers to "mentally incompetent Indian". It is obvious that this term is outdated, offensive and stigmatizing.

### *Government Orders*

Bill C-38 would replace this term with the updated term “dependent person”. This amendment is a logical step forward and would align the Indian Act with developments in capacity and guardianship law over the last 50 years.

In summary, amendments proposed in this legislation would fix four long-standing issues in registration and membership under the Indian Act relating to enfranchisement, individual deregistration, natal band membership and some outdated and offensive language in the Indian Act.

If all enfranchisement issues are addressed, approximately 3,500 people could be newly eligible for registration with these amendments.

These proposed changes represent significant and meaningful action to the affected people and their families. They also demonstrate to indigenous peoples a steady and forward movement by Canada to make amends to the many ways colonial laws and actions intentionally harmed them and their communities.

● (1015)

Even with these proposed changes, there is still much more work to do. Ahead of us, we have the work of undoing the racist policies reflected in the Indian Act, including those related to the second-generation cut-off.

We are engaging with partners so we can continue to explore how to move forward on this deeply personal issue. Indigenous identity must be determined by indigenous individuals, full stop. It is our responsibility to proactively right historic wrongs and make the changes asked of us by first nations and indigenous partners who represent non-status first nations. This bill would right some of those wrongs.

It is in this way, working together in good faith, that we would advance reconciliation and support a renewed relationship between Canada and first nations, one not marred by the paternalism and control of the Indian Act, but one based on rights, respect, co-operation and true partnership. *Woliwon*.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest. The term “enfranchisement” meant the destruction of indigenous identity. To be enfranchised meant someone's inability to leave the reserve, the inability to vote, the inability to marry whom one loved, and even the inability to fight to defend Canada, because the Canadian government, in the First World War, did not want to allow indigenous soldiers because it did not want to recognize them as citizens with rights. We have a long way to go in dealing with the destruction that was done.

I appreciate my hon. colleague for bringing this bill forward, although this bill has been sitting on the back burner for some time now. The issue goes back to the fact that, at the end of the day, those who are trying to re-establish their rights are still going through the department of Indian affairs. That is what it was before and that is what I still call it. It is a department that is underfunded and that does not take this issue seriously. It is bureaucratic red tape.

My hon. colleague says that indigenous identity must be dealt with by indigenous people. When are we actually going to see a bill

that is about nation to nation, that is about empowering the nation to make decisions about environmental protection and growth, and that is about who their band members are? We are still going through the department of Indian affairs. It is still a colonial system and a broken system.

● (1020)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Mr. Speaker, I struggle a lot being in this place and talking about these things because, inevitably, we are in a colonial structure. The Department of Indigenous Services remains a part of that colonial structure.

Being the parliamentary secretary, I have made a commitment to do all I can to improve service delivery, to improve the nation-to-nation relationship, and to ensure that indigenous voices are the ones guiding all that we do. There is extensive consultation happening. There is commitment from all parties, which is really momentous here in Canada. We see that we have consensus about moving forward and what it is going to take to truly achieve that reconciliation. This is a piece in a series of legislation that we are working on to address these wrongs. It is incumbent upon all of us to recognize some of the history that led us here and to peel back those layers. That is really what this process is all about.

I am really proud to be part of Bill C-38. I highlighted some of the specific individuals who would be impacted by this in a positive way. However, once again, I highlight that there is so much more work to do. I am absolutely committed to doing that, and I know that the member is as well.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an important piece of legislation.

I would like to identify some of the time frames we see around indigenous legislation. Let us go back a couple of years to when Bill C-29 was introduced on June 22, the second-last day of the parliamentary session in 2022. Bill C-38, which we are talking about today, was introduced on December 14. We are now 11 months down the road and are finally starting to debate this very important piece of legislation. Bill C-53 was introduced on June 21, 2023, the very last day of the parliamentary session. In our office, we have a running comment about how we address indigenous legislation from the government: It is the “last-minute Liberals”. They are doing it at the last minute all the time.

The parliamentary secretary identified that there are some issues that still need to be dealt with. She identified the second-generation cut. There are several others that are identified in the engagement kit presented by this bill. If it was going to take 11 months to actually get this bill to the floor to debate, can she identify why we did not solve some of the other issues at the same time so we could speed up this process and solve some of the challenges she identified?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to work with him on the indigenous and northern affairs committee. I know he is deeply committed to seeing this work progress.

*Government Orders*

I do not disagree. I would love to see legislation around indigenous rights recognition and frameworks for nation-to-nation building move a lot quicker in this place. I have asked some of those same questions of my colleagues on this side of the House, and really it is about doing it right. Reconciliation is a process. There are deep commitments to consultation that have to happen. It is not just presenting completed bills or completed plans of process; it is also about really working together and co-developing. I get a lot of reassurance from that, that we are doing this the right way.

We cannot rush pieces of legislation that deal with such foundational issues, with respect to identity, for example. The second generation cut-off is brought up a lot. It actually impacts my family in particular, so I am deeply committed to seeing that legislation come forward as well. Again, it has to be done with the right intentions, with the right work and process in place, and consultation is absolutely key, because it has to be an indigenous-led process. However, I am absolutely committed to the urgency and moving it forward as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Fredericton for her speech and her position on Bill C-38.

Obviously we are in favour of the principle of the bill, but I am still uncomfortable when bills on indigenous issues are introduced because I find it will only result in some sort of band-aid solution.

The government is trying to fix something that was done on a fundamentally bad foundation. The title itself, “Indian Act”, is repulsive. I find that the federal government tends to take a paternalistic approach to the first nations and that always makes me uncomfortable.

Should we not, for once and for all, rip up the old Indian Act and truly redo the agreements with the first nations, agreements that are created and developed nation to nation and not with someone who has a colonizer attitude draped in virtue?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Mr. Speaker, that is an important question.

[*English*]

I have written so many papers in university about the need to dismantle the Indian Act. We need to throw it in the trash. We need to just completely move forward from it.

When we have conversations with the 634 indigenous communities across the country, there really is no consensus. I think that is the piece right now. We are trying to do it the right way. There would be a risk of losing services if we were to just scrap it altogether. We want to make sure that no services are lost and that rights are enhanced, so it is, unfortunately, a patchwork process.

I would like to address paternalism, because we are in a highly colonial space right now. However, I also feel that there are so many women's voices leading this discussion. With the co-development, the nation-to-nation relationship and the consultations, we are doing this in a good-faith way and with a better approach than I have seen from the federal government in a long time. I am proud to be a part of that process, because I feel we are changing things. I think we are really making a meaningful difference. I am commit-

ted to seeing that process through to the end, but done the right way.

• (1025)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I regret that I have to put this question to the parliamentary secretary.

We speak of reconciliation, and today we are debating a baby step in Bill C-38 and, to add to the adjectives used by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, the racist law. However, the actual day of statutory recognition of the day for reconciliation, October 2, was the day the Liberal-owned, and now publicly owned, TMX pipeline began constructing open-trench construction through the most sacred area of the Stk'emlupsemc te Secwepemc nation in the area called Pipsell, which TMX had pledged it would not disturb. That was on the day that we observed reconciliation. It made a mockery of reconciliation as it made a mockery of the Liberals' commitment to climate.

I wonder whether the parliamentary secretary discusses that with her caucus.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague knows very well how I feel about the TMX pipeline. I have been very vocal about that with my colleagues and my caucus with respect to exactly how it relates to reconciliation and our commitments on behalf of the environment and the original stewards of this land. I continue to have those difficult conversations and try to move forward with a path that I find would bring in those voices.

It is quite shocking to think that it was on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, so I thank the member for bringing that to the attention of the House. I look forward to having further conversations with her on how I can best continue these difficult conversations within my own caucus. Again, I am deeply committed to the environment and to reconciliation. They absolutely go hand in hand.

**Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to build on some of the questions asked earlier. I wonder whether the hon. parliamentary secretary could give us more information on how this would facilitate the phase-out of the Indian Act.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Mr. Speaker, it is a piece of legislation that would come in a series of other approaches in addressing the inequities in the Indian Act.

The enfranchisement piece is really key. Other items include getting rid of some of the inflammatory language and restoring some of the rights that should be there. Again, it is a process, and we are committed to doing the work that needs to be done to undo the wrongs. This is an important step forward.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, is an honour to rise in my place today to speak to this very important piece of legislation.

*Government Orders*

Before I get into the substance of my remarks, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to split my time with the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to split his time?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for that support. I think they will find that my friend from northern Saskatchewan has some very insightful and important remarks to share. Despite his allegiance to the Roughriders football team, he is quite a stand-up individual, so I look forward to hearing what he has to say.

Of course, this is a very important piece of legislation, as I mentioned. It is an honour for me to rise today to speak to it, representing the riding of Kenora in northwestern Ontario, which covers three treaty territories, treaties 3, 5 and 9, as well as the Métis homeland, and it includes 42 first nations.

As has been mentioned in the previous remarks and in questions and comments, this legislation would truly help set out a series of fixes. However, it is much more than a simple patchwork and just those fixes. To me, it is about self-determination, and that is obviously a very important aspect of what we are talking about when it comes to reconciliation. It is giving more control and autonomy to first nations and first nations individuals themselves.

Before I get back to the substance of this bill, I want to highlight a key proposal that our Conservative leader has been championing when it comes to self-determination: a first nations resource charge that would, in essence, allow first nations to directly collect revenues from projects on their lands rather than seeing those revenues go to Ottawa and filter back down through a bloated bureaucracy. It is a simple, common-sense approach to ensure that first nations have greater control over projects on their land and a greater portion of the direct revenues. This is one way we will support self-determination. Our consultations on this are ongoing, and I look forward to being able to say more about it in the near future.

I share that because, of course, it is one aspect of self-determination in this bill also, as the bill highlights and addresses four key issues in the Indian Act.

This bill would ensure that individuals with a family history of enfranchisement, which is having to give up Indian status, would be entitled to registration under the act. They could then pass on that entitlement in the same way as others.

Individuals would be allowed to deregister from the Indian register if they chose to do so via an application for removal, without the repercussions of enfranchisement.

As well, an addition would be made to section 11 of the act that would allow married women to return to their natal band if they obtained status and were registered to their spouse's band before April 1985.

The last of the four key points that the bill addresses is to change a lot of outdated and discriminatory language. We have heard some of that language here today. I do not wish to repeat it, but it is

something that we are all happy to see being addressed and being removed from the legislation.

This is, of course, part of a series of changes in recent history. We can go back to 1985, which is relatively recent. That was when the process started to remove some of the gender-based discrimination, particularly pertaining to status women who married a non-status men and were involuntarily enfranchised. That is what got the ball rolling in this process. We have heard comments in the chamber about the patchwork and the fact that we have not been able to move forward on addressing all these issues as quickly as we would like to, and I share those concerns.

Although this bill is certainly a great help, and we are happy to see it move forward, as the member for Fredericton mentioned, it was tabled in December 2022. On this side of the House, we certainly would have liked to see this move forward much more quickly. It has been almost a year. The bill also has many gaps in it, with more things that will have to be addressed at future dates.

● (1030)

Considering that the government sat on the bill for close to a year, I think that would have been a great time to work on some of those other aspects concurrently. We could be much further along at this point.

It is a concerning trend. We have heard from the governing Liberal Party itself that its members are also concerned about this trend of the government not prioritizing indigenous-led pieces of legislation pertaining to indigenous peoples, and I just want to urge the government to make it a priority instead of table-dropping at the last moment.

The Prime Minister has said that there is no relationship more important to his government than that with indigenous peoples, but I think the actions speak louder than words. The fact that it has taken so long to make such relatively simple and straightforward changes is definitely a cause for concern, so I would like to urge my colleagues on the other side to move these pieces of legislation forward much more quickly.

Further to the fact that it has been so long, we have seen the need for unanimous consent motions in order to get things through at the last second, and we have been trying to work in good faith to get as many of these things through as quickly as possible. However, we recognize a need for debate and a need for proper scrutiny and consultation on a number of these pieces of legislation. With the rushed process we have from the government, I do not feel we have that time for the proper consultation.

That is not the only concern. It is not just from the legislative point of view that the government seems to be too slow to react. We see issues on things such as status card processing times. It is taking far too long for many people to be able to actually receive their card and have access to the rights they are entitled to, so again I am happy to see this moving forward. The bill would impact 3,500 individuals, and I hope that all those individuals are able to access their status cards and their rights as quickly as possible.



*Government Orders*

Again, I would like to urge the government to put the resources that are necessary toward that, cut through the bureaucracy and ensure there are ways we can get that done more quickly.

I was thankful my colleagues chose for me to split my time, but now with great respect to my colleague, I wish I had a bit more, because there is so much to get into when it comes to the piece of legislation before us. However, I think it is important to remember the discriminatory and racist history behind this and the reasons it is so important we move forward on this quickly.

Enfranchisement was truly not voluntary. Even in the cases where it was “voluntary”, it was done so that people could avoid having to send their kids to residential schools, so they were able to participate more fully in Canadian society, obtain the right to vote and obtain land and financial compensation. It was a number of things. This is a process that has been forced on indigenous peoples throughout our history, and I am pleased to see the bill moving forward. We need to move it forward much more quickly on the government's side.

Our party here in the official opposition stands ready to work and ready to get the bill to committee. If there are any changes that need to be made, we will ensure we have those fixes. We will hear from grassroots, first nations and indigenous peoples across the country and get it to the finish line.

I want to urge my colleagues on the other side to work with us, so we can get it done.

• (1035)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his commitment. I had the pleasure of working with him on the indigenous and northern affairs committee, I know his heart is in the right place and he wants to see these issues dedicated the urgency that they deserve.

I would also like to see his commitment to passing the bill quickly, and I hope he can have that conversation with his colleagues. Would he agree that, despite some of the lengthy timelines or challenges we faced, this government has done more for indigenous reconciliation than any other in our history? I would like to hear him comment on that.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, I truly would not agree with that member's framing of this. As I mentioned, if we are talking specifically about these issues, it was in 1985 that the fixing of this patchwork started, and we started to see a series of that. That was certainly not under the current Liberal government. I think with the current government, we have definitely seen a lot of spending and announcements. Unfortunately, we have seen numbers that show that, despite the increase in spending, the department results have achieved only 26% of their goals.

That is just one example of how I think the rhetoric has been very strong and positive from the government, but it has not filtered down to actually delivering the real results that are needed for indigenous peoples across the country.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see you sitting in the House on a Friday.

I thank my hon. colleague for his very interesting speech.

One thing about this bill that really stood out for me is the part that replaces the term “mentally incompetent Indian” with the term “dependent person”. Does the member agree with me that, in this example, the language used by the government is demeaning? Does he agree that it is time to stop discriminating against people with disabilities and be much more inclusive?

[*English*]

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree. It is very discriminatory.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, part of the legislation is a clause that justifies past discrimination and violations of human rights. It would allow for the government to have discriminated without impunity and underscores the sense of colonial entitlement.

Does the member agree that the provisions of this legislation would prohibit first nations women from seeking compensation for historical harms? Is it justified that the government denied first nations women access to health care, education and safe housing?

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head, I am not sure of the specific clause that the member is referring to. However, to answer her question, I certainly agree with her that it is discriminatory for the government to deny first nations women rights to health care and the rights that they need. I certainly share her concern, and I would be happy to speak with her when we have more time to get into detail about it.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, given that my hon. friend's speech this morning is the first time a Conservative Party member of Parliament has spoken to the issue, it seems that there is an intention to vote for the bill at second reading and fix flaws later at committee. Is that something we can count on?

It is a shame to see debate so often where it looks as though we might all be voting for something to get it to committee and only later discover that there is going to be a longer debate; I do not want to use the word “obstruction”. Does the hon. member know if his caucus is prepared to vote yes for the bill?

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we are looking forward to moving forward on the bill. As I mentioned, we want to get the bill to committee, but we also want to ensure that we are able to have the voices of members raising thoughts on it. We hope that we can move forward on it as quickly as possible. I encourage the government to continue to progress this legislation through the House.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as has been part of the interaction of the members so far today, people tried to take credit for whatever and said that things were accomplished under certain governments. However, with the indigenous stakeholders that I talked to, they very clearly indicated to me that there has been more achieved for indigenous people in our country under Conservative governments than any other government in history. Does the member think it is time for a Conservative government to step up and effect the change that we need to improve the lives of indigenous people across the country?

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree. It is time for a Conservative government that will bring it home for all Canadians, including indigenous peoples across this country.

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand up to speak on behalf of the people who I serve, but one of the things that we do not do in this place is recognize the people who serve us behind the scenes. I want to take a minute today to acknowledge my team, who work tirelessly, without recognition often, to serve not only the people in the House, members of Parliament like myself, but also the people who we represent, in my case specifically those from northern Saskatchewan. I want to take a minute to recognize Linnæ and Emalie, who work with me here in Ottawa, and Dion, Hunter and Cindy, who are back in the riding. I want to make sure they know that they are appreciated for the work they do in serving the people that we get to serve.

With those comments out of the way, let us talk about Bill C-38 for a few minutes. I appreciate the opportunity that my colleague has presented to me to speak on this very important bill.

Bill C-38 is an act that amends the Indian Act to address four separate matters, which we have already heard about from the members who spoke already, but I am going to hit on these just for a few minutes.

First, it addresses the gendered inequity issues that were a result of enfranchisement. I am going to speak a little bit more about that in a few minutes. We have already heard as well that it addresses the issue of natal band reaffiliation. If passed, this legislation would allow women to affiliate with their natal band, or the band they came from before having been forced to change to their husband's band if they were married before 1985.

We have heard about the opportunity through application to deregister from the Indian registry. There is a number of reasons why people might want to do that. I am not going to get into the details of that. Finally, we have heard the conversation already today around replacing offensive and outdated language so that no individual under the act is referred to using any kind of discriminatory or offensive language. That, I think we would say, is a very good thing.

As has been mentioned as well, Bill C-38 is the continuation of a series of fixes, fixes that began in 1985 under then prime minister Brian Mulroney, some fixes that carried on in 2011 under then Prime Minister Harper, and finally, Bill S-3, which took from 2017 to 2019 through the Senate bill to make some progress on this.

Each of these pieces of legislation addressed various matters of gender-based discrimination in the act. While it is important to note that we support amendments to ensure that no federal legislation, including the Indian Act, has any discriminatory components to it, we must recognize that these amendments are just that, changes to existing legislation that supports the maintenance of the status quo, a status quo that perpetuates control over first nations people across our country. We cannot simply reverse the damage that these outdated laws have had, but what we can do is to move forward in support of first nations people on their journey to self-determination. Conservatives seek to ensure that we are making positive strides towards truth and reconciliation, and we know how important it is to hold open and honest discussions in doing so.

Since I only have 10 minutes here, I want to spend some time talking about enfranchisement. We have done a bit of that already, but I want to flesh it out a little bit as well.

For those who may not be familiar with the term, enfranchisement was a policy prior to 1985 that terminated an individual's right to be considered as a first nations person or have status under the Indian Act. As the parliamentary secretary, my colleague from Kenora, already identified, this could be done voluntarily or it could be done involuntarily. When we think of involuntary registration, as mentioned, it could be because they received a university degree, joined the medical or legal professions, married a non-Indian man or became a priest or a minister.

We have heard as well that there were a number of reasons for voluntary enfranchisement, although we use the term "voluntary" in this case when it does not seem like it was really of their own free will. Rather, other factors forced it upon them. Some, as already identified, gave up their status for the sole purpose of preventing their children from having to attend residential schools. World War II veterans voluntarily enfranchised to obtain the same essential benefits that other non-status veterans were provided. Some did so just to have the right to vote.

If we look at those examples of voluntary enfranchisement, it does not really seem like it was a matter of personal choice but maybe more a sacrifice of rights, or something that they were forced into, to protect members of their family or others.

• (1045)

Bill C-38 seeks to address some remaining gender-based inequities that were a result of this unequal reinstatement of status in 1985. In short, women who were enfranchised and later reinstated were placed in a different category than men in the same circumstances. Because of this, first nations women could not pass down status or rights to the same number of generations as first nations men could. This is something that this bill addresses. It has a ripple effect because it affects the descendants of these people as well.

I would like to encourage members of the House to talk to people and hear their stories. We have heard a couple already today, but they should talk to the people who have been affected by enfranchisement. I have heard many of these, and I am going to quickly share one story.

*Government Orders*

My team and I met with a Professor Karl Hele, a member of Garden River First Nation and a professor in Canadian indigenous studies. His personal experience with enfranchisement is not unfamiliar to many others. His mother and many other women in their community were targeted and coerced by an Indian agent to voluntarily enfranchise. This resulted in an unfair exclusion of their rights and those of her descendants.

To access his child's rights, Professor Hele had no other choice but to pursue legal action, which came at a hefty cost, both in time and resources, which is an option that many people do not have. This case highlights how the Indian Act gatekeepers have historically been, and continue to be, much of the problem.

It is little wonder that first nations people in Canada feel there is an Ottawa-led system, which feels broken. We need to fix it. I believe we need to acknowledge, despite amending the act, there still needs to be a change in how first nations issues are approached. This means acknowledging the failure in the cumbersome bureaucracy that is meant to support first nations, but instead often creates significant barriers.

The population of my riding is over 70% indigenous, and my team deals with the endless frustrations of individuals trying to either access their right to status, respond to other requests of maybe a financial nature or even access appropriate health services. Our office has been dealing with one individual who has been denied status time and time again. However, the bigger issue is not the denial of status, but that this individual has been given a variety of excuses for the denial, which contrast with their family story, and where other members of the family have been granted status under the same circumstances.

It seems as though this case has been passed around the department without a care or concern for the provision of an honest answer. That is unacceptable. In one of the calls with my office, this gentleman finally expressed his frustration and disappointment, and that he is going to give up because he believes he is going to die before this ever gets resolved. That is a very sad story.

What this story tells us is that we cannot accept simple amendments to the Indian Act as a means to an end. We can reshape the tool as many times as we like, but if we do not fix the mechanism, there will never be a fix for the problem.

Our Conservative team is determined to address this problem. In fact, we are proposing steps to do that. My friend from Kenora has already addressed one of those, in relation to our leader proposing the first nations resource charge and our plan for that.

The goal of the federal government should be to work with indigenous leadership to put the control of their communities back into their hands. While the hope for Bill C-38 is to address this to some degree and to respond to a constitutional challenge on enfranchisement, it is merely a small step in the long journey to self-determination.

We have a lot of work to do, and as Canada moves forward on eliminating the Indian Act, the "Ottawa knows best" mentality has got to go.

It is imperative that we recognize the rights and freedoms of first nations people across our country. They know what is good for them. They know what needs to be done. They have already taken many of the steps necessary by investing in projects and businesses, and creating prosperity and employment. They are focused on increasing capacity, and they are generating opportunities that will pay dividends for generations to come.

It is important that the government no longer stands in their way, and that we ensure that first nations are the decision-makers controlling their own destiny. We recognize that this is the only way forward, and although it will have its challenges, Conservatives are not afraid of a challenge.

In closing, let me simply say, under the leadership of a Conservative government, I would be very hopeful for the future of our first nations people across this country. I am personally very eager to see meaningful change.

● (1050)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the House might not be aware, but in my riding we had an Iroquois first nation, and the entire nation enfranchised in 1958. I am talking, of course, about the Michel band.

Under Bill C-31, back in the 1980s, 700 members of the Michel band, as individuals, were allowed to gain back their Indian status. However, as of today, this band is still not fully recognized and are not able to make any claims. I do not see anything in this legislation that addresses that injustice, as they were enfranchised under very suspicious circumstances.

Could my hon. colleague tell me what this legislation could do to help a band such as the Michel band, which, as far as I am aware, is the only entire first nation band that was ever enfranchised in Canada, to get their recognition back?

● (1055)

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Mr. Speaker, I understand he is saying that this is the only example of this happening to an entire band, but there are many, many examples of communities or very large groups of people being enfranchised involuntarily or "voluntarily", or being coerced into it by very suspicious circumstances.

This legislation should address some of those situations by creating an equal opportunity for people to be re-registered to gain their status back and create an equalization between the descendants of what might be male lineage compared to female lineage to ensure the descendants of those two lines of descendants is brought to a place where they are treated equally.

We will look at this closer in committee to ensure those kinds of questions are answered and solutions are proposed.

*Statements by Members*

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, and he spoke about this, first nations, Métis and Inuit continually have to go through the court system to have their rights recognized, including with this bill. It is tragic that people would need to go through the court system to have their basic rights met.

It sounds like the member agrees it is unfair for indigenous people to need to go through this court system to have their rights recognized. I am wondering what the member would suggest we change about Canada's political and legal system so indigenous people no longer need to do this.

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Mr. Speaker, from a personal perspective, and on behalf of Conservatives, one of the things we would say in response is that we need to eliminate the "Ottawa knows best" approach and the control imposed over people across the country by this outdated and archaic Indian Act, but we need to do this much quicker.

We need to get to a place where first nation, Inuit and Métis people across the country all have the ability and the right to determine their own future, to true self-determination. That is the only path where we are going to get past all of the litigation, all of the lawsuits and all of the court cases and where we actually empower indigenous people across the country to control and dictate their own futures and their own destinies.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the foundation of a solid house cannot be built on sand. Unfortunately, this bill is yet another pillar or beam in a house that the government is trying to build on a very shaky foundation, namely the Indian Act.

After hearing my colleague's speech, I would like to ask him a question that reflects the Bloc Québécois's position. Why not simply abolish the Indian Act itself, which is so problematic?

[English]

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Mr. Speaker, very simply, I agree.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. Saying that the Conservatives are going to support indigenous self-determination is something I like, but I will give an example. Timiskaming First Nation is set-up as 110,000 acres between the Blanche River in Ontario and the Des Quinze river in Quebec. It was then arbitrarily cut apart with illegal land surrender after illegal land surrender until it was down to about 4,500 acres in between the municipalities.

The traditional land rights in Ontario continue to be ignored, so how would the Conservatives say to the people of Timiskaming First Nation that they would make sure their land rights, amidst an endless sea of stolen land, would be respected for the community's development?

• (1100)

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Mr. Speaker, I would simply say we need to get to a place where it is not taking 25, 30 or 40 years to solve some of the claims issues in our country. We need to speed up the process so we can settle these things and get out of the endless litigation.

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[English]

**SMALL BUSINESS WEEK**

**Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to rise in the House and recognize small businesses across Canada during Small Business Week.

Small businesses continue to be the backbone of our economy and, in turn, the backbone of our communities. From coast to coast to coast, hard-working entrepreneurs provide jobs to our communities and innovation to our economy, incubating the next generation of inspiration.

Back in 1922, my great-grandparents started a mom-and-pop grocery store in my home riding of Niagara Centre. Four generations later, I had the pleasure of operating that same business, which has since evolved into a ship chandler wholesaler.

I know first-hand the daily struggles and complexities that our small business owners face, and our government is focused on enabling them to thrive, because when our small businesses thrive, our communities thrive. It is all about building communities.

This week, let us celebrate small businesses across this country and the communities they continue to strengthen. Happy Small Business Week.

\* \* \*

**BLOOD DONATION RECORD HOLDER**

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the gift of life is so precious. The Canadian Blood Services motto is "it's in you to give", and there is no one who has lived that mantra more than Penhold's Josephine Michaluk, who was just recognized by Guinness World Records as the female with the most whole blood donated. Josephine earned the record after donating her 203rd unit of blood in December of last year.

Josephine's epic journey started back in 1965 while accompanying her sister, who was on her way to donate. The experience left a great impression on Josephine, and with her O+ blood type, she realized just how important her highly compatible blood type was to the people in her community. Penhold's town council acknowledged her at its October 11 meeting "for reaching this milestone and for her...selfless act to help others."

Her 208th donation will be on November 24. I congratulate Josephine.

### MESSAGE OF PEACE

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to stand in this House and to use my voice to shine a light or reflect on a moment in time on behalf of my constituents.

I know that over the last weeks, our hearts and souls have been mourning as we are witnessing violence and endless suffering generated by war. I send my love and support to the Muslim and Jewish communities here and abroad that are directly impacted by the events that are unfolding.

Words might appear insignificant at a time when we are collectively facing horror. Words can hurt, but they can also heal. They can change how we perceive the words. We need to see the humanity in one another and not lose sight of everything we have in common. We need to reflect on how we can work with and listen to each other.

Our own country is on a path of reconciliation. Getting there was not easy and is still a constant reaffirmation of our commitment to a better future for all. That is the message I humbly share today. Peace cannot be achieved through violence; it can only be obtained through understanding.

I pray for the world. I pray for peace.

\* \* \*

### CELEBRATION OF INDIGENOUS ARTWORK

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation this year, I was honoured to join a celebration in Nuu-Chah-Nulth territory of the art created by attendees of the former Alberni Indian Residential School in the late 1950s and 1960s. This artwork was inspired by volunteer artist Robert Aller, who encouraged young artists to paint their ideas, their knowledge and their truths.

After Robert passed away in 2008, 36 paintings were donated to the University of Victoria and then repatriated to the survivors who created them or to their families in 2013, with the assistance of Professor Andrea Walsh in partnership with one of the artists, Wally Samuel from Ahousaht. Since then, they have been widely exhibited to educate Canadians and the world about the legacy of residential schools. They have reached thousands of learners through gallery exhibitions, digital platforms and public presentations.

Canadians owe these artists and their families an enormous debt of gratitude for their generosity of spirit in sharing these wonderful paintings as we seek to reconcile historical wrongs with indigenous people.

*Klecko, klecko* to all.

\* \* \*

● (1105)

[Translation]

### CLUB QUAD PETITE-NATION

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and celebrate Sylvie Phaland-Gosselin, the first woman president of the Club Quad Petite-Nation and an Outaouais area trailblazer. Her years as a volun-

### Statements by Members

teer, a trail patroller and keeper of a portion of the Duhamel area are indisputable proof of her dedication.

I would also like to acknowledge former club president Alain Lamarche for encouraging women to take on senior management positions within the club. Gender diversity in sports clubs enriches our communities with a broad range of experience and ideas. Despite some progress, however, the road to gender equality remains long.

That is why I am asking all parliamentarians to continue supporting our government's efforts to improve equal opportunity in Canada. We have to keep taking concrete action that paves the way for women like Sylvie Phaland-Gosselin to enter leadership positions at all levels.

In closing, I congratulate Club Quad Petite-Nation.

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### 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF BUSINESS IN RIVIÈRE-DU-LOUP

**Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with immense pride that I rise to mark an exceptional occasion: the 100th anniversary of Premier Tech, based in Rivière-du-Loup. Premier Tech has forged a reputation for excellence with 100 years of history, determination and daring.

The story began when the Bélanger family purchased a small business. It moved into horticulture with sphagnum peat moss and is now known for automation and waste water treatment.

Premier Tech employs 5,200 people in 28 countries, has 48 plants and generates sales of over \$1 billion. The company is deeply committed to its home community, but it is also involved internationally in the world of cycling. The Israel-Premier Tech team has achieved major successes, including at the Tour de France with Canadian cyclists.

I would like to commend my friends Bernard Bélanger and his son Jean, who, through their hard work and vision, have shaped our community and made a positive impact on a global scale.

I wish Premier Tech a bright and prosperous future, and happy hundredth anniversary to the company and its teams.

*Statements by Members**[English]***COMMUNITY IMAM AWARD RECIPIENT**

**Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Canadian Council of Imams hosted its annual gala dinner. Founded in 1990, the council has been a unifying forum for Canadian imams and chaplains. At this fifth annual gala dinner, a member of my constituency, Chaplain Imam Imran Ally, received the well-deserved Community Imam Award in recognition of his continuing service to society.

Imran's dedication is truly inspiring, and the recognition by his peers speaks volumes to the impact he has had on our community. Through his tireless efforts, he has not only served the Muslim community, but also made significant contributions to society. We are fortunate to have individuals like Imran among us, individuals who work tirelessly to bridge divides, to bring communities together and to spread the message of love, compassion and unity.

My sincere congratulations to Imran. May peace and unity continue to guide our path forward.

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**WIND ENERGY**

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a new report from the Public Policy Forum concludes that Atlantic Canada's offshore wind potential will make the region an energy powerhouse going forward. Installing turbines around the Sable Island Bank could produce enough energy supply for 6.5 million average Canadian homes, which is almost twice as much as what is being used by Atlantic Canada today.

This boom would mean thousands of jobs and billions of dollars for Atlantic Canada. However, on Tuesday, the Conservatives, including several MPs from Atlantic Canada, voted against Bill C-49, a bill that would allow for the development of the offshore wind industry in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

On this side of the House, people can count on our government to help Atlantic Canadians today and every day.

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**CARBON TAX**

**Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP-Liberal government knew carbon tax 2 would increase the cost of energy and disproportionately impact low- and middle-income Canadians, yet it is imposing the tax anyway. Carbon taxes 1 and 2 will add 61¢ per litre to the price of fuel, and because of the government's punishing fuel taxes, we are already seeing fuel prices in B.C. at over two dollars per litre.

After eight long years of inflationary spending and failing policies, even Liberal MPs are speaking out against the carbon tax. Those Liberal MPs are realizing that when we tax Brad, the farmer who grows the food, tax Rob, who transports the food, and tax Joanne, who has to drive to buy the food, the food becomes too expensive. It is no wonder 60% more Canadians per month are expected to use food banks in 2023.

After eight years, it is even more clear that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

\* \* \*

● (1110)

**PUBLIC TRANSIT**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a special acknowledgement and shout-out to Winnipeg transit drivers for both educating me and being there in a very real and tangible way to ensure there are all forms of diversity in transportation.

Over the summer, the Government of Canada tabled a report about public transit in general in Canada. No government in the history of Canada has committed more public dollars to ensure that we have a solid public transit system from coast to coast to coast. It is a commitment that is genuine. It is there to help build communities and connect people in every way.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the current NDP-Liberal government, where are we at? Well, more Canadians are frozen out of the housing market, rents are doubling, inflationary deficits are driving up mortgage payments and our federal government is saying, "Our inflation is not all that bad; look at other countries."

That is exactly what an enterprising Ontario couple did. They sold their modest 2,400-square-foot suburban home in Fergus and bought a 6,300-square-foot chateau in the South of France on 37 acres. It was an even trade. However, with the NDP-Liberal made-in-Canada inflation, the couple said that if they sold the chateau now, they probably could not move back to Fergus.

More and more Canadians are realizing that this tax-and-spend Liberal Prime Minister is just not worth the cost, at least for those ordinary Canadians who were hoping one day to have their own modest home right here at home in Canada.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the current Liberal-NDP government, life is unaffordable. Families in northern Saskatchewan and across Canada are faced every day with austerity measures. There is less food, fewer activities for their kids, fewer trips to see grandma and grandpa and less money for rent or a mortgage at the end of every month. However, as families are forced to make cuts, the Liberal-NDP government spends.

There is something morally wrong when a government grows bigger and continuously throws money around while taxpayers themselves are forced into cutting for their own families. This is backwards. The solution is to have less for the government and more in the pockets of families: more healthy food, more activities for their kids and more trips and time to spend with family.

The Liberal-NDP government's inflationary deficits are driving up the cost of everything. Canadians are tired of it, and they want hope. After eight long years, the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost.

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[Translation]

#### HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS NIGHT

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this evening, thousands of people in more than 40 cities across Quebec will mark Homelessness Awareness Night, an event whose mission is to raise awareness of poverty and homelessness in Quebec.

This year marks the 25th edition of Homelessness Awareness Night in Longueuil. Many activities have been planned to help people gain a better understanding of the difficult conditions that homeless people experience and to learn more about homelessness organizations.

The public is therefore invited to go to St. Mark Park this evening to visit the community village, listen to the stories of people who have experienced homelessness and participate in the solidarity walk.

I commend Table Itinérance Rive-Sud and all members of the organizing committee for their commitment to giving a voice to the homeless and shining a light on the realities of homelessness.

\* \* \*

● (1115)

[English]

#### VIOLENCE AROUND THE WORLD

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I normally rise in this chamber with gratitude and vigour. However, today, the events of the last two weeks, with the attacks by Hamas and response by Israel, have me at a loss.

I represent a riding with a Jewish population that has contributed so much, including fighting in both world wars. From my work, I know the constant battle against anti-Semitism that we face and the symbols of hate that have been painted on the sidewalks, streets and even my own lawn signs.

I am blessed in the Windsor-Detroit area with having a Middle Eastern population. I have stood in solidarity with them from the original blame for the Oklahoma City bombing to 9/11 blame and the Islamophobia that still persists. I am proud to be part of a movement to always push back and speak the truth against that type of rhetoric.

My statement today to try to help end the violence in Gaza, Israel and Lebanon was crafted many times. However, despite trying, it

#### Statements by Members

never left me feeling anything but ill. Therefore, here I am; my only message is to find enough forgiveness and respect in humanity to end all violence. I appreciate that it is a naive message, but after 21-plus years in Parliament, I need to speak the truth: I do not have the answers, but I love my constituents of all races, ethnicities and religions. I am sorry that I do not have the solutions. I know that it is never too late to save someone who is alive. Everyone can join me, or let me join them, in solidarity for forgiveness of our failures to all the victims.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS NIGHT

**Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today was the 34th Nuit des sans-abri, a homelessness awareness event that seeks to raise awareness about homelessness, poverty and social alienation. This year's theme is "no roof, no choice". More than 60 municipalities across Quebec will host this event.

Tent parks in the four corners of Quebec; single mothers who sleep in their car with their children; seniors who, after living in a home and working their entire lives, end up on the street; young, pregnant women with no roof over their heads, including one who will end up giving birth in the streets, in the middle of downtown Gatineau: This happens in our communities, and it is in our communities that organizations have to help battered women who stay in relationships that are toxic to themselves and their children because they cannot find a place to live. It is in our communities that families have to cut back on how much food they buy and seniors have to limit their medication budget to keep a roof over their heads.

Quebec is on the brink of a major humanitarian crisis. The government has already recognized housing as a right. Now it has to ensure that this right becomes a reality for everyone.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### HATE CRIMES

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, the Toronto police chief has reported a 132% increase in hate crimes. We have seen horrific stories of a sign written in spray paint in Centennial Park that says "Attack the Jew" or a vandalized message in London that says "Kill all Muslims". This is absolutely unacceptable.

We can all be revolted by the horrors of Hamas, but we should never blame our fellow citizens in Canada who are Muslim. They did not commit those atrocities.

We can debate the decisions of the Israeli government, but we have no right to insult our Jewish neighbours or attack their local synagogue.

This must be a country based on freedom, where it does not matter if one's name is Mohammed or Martin, Chang or Charles, Singh, Smith or Steinberg. We are all Canadians. We are all patriots. Let us embrace each other with love.

*Oral Questions***ELECTRIC VEHICLE BATTERY PLANT**

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today excited to congratulate Umicore Rechargeable Battery Materials Canada. This past Monday marked its official groundbreaking for the manufacturing plant it is building in Loyalist township, located just outside my riding.

The plant will manufacture materials that are required for the production of electric vehicle batteries. In full swing, its operation has the capacity to produce enough battery materials to support the production of over 800,000 electric vehicles each year. What is more, it is designed to be nearly carbon-neutral from the start of production.

Of course, this is excellent news for our region in terms of economic development and job creation. It is also great news for Ontario and Canada, as it helps strengthen our position as a global leader in the electric vehicle and battery supply chain.

I am proud that the federal government has committed up to \$551 million, through the strategic investment fund, to support this project.

I send congratulations and best wishes to Umicore, as well as thanks for choosing eastern Ontario.

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

• (1120)

[*English*]

**FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the lack of competition.

Yesterday, the Competition Bureau reported that, now, the lack of competition is worse than it was at any time in 20 years, leading to higher prices for consumers and higher profits for corporate oligarchs. Now the Liberal government is considering allowing Canada's biggest bank to gobble up the seventh-biggest bank, to eliminate competition and force up mortgage rates on Canadians who already cannot afford to pay their bills.

Will the government side with consumers and homebuyers, instead of corporate oligarchs and big banks, and block this merger?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the Conservative leader recycles "common sense" clichés from decades ago as if he were an automaton from the Mike Harris era, our government has taken decisive action to help Canadians with the price of groceries by supporting more competition in the marketplace and by increasing housing supply, waiving GST on new rental construction. These are two significant measures the members opposite can support right now by supporting the government's bill on affordability, but they have stated that they will not do so.

Can someone from the opposition benches please explain to us all how voting against measures that are going to substantially help middle-class families is common sense?

**FINANCE**

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will tell us what is not common sense: spending \$8 million on a barn. We just found out that the Prime Minister's Capital Commission spent \$8 million to replace a barn at Rideau Hall.

We have long said that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost after eight long years.

While Canadians cannot afford a home, how is it that the Prime Minister is spending \$8 million on a barn? By the way, was it made of gold?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, those are quite the words from the Leader of the Opposition. I remind him that, when he was responsible for housing during the Harper years, there was \$300 million spent for housing, with fewer than 100 homes built. We can do the math: That is \$3 million a home. That is the record of so-called fiscal responsibility on the other side.

On this side, we are getting homes built. Just this morning, the Prime Minister announced over \$100 million for the City of Brampton, which is going to lead to 24,000 homes being built in the coming years. We are going to continue to work with municipalities through partnership.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Prime Minister, he is not worth the cost. The wasteful spending has spiralled out of control. Members will recall the \$116 million spent on consultants at McKinsey, the \$54 million on ArriveCAN and the \$6,000 per night for a hotel room. Today we learned that the government wasted \$8 million on a barn.

How can the government spend \$8 million on a barn on the Governor General's property when food banks are in such desperate need? Is spending \$8 million on a barn on the grounds of the Governor General's residence really the Liberals' priority?

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, obviously, we have been there for Canadians. We have invested money to support them. The Conservatives have voted against our measures several times.

When the Conservatives were in power, seven consecutive budgets produced deficits. We have the lowest deficit in the G7 and we will continue to be fiscally responsible.



## HOUSING

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that her government is fiscally responsible.

After eight years of Liberal inflationary spending, Quebec's inflation is the worst in Canada. Young people are forced to live with their parents permanently because everything is too expensive. Interest rates are so high that the Liberals have robbed young people of their home ownership dreams. Over the past two years, mortgage interest has shot up by 41%. After eight years under the Liberals, rent costs have doubled.

When will the Liberals stop mortgaging the future of young people and let them achieve their dreams of home ownership?

• (1125)

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we currently have a bill before the House that will speed up housing construction across Canada.

In my Montreal riding, co-operatives are being built for families, seniors and young people. The Conservatives are unwilling to invest in building more housing to lower costs for Canadians. That makes no sense.

If they really care about the interests of Canadians, why are they voting against the interests of Canadians?

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## CARBON PRICING

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if they really wanted to pass Bill C-56, they would put it on the agenda. Since October 5, the Liberals have not called Bill C-56 for debate in the House. They should make a decision and stick with it. One would think they would have a better sense of what they want.

Meanwhile, the middle class knows what is coming. They are lining up at food banks. This morning, the newspapers were saying that food banks are desperate. In the last three years, food prices have risen by 23%.

Meanwhile, the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois want to drastically increase carbon taxes. Voting for the Bloc Québécois is costly now, and it is going to get even more costly.

Will the Liberals abandon their plan to raise carbon taxes?

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I recognize that rising costs hurt Canadians, and that is why we look across the way. We would like to see the Conservative Party stop playing games. This destructive force is constantly playing them inside the House, with the holding up of legislation. Whether it is by providing rebates of one form or another, building the Atlantic accord for Atlantic Canada or talking about green jobs for the future, we are trying to address the needs of Canadians, and the Conservative Party continues to play games inside the chamber. Shame on them.

## Oral Questions

[Translation]

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, there is every indication that humanitarian aid could finally reach Gaza today, but let us not kid ourselves. We already know that that aid will be insufficient. We already know that only 20 trucks will be allowed to pass when the UN is saying that a minimum of 100 trucks is required every day.

As we speak, tons of humanitarian aid is sitting on the tarmac of an Egyptian airport because we are unable to send it where it needs to go. Without diplomatic pressure, that aid will still be sitting there tomorrow.

Has the Prime Minister exerted any pressure in the past 24 hours to help get this aid where it needs to go?

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we commend the decision made by Israel and Egypt to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza through the Rafah crossing. This is an important step in making sure that Palestinian civilians in Gaza get humanitarian aid, but there is still a lot of work to be done. Rapid and unimpeded access to aid is essential to meet the urgent needs of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. International law must always be followed.

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we all hope that there is a light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to this terrible war, but we can see that dark times lie ahead.

Many countries, including Canada, are calling on their citizens to flee Lebanon, and that speaks volumes. Everyone expects the conflict in Gaza to grow. By all indications, the humanitarian crisis will get worse while the humanitarian aid is already insufficient. Canada cannot accept the status quo. It must use all of its political weight.

What will the government do in the immediate term to ensure that the humanitarian aid is released?

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, alleviating human suffering is our top priority. We were the first western country to provide \$10 million in humanitarian aid. We are actively using every diplomatic avenue. There is now constant communication with partners and organizations in the region.

Our immediate objective is to open humanitarian corridors to provide safety and refuge to those fleeing the war and to allow aid to enter.

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

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the auditor issued a damning report about processing delays in immigration. The most vulnerable are made to wait the longest due to Liberal mismanagement. Offices in sub-Saharan Africa are chronically underfunded, and they have the highest volume. Applications are untouched for up to 20 months. The average wait time for refugees is now three years. People who are being persecuted do not have three years to wait.

Will the minister take immediate action to process the unacceptable backlogs for refugees?

• (1130)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is of great concern. We all want to see immigration processes speed up. Over the last number of years, we have seen processing times improve in many different areas. Whether it is dealing with the sponsoring of parents, for example, or the sponsoring of spouses, we have seen dramatic increases.

There are areas that we do need to improve upon, and I can assure the member that we are, in fact, making progress in all different areas as much as possible

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**HOUSING**

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one in four Nanaimo renters is in core housing need, meaning that where they live is unaffordable, unsuitable or inadequate, and these are people who have housing. Too many do not. Nanaimo has a housing problem larger than its size, and we are seeing the symptoms of this all around us. People deserve better than years of Liberal and Conservative half measures. People deserve a place to call home.

Why is it that the government is doubling down on its failed housing plan?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member and the NDP caucus for supporting this government to double funding in response to homelessness.

We continue to work with municipalities across the country. We continue to work with not-for-profit organizations. It was this government that recognized, of course, that there is a human right to housing. In that vein, we are seeing results. There is more to do, but 70,000 people who were on the street are no longer on the street, and 122,000 people who were close to homeless are not in that position anymore because of the national housing strategy.

**Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, all Canadians now know that the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost.

In 2021, a couple from Fergus, Ontario, swapped their four-bedroom, 2,400-square-foot home on three-quarters of an acre for a 6,300-square-foot, 16th century French château on 37 acres near the Bordeaux wine region in the south of France. Today, they admit that if they were to sell that mansion in the south of France, they would not have enough money to buy their old home in Fergus.

I am wondering why it is cheaper to buy a mansion in the south of France than a family home in rural Ontario.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our colleague is a former mayor, and he knows, therefore, that the affordability challenge Canadians face, whether it with respect to rent or the challenge of buying a home, is due to a lack of supply. This government recognizes that. That is why we have moved ahead to put incentives on the table for the private sector, for example, for builders, like lifting the GST on the construction of purpose-built rentals, period.

That side wants to maintain the tax for the purposes of building rental homes for the middle class. It is unacceptable. It is a reckless approach.

**Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the government maybe misses the point.

Canada has 20 times the land and half the people of France and it is still cheaper to buy a house in France. Of course, after eight years of the Prime Minister's inflationary deficits, mortgage costs have doubled. In 2015, the average mortgage payment was \$1,400. Today, it is over \$3,500, and now half of Canada's housing markets are severely unaffordable.

When will the NDP-Liberal coalition finally end its inflationary deficits so Canadians can afford to keep their homes?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said and emphasized, the challenge of affordability with respect to housing writ large has to do with the lack of supply. When demand is high and supply is limited, we are always going to have an expensive situation. We see that with respect to housing.

What this government is doing is working with municipalities to see more homes built. This morning, as I said, we saw the City of Brampton move ahead, working with this government. In exchange for a \$114-million investment, it is going to get more homes built. It is dealing with missing middle housing and exclusionary zoning. I thank the City of Brampton.

• (1135)

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a recent survey has found that nearly 70% of millennials and those who are younger have put off the purchase of a home because of rising prices and rising interest rates. After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, this is its legacy: inflationary deficits that are driving up the cost of living and making housing out of reach for many young people across the country.

It is clear the Prime Minister is not worth the cost, so why does he not finally listen to our common-sense approach to stop his inflationary spending so that Canadians can afford a home again?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member talks about young people. I will give him credit: During his time being a member of Parliament, he has put issues on the table with respect to youth.

He can support the government, or at least he should have, with respect to the tax-free savings account the government put in place to help young people save for a down payment. Up to \$40,000 can be put into that account, which is, again, tax-free. Add to that, of course, the fact that we continue to build more. We continue to put in place other policies that would see more homes built. We are doing that in partnership with municipalities.

The Conservatives are against all of that. They put half measures on the table and that is not good enough.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not have the funds to put into a savings account because of the cost of living crisis the government has created.

The member mentions building homes. We do not have enough home building in this country to keep up with demand. After eight years of the government, housing prices have skyrocketed. They have actually doubled. Mortgage rates are up, and young students and young professionals have given up completely on their dream of home ownership.

I ask this again: When will the Liberals finally stop their inflationary spending so that young people can afford a home?

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives were in power, they ran seven consecutive deficits. I find it interesting that they claim to be so concerned about the 0.7% deficit we have here in Canada, the lowest of all G7 countries.

We have a serious plan in order to build more homes. We have a serious piece of legislation before this House that the Conservatives are delaying. It would solve the housing crisis, and the Conservatives are delaying that measure.

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#### THE ECONOMY

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Bloomberg just reported on a recent survey that shows how much Canadians are struggling after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government's inflationary spending. Sixty-five per cent of

#### Oral Questions

Canadians now say they are concerned about saving for retirement, and 63% are concerned about how to prepare for an unexpected financial event. It means less savings, more concern, more risk. The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

When will the Prime Minister end his inflationary spending so Canadians can plan for their future again?

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that the member opposite even refers to pensions. Under what the Conservatives are proposing, they would gut the Canada pension plan. What the Conservatives are proposing would also result in Canadian families receiving less money from the federal government.

We have the Canada child benefit. In fact, cheques are going out today to families right across the country. That is important support for families that are having a hard time making ends meet. The Conservatives would see that program completely cut.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, speaking about misinformation, that response has nothing to do with what is actually happening in people's lives.

The latest MNP consumer debt index shows that 51% of Canadians are \$200 or less away from not being able to complete their financial obligations. "Facing a combination of rising debt carrying costs, living expenses and concern over the potential for continued interest rate and price hikes, many [Canadians] are stretched uncomfortably close to broke."

This is Canada after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government. When will the Prime Minister stop his inflationary spending so Canadians can afford to live again?

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite claims that there is misinformation. I would welcome her to clarify where exactly. The Conservatives have consistently said that they do not want to support Canadians with the programs we have in place.

We have the Canada child benefit program, which is supporting families and helping them make ends meet. Perhaps she would like to clarify if that is where they are going to cut. Are they going to cut our programs for seniors? Seniors are relying on our government at this time.

What the Conservatives are proposing is simply reckless. At a time like this, we need responsible government.

*Oral Questions*

• (1140)

[Translation]

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, let us talk about Amira Elghawaby, the Prime Minister's special representative on combatting Islamophobia.

Many people noticed her long silence on the war between Israel and Hamas. Then, when she did finally break her silence after 10 days, everyone noticed that she did not say a word about the Hamas attacks, about the massacre of civilians, about the hundreds of kidnappings or the rapes. Many were hoping she would condemn those actions, but no, there was not even a mention.

Ms. Elghawaby's role is to build bridges between communities. That is what is needed right now. Does the government think that she is building bridges this week?

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have been clear. Our government has been clear. The Hamas attacks on Israel were terrorist attacks. However, Ms. Elghawaby's mandate to combat Islamophobia is 100% national. She is working with our newly appointed special envoy on combatting anti-Semitism to combat discrimination against Muslims here in Canada. At the same time, she is supporting other communities.

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Muslim and Jewish government MPs met despite their differences to jointly reiterate the importance of all citizens feeling safe in Canada, regardless of their religion. That makes a difference and it should be commended.

Ms. Elghawaby, however, is incapable of recognizing that Hamas attacks are even happening, let alone the anger, fear and suffering they cause, including among her own fellow citizens. Does the government think that Ms. Elghawaby missed a good opportunity to also do something worthwhile?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of his question, my hon. colleague pointed out the importance of protecting Canadians who are understandably worried about their safety and the safety of their community and meeting places. I agree with him on that.

Last week, I had discussions with Minister Bonnardel from Quebec and with other provincial and territorial ministers. These discussions focused specifically on how we can reassure and protect Canadians. I often speak to representatives of the RCMP and intelligence services. We will do whatever it takes in that regard.

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[English]

**FINANCE**

**Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians who grew up in the seventies and eighties remember a disastrous Trudeau economic legacy that most definitely was not worth the cost. Fourteen deficits in 15 years led to an inflation crisis, an energy crisis and a housing crisis. The long-term impact of interest payments on that Trudeau debt forced another Liberal gov-

ernment a decade later to cut a devastating 32% from transfers for health care, education and social services.

The Liberal-NDP government is going down the exact same road. How much will they spend on interest on their record debt this year?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, they constantly talk about their record of fiscal responsibility. During the Stephen Harper years, they ran seven consecutive deficits.

Under this government we have seen economic growth. We have seen this government go through an extremely challenging time in the pandemic. Guess what? Businesses are still there. They are finding ways to thrive as a result of the ways that we supported them and continue to find ways to support them. When Canadians need support for other key challenges now, like housing, we are there.

They are putting half-measures on the table. They are not worth the risk.

• (1145)

**Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of mind-blowing, unprecedented, previously unfathomable increases in spending, the government's response to every question is to ask why we will not help them spend even more. Again and again, we on this side will stand up against an incompetent Liberal government that is leading us down a path of economic devastation.

Again, my question was reasonable and straightforward and I would appreciate an answer this time. What will the Liberal-NDP government spend on interest on its record debt this year?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, they inherited a surplus. They turned it into a deficit, another deficit and another deficit. On this side, we put constructive measures on the table like lifting GST on the building of rentals for Canadians. They talk about an attachment that they have to a vision for the country that puts the middle class front and centre. It is not true.

Why are they proposing at this time, at a time when Canadians are facing a housing crisis, to tax the building of rentals for the middle class? It makes no sense. It is a reckless approach from start to finish.

## NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight miserable years, our military heroes can no longer afford the Prime Minister. The NDP-Liberal government keeps driving troop morale down and their costs up.

A recently leaked report stated, “Increasingly, members will release (from the Canadian Forces) rather than relocate to an area they cannot afford or taking a loss on an existing home.” The Canadian Armed Forces are in a crisis and are short 16,000 people, but the Liberals are pushing people away and making things worse.

Why is the Prime Minister destroying our military?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before answering my colleague's question, I would like to underscore that today, we remember Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent, who lost his life in 2014.

[English]

Regarding the hon. member's question, I would like to say that when we think about the housing situation, just last year, in our fiscal update, we put \$55 million of support toward residential housing for CAF members.

I would also like to acknowledge the support we are giving to members when they relocate, like with the reimbursement of legal and real estate fees. We will always be there for our military.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is actually repeating Liberal history, known as the decade of darkness. Soldiers and their families back then were forced to use food banks. There were slashes to training programs. They operated with old equipment and were sent to Afghanistan without proper boots or uniforms.

Now, this month, the headlines read, “Soldiers asking for donations to help with housing, food costs”; “Canadian Forces personnel leaving the ranks over lack of affordable housing”; and, “Federal government looking to cut \$1 billion from National Defence budget”.

Our troops are out there fighting for our freedoms. Why is the Prime Minister attacking their economic freedom?

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question because it allows me to validate some of the measures and supports that we have put in place for our military.

As I mentioned earlier, we are reimbursing the legal and real estate fees. We are covering some expenses for dual residency for up to six months if a CAF member cannot sell their residence. We will continue to support our Canadian Armed Forces members posted across the country and their families.

For example, the post living differential allowance is intended to help reduce financial burdens for CAF personnel and their families. We will not take any lessons from that side of the House.

## Oral Questions

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has supported international justice efforts in response to the wars in Ukraine and Syria, but has refused to support international court investigations in Israel and Palestine. The parties in this conflict and the victims of this conflict need to know that violations of international law will be prosecuted. This includes terror attacks and collective punishment. International law applies to everyone. There are no exceptions.

Why will Canada not support independent court investigations into violations of international law by all parties to the war in Israel and Palestine?

• (1150)

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, right now, the alleviation of human suffering is our number one priority. We continue, and will continue, to push for all parties to respect humanitarian and international law. This means access for civilians. This means accountability for those who do not follow international law. This means that we are using every diplomatic channel that we have to alleviate the suffering, and ensure that aid gets to the Palestinian civilians and that international law is complied with.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the war between Hamas and Israel keeps taking the lives of so many innocent Israelis and Palestinians. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is getting worse by the minute. People in Gaza have very little access to water, food or electricity. They are forced to flee their homes or be bombed, and half of them are children. Palestinians and Israelis deserve to live in peace, and that is why the NDP has been calling for an immediate ceasefire and for the release of the hostages.

Why will the government not do everything in its power to save lives by calling for a ceasefire?

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canada will continue to support Palestinian civilians in Gaza facing urgent humanitarian needs. Our initial commitment of \$10 million in humanitarian assistance to trusted partners in Gaza will provide food, water, emergency medical assistance and protection services. We were the first western country to do so, and others have now started following suit. We will continue to be there.

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### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, national parks protect Canada's iconic terrestrial and aquatic environments, while provide opportunities for public understanding, education and enjoyment for these protected areas.

### Oral Questions

Having worked for Parks Canada for more than 30 years prior to politics, I can appreciate the importance of protecting and preserving the beautiful landscapes that represent the very best of Canada.

Can the parliamentary secretary share with this House the progress our government is making to protect and conserve these national wonders for future generations?

**Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his advocacy for Parks Canada all these years.

Yesterday our government introduced Bill S-14, the protecting Canada's natural wonders act. This bill would ensure that, along with its partners, Parks Canada has the authorities and tools to protect these lands for current and future generations. This represents an increase of more than 12 million hectares protected under legislation, which is a land mass slightly smaller than the combined area of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

I hope all parliamentarians can work together to ensure the passage of this important piece of legislation.

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### HOUSING

**Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight long years under the Prime Minister, Canadians expect more than just empty promises on housing. Construction is down and costs are climbing way up. The NDP-Liberal coalition's inflationary spending feels like a cruel joke to those trying to afford a home.

The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost. Is it not time for some common-sense Conservative solutions to ensure every Canadian has a roof over their head?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is a bill on this floor that the Conservatives can get behind. The result, if they decide to support it, would be a more affordable situation for builders, because it would lift GST off the construction of rental apartments. They are not in favour of that. They want to tax the construction of rental apartments for the middle class.

On top of that, we are putting forward measures to help support builders by making sure there are training programs so labourers can be available. They have no support for that. It is an entirely reckless approach that they take.

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### CARBON PRICING

**Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight long years of the Liberal-NDP government, seven million Canadians are now struggling to put food on their tables thanks to the carbon tax. When one taxes the farmer who grows the food and taxes the trucker who ships the food, one ultimately punishes the Canadian who buys the food. Now there are Canadians driving across the U.S. border to buy basic grocery essentials. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister do the honourable thing, axe the carbon tax and bring home affordable groceries for all Canadians?

• (1155)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservatives consistently use the carbon price as a scapegoat for global inflation in this House. I think they are having trouble grasping the concept of magnitude. The Bank of Canada governor recently said carbon pricing contributed 0.15% to inflation, which is equivalent to 15¢ on a \$100 grocery bill. The European Central Bank said climate change contributes as much as 3% to the cost of food per year, which is three dollars on a \$100 grocery bill. That means climate change has 20 times the influence on food prices than the carbon price. If Conservatives were serious about fighting global inflation, they would have a plan to fight climate change.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of all the provinces, Quebec is the one most affected by inflation. Quebecers are spending 23% more for their groceries. Food banks are swamped with people no longer able to afford supermarket prices, but this is a matter of utter indifference to this government and to the Bloc Québécois, which wants to drastically increase the tax. Voting Bloc is costly.

Will the Prime Minister show some empathy, do the right and reasonable thing and cancel his costly carbon tax?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising the issue of affordability and the Quebec City region.

She is a brand new MP, so she may not know that her Conservative Party colleagues voted against the Canada child benefit in 2016, before her time. Tens of thousands of children and families receive a tax-free cheque every month, lifting 40% of the people in her riding out of poverty.

Would she choose to vote against the Canada child benefit too?

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal government, Quebecers are getting poorer. Those are the facts.

According to Statistics Canada, inflation is rising faster than Quebec wages. What is more, the second carbon tax to be applied in Quebec will increase the price of gasoline by 17¢ per litre. Then there is the Bloc, which claims to defend Quebec, yet is further harming Quebecers by demanding a drastic increase. Voting Bloc is costly.

When will the government abolish its carbon tax and give Quebecers a chance to get their heads above water?

*Oral Questions*

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when I talk to Quebeckers, they tell me that voting Conservative is far too costly. The Conservatives are proposing an austerity plan. They want to cut support for our seniors, support for families with children, the help Canadians need to make ends meet.

We are here to support Canadians. The Conservatives are not worth the risk.

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**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Amnesty International is calling on Export Development Canada, EDC, to stop funding Canadian mining companies in Colombia, where human rights violations are on the rise.

Some 146 political dissidents were killed last year. That represents 46% of all political assassinations around the world. Environmental activists, farmers, indigenous people and anyone who has reservations about the mining companies' activities are at risk.

Will Ottawa suspend the funding of mining companies in Colombia while there are serious concerns that they are contributing to a climate of violence there?

[English]

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government will always stand up for human rights. This is why we created the CORE to maintain social responsibility of businesses around the world. This is why we will continue always to ensure that when Canadians and others are doing business around the world, particularly mining companies, we will always stand up for human rights everywhere, all the time.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, CORE, the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise, does not even have the authority to call witnesses.

I went to Colombia in 2021 as part of a human rights mission. I can confirm that there are some disturbing accounts there. Ottawa has no idea what is happening with the mining companies abroad. Export Development Canada has no checks and balances or credible monitoring.

Ottawa needs to tighten the accountability and transparency requirements of the companies it funds in countries where human rights are being violated.

In the immediate term, will it listen to Amnesty International and restrict EDC investments in Canadian mining companies in Colombia?

• (1200)

[English]

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have

very strong export control mechanisms. We always stand up for human rights. The Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise was created specifically so that we can work together with businesses.

We know that there are ways in which that can be strengthened. This is exactly why we are listening. It is why, when the Subcommittee on International Human Rights did a study, the government accepted those recommendations regarding CORE.

We will work together with every member of the House to ensure that Canada and Canadians, when we are abroad, stand for human rights.

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**INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the current government and the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister, it is no surprise that the Liberals' billion-dollar green slush fund is lining the pockets of Liberal insiders and is now under investigation. Annette Verschuren is a good friend of the Prime Minister and chair of the board that is doling out taxpayer cash. However, it turns out that her own company received millions from that same fund. The Prime Minister simply is not worth the cost.

How many other Liberal insiders got rich with this green slush fund?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know that Canadians are wising up to the fact that the Conservatives are just not worth the risk, but let me answer the member's question by saying this: When the minister became aware of the allegations of mismanagement at SDTC, he immediately acted and commissioned a review. The review resulted in an action plan that the executive will now implement by December, and we expect the highest standards of excellence in governance from all of our federal agencies.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is the same scandal that has whistle-blowers pleading for legal and career protection after exposing the latest scandal in this billion-dollar boondoggle. We know that everyone from the board chair to the CEO is in a conflict of interest. They all protect each other and they all make money, and it is all on the backs of Canadians. The Prime Minister simply is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister guarantee these whistle-blowers the same protection afforded to whistle-blowers in Canada's public service?

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, when the minister became aware of the allegations of mismanagement in this particular case, he immediately acted to commission a third party independent review of SDTC. That review produced an action plan that, now, SDTC will implement by December. That will make a substantive difference to addressing the mismanagement. The highest standards of governance are the expectations that Canadians should have, and that is exactly what our government is doing.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what Canadians expect is that whistle-blowers, when they bring to light corruption within the Liberal government, will be afforded protection, but we have seen before how the government treats the rule of law. The Prime Minister blocked the RCMP from pursuing a criminal investigation into Liberal corruption by hiding documents from them. If anyone else hid documents from the RCMP, they would end up in handcuffs, but with the Liberals, what we see is the continuation of that cover-up. After eight years, he is a Prime Minister who is not worth the cost to our democratic institutions.

What evidence is the Prime Minister so desperate to hide from the RCMP, and why does he think he is above the law?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that what the member falsely claims is something that we take issue with. Earlier this year when the minister became aware of the allegations of mismanagement, he acted immediately and decided to conduct a fact-finding exercise through an impartial third party review. That third party produced a report, and that report has now resulted in an action plan that is being implemented. That is going to make a substantial difference in addressing the issues that have been identified.

Let us make one thing clear: We expect the highest standards of governance from all federal agencies, and that is exactly what we are standing up for.

\* \* \*

● (1205)

[Translation]

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the well-being of veterans and their families will always be a priority for our government. We know that Canadians across the country also want to help those who have given so much to our country. Whether through organizations that provide housing, mental health services or assistance for the transition to civilian life, Canadians are stepping up to support our heroes.

Can the Minister of Veterans Affairs tell the House how our government is helping those who support our veterans?

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his question. He is absolutely right. Canadians and other veterans are stepping up to help those who have served our country. Through the veteran and family well-

being fund, we have been able to invest in innovative projects, such as the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, which will support mental health among veterans.

This fund is helping veterans and their families from coast to coast to coast, with supports in areas ranging from mental health to housing, and we will not stop there.

\* \* \*

[English]

**OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court has affirmed every argument regarding the overreach of the government's disastrous Impact Assessment Act. Its effect has been over \$100 billion of projects cancelled. No major projects have proceeded, and 42 projects are in limbo. First nations cannot get roads built to their communities. This bullheaded ideology has broken Canada's regulatory system.

After eight years, will the NDP-Liberal government finally take a lesson, abide by the Constitution and stay in its lane?

**Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after a decade of the Harper government, the Conservatives gutted environmental regulation and still got nothing built.

The government is continuing to review the ruling and will have more information to share soon about aligning existing legislation with the Supreme Court's ruling. We have previously said that the current system will remain in place. We will have more to share soon, including any changes or guidance on the project.

The Conservatives have zero credibility on the environment. They are just not worth the risk.

**The Speaker:** Once again, before we continue with questions, I will ask members to please limit their comments to the people who have the floor.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would advise the member across the way that the last project, which was built was in 2016, was under the previous government's environmental assessment regime, LNG Canada.

The chief justice is clear in his statement. He says, very clearly, that the federal government cannot overstep its boundaries into provincial jurisdiction. Who else has said that this bill was an immense overreach? Every province, over 100 first nations, industry groups across the country, the Conservative Party and anyone who can read the Constitution has said this.

Will the NDP-Liberal government finally accept the decision, respect provinces and stay in its lane?



*Oral Questions***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as stated earlier, when the Conservatives were in office, they gutted environmental protection, eroded public trust, discouraged investment and made it harder, not easier, to build projects. This is why we delivered better rules for environmental assessments to help move projects forward. While we are making amendments to the act, the Supreme Court was clear: “Parliament can enact legislation to protect the environment”.

The Conservative Party's plan to eliminate environmental protections and disregard indigenous rights is reckless and unacceptable. The Leader of the Opposition is not worth the risk.

**Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week, the Netherlands agreed to buy liquefied natural gas from the Middle Eastern dictatorship of Qatar for the next 27 years. Last week, France agreed to buy LNG from Qatar for the same amount of time. This is in addition to similar LNG deals that Germany recently signed with Middle Eastern dictatorships.

After eight years, does the Liberal-NDP government still believe that there is no business case for Canadian LNG exports?

• (1210)

**Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is really shameful that the Conservative Party would use this humanitarian situation to peddle conspiracy theories.

We need to work with our allies to deliver the clean energy they are asking for, whether it is hydrogen or reactors. If the member of the opposition actually cared about supporting Canadian energy and allies, they would not have voted against Bill C-49, which has created good jobs, improved global security and helped our allies.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we know that some Canadians are really struggling with the cost of living, and I recognize the outstanding support of our Muslim Food Bank, the Surrey Food Bank and the Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib in Fleetwood—Port Kells, all stepping up to provide relief in Surrey and the South of Fraser area. Their efforts complement steps our government has also taken to help with the community and help them cope.

For those looking to us for help through these tough times, can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development tell us what Canadians should expect next?

**Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have great news. Today, 3.5 million Canadians and over six million children will receive the Canada child benefit.

I know that raising children is expensive, especially now, when the cost of necessities is high. Since 2016, this benefit has lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. This is just one more way that the government is supporting Canadian families.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for two years, the Liberal government has let a ship-breaking company in Union Bay break rules in sensitive fish habitats. This could put this important ecosystem, and 50% of the B.C. shellfish industry, at risk, threatening up to 500 jobs and the local economy.

Local first nations, governments and residents are asking the Liberals to stop extending the permit that allows Miller Freeman to sit above the high tide zone. Will the government stop allowing this dangerous activity and further develop ship-breaking regulations to protect coastal communities?

**Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Coast Guard is aware of an incident involving abandoned vessels at Union Bay, British Columbia. The Coast Guard is working with the Government of B.C. and is ready to assist with the situation as required. Furthermore, the Canadian Coast Guard has reminded the parties involved of their obligations under the Canada Shipping Act.

We will continue to monitor the situation, and we will be ready to assist local officials if required.

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**IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

**Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government suffers from amnesia. It has forgotten its election promise to Toronto to help the city with its deficit, and it has forgotten the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Canada is a signatory with obligations to support the refugees we accept.

Under the resettlement assistance program, the government is supposed to help refugees get essential services and support for basic needs. Given last summer's debacle as refugees and asylum seekers slept on the streets, could the minister confirm that the government will provide Toronto with financial support to avoid a repeat, or does the government want to see refugees sleep in the snow?

*Routine Proceedings*

**Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the number of refugees worldwide grows, Canada continues to protect the world's most vulnerable and be a leader in refugee resettlement. In 2020, Canada resettled one-third of all refugees around the world. In addition, between January and July of 2023, Canada has resettled 27,400 refugees, which is over half of our 2023 target of 51,300.

\* \* \*

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, looking at the Standing Orders, I am raising a point of order under Standing Order 18.

I believe the member for Whitby made a very serious allegation against the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

During an exchange in question period, the member for Whitby said that the member “falsely claims”. He did not say “alleged” or “made an allegation”, which means he is implying that the member misled the House and was lying to it.

I wonder if the member for Whitby could clarify whether he was saying that the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes was in fact lying, which would be a breach of privilege to mislead the House. If not, I would invite him to retract his statement and apologize.

● (1215)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I think that from the explanation the member just gave, he is uncertain as to what the intent was. Therefore, I do not think it would be appropriate to be calling on somebody to apologize without even fully understanding what that member said.

**The Speaker:** Before I give a response to the member for Calgary Shepard, if the member for Whitby would like to rise, he is welcome to do so.

I thank the member for Calgary Shepard. I am going to take this back, and I will come back to the member at the first possible opportunity.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I appreciate this. I think it is important because people make claims all the time, such as “the member claimed”. People will also say that “the member has falsely stated”.

My understanding is that is fair commentary because we are not calling the member a liar, but when people are making false claims, that can be called out within the parliamentary tradition. I think you will find that we have a strong tradition of that. Therefore, I am not exactly sure whether the person was making false claims or not, but a member can make that allegation, just as members of the opposition can make allegations against the government.

**The Speaker:** I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for adding to that matter, which I will take into consideration.

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**PETITIONS**

## AIRCRAFT MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition signed by over 1,100 Canadians from across Canada who are calling on the Government of Canada to establish an annual aircraft maintenance engineer day on April 20.

From coast to coast to coast, Canada's aircraft maintenance engineers work hard to keep aircraft of all types and sizes safely maintained in every type of weather. They are more than deserving of a day to recognize their contributions to our country.

● (1220)

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise virtually today to present a petition on behalf of newer constituents who are concerned about Canada's public transit policy and, specifically, sustainable public transit funding. The government's initial 10-year transit plan, and the funding that municipalities can count upon, will end in a few years, in 2027.

The petitioners are calling on the government to follow the requests and advice of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and ensure that it is consistent with our climate objectives and sustainable. Affordability is also a very key issue in ground transit and access to adequate, safe, reliable public transit.

The petitioners are calling on the government to extend and ensure sustainable support for public transit across Canada.

## CHILD SUPPORT

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table today.

The first petition comes from constituents in my riding who are drawing the attention of the House to the increasing levels of divorce rates. One of the points they raise is that Canada now has the highest rate of common-law relationships among G7 countries, with the share of co-residing common-law couples increasing from 6% in 1981 to 23% in 2021. They are saying that the federal child support guidelines created under the Divorce Act fail to reflect that diversity and complexity today.

They are calling for the Government of Canada and the Minister of Justice to initiate the statutory review of the Divorce Act, specifically concerning the federal child support guidelines, to take into account the evolving reality of blended families and the variance of income over time to better reflect the needs of children in shared custody situations.

## CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by over 1,500 Canadians from all across the country. They are concerned about the self-administration of the citizenship ceremony. They are drawing the attention of the House to this being a tradition, since 1947, for new Canadians to swear an oath in person and live and that two-thirds of submissions during the time this was considered in the Canada Gazette opposed the proposed changes by the Government of Canada. They are calling for the four following things from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship: to abandon plans to permit self-administration of the citizenship oath; to revert to in-person ceremonies as a default with virtual ceremonies limited to 10% of all ceremonies; to focus on administration-processing efficiencies prior to citizenship ceremonies where most frustrations are; and to explore evening and weekend ceremonies to improve accessibility with more flexible scheduling management.

## OPIOIDS

**Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to present a petition on behalf of 823 signatories based on the work of medical students from the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, specifically Ethan Kendall, Winnie Foo and Kathy Zhang.

In light of the ever-increasing, tragic and preventable deaths as a result of the toxic substance crisis, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to: refine the national approach to treating substance use disorder to emphasize evidence-based harms, harm reduction strategies like safe consumption sites, safer supply and drug-checking services; provide additional, conditional funding to provinces for the implementation and expansion of these programs in order to facilitate access; and incorporate decriminalization of the simple possession of substances and a national overdose strategy in order to allow substance use disorder to be treated as a medical and social issue rather than a criminal one.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise for the 15th time on behalf of the people of Swan River, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. People are scared to leave their homes. Businesses face constant threats from the same repeat offenders, but the Liberal government says not to worry. It told the people of Swan River that its bureaucratic, pan-Canadian, strategic framework on rural crime will bring a feeling of safety to rural communities. Unfortunately, no one knows what this program does or where it is. We need jails, not bail, for violent, repeat offenders and not another framework.

The people of Swan River demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which directly threaten their livelihoods and their community. I support the good people of Swan River.

• (1225)

## CLIMATE CHANGE

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is not a surprise that I am tabling this petition, given that there were forest fires across my riding, that divided my riding this summer.

*Routine Proceedings*

The petitioners cite that there is a climate emergency crisis in our country and that Canada's temperatures are rising faster than overall global temperatures. Extreme weather events, including unprecedented droughts, hurricanes, floods and forest fires, like those I cited that occurred in my riding, are destroying lives, homes, communities and our forests. There are 120,000 Canadians who have been driven from their homes and young people are grieving. They are feeling hopeless and anxious about a frightening future. They feel abandoned by a government that is failing to act decisively to counteract the worsening climate catastrophe.

The petitioners are urgently calling on the government to legislate and swiftly enact an economically prudent oil and gas emissions reduction plan. The target of this plan would be to reduce oil and gas emissions by 40% to 45% below 2005 levels by 2030. They want to do this by placing a legislated emissions cap that delivers absolute emission reductions that includes methane; removing all publicly financed tax exemptions to the oil and gas sector and eliminating all inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by January 1, 2024; redirecting this money to the urgent development of proven clean energy; and, lastly, stopping all government assumption of transfer of risk and provision of goods and services to fossil fuel companies and prohibiting those fossil fuel companies from using offsets or exemptions on exported fuels.

## CRIMINAL CODE

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition calls upon this place to legislate the abuse of a pregnant woman and/or the infliction of harm on a preborn child as aggravating circumstances for sentencing purposes in the Criminal Code. At the stage of sentencing, after someone has been found guilty, they want aggravating circumstances to be required.

Their rationale is that it is a well-established fact to all of us, and we know this, that the risk of violence against women increases when they are pregnant. Currently, the injury or death of preborn children as victims of crime are not considered aggravating circumstances for sentencing purposes in our Criminal Code, which means they may or may not be considered, and often they are not. Canada has no abortion law and the petitioners indicate that this legal void is so extreme that we are not even in a place in this House to recognize preborn children as victims of violent crimes.

Finally, justice requires that an attacker who abuses a pregnant woman and/or her preborn child should be sentenced accordingly. The sentence should match the crime.

*Government Orders*

## HEALTH

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the second petition, the signatories call on this place to respect the right of every Canadian to health freedom. Their explanation is that freedom of choice in health care is becoming increasingly curtailed and further threatened by legislation and statutory regulations of this Government of Canada. They say that it is a fundamental right for individuals to be able to choose how to prevent or address illness or injury in their own bodies. Canadians want the freedom to decide how they will prevent or address illness or injury in their own bodies, as they always have. Canadians are competent and able to make their own health decisions without state interference.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon this Parliament to guarantee the right of every Canadian to health freedom by enacting the charter of health freedom drafted through the Natural Health Product Protection Association on September 4, 2008.

\* \* \*

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

• (1230)

[Translation]

**INDIAN ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-38, An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-38, an act to amend the Indian Act, which corrects serious mistakes committed in the past regarding the status of many first nations members.

Today, I speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, but also as a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation. First, let me say one thing: The Indian Act is a colonial law that introduced a system of domination and ghettoization. Its very name is just as racist as the N-word can be. I cringe whenever I see the word “Indian” on my status card. Cosmetic or vocabulary changes do nothing to fix the fact that this is a law on ghettos. This law was put in place by a conqueror in order to park people on reserves. It is a throwback to British colonialism and a culture that became woven into English Canadian colonialism. The Indian Act must be abolished and replaced by a new, respectful regime founded on a dialogue between nations. International relations begin at home.

Be that as it may, although it merely amends the scandalous Indian Act, the bill before us today remains incredibly relevant. The spirit of Bill C-38 stands as a sentinel against the injustices perpetrated by the Indian Act, which continues to cast long shadows, even into present-day Canada. It courageously tackles the evils that continue to impede deregistration, enfranchisement and reaffiliation with the natal band, despite multiple attempts at amendment. This noble bill embodies a common quest and a never-ending conversation with the indigenous nations that stretch across our vast land. No fewer than 50 virtual sessions, held from August to December 2022, enabled first nations, indigenous organizations and all those concerned to engage in dialogue and express themselves.

The government anticipates that close to 3,500 individuals will be granted the right to registration as a result of these legislative amendments, thus opening a door towards the righting of many historical wrongs. This bill, like a small breath of fresh air, offers thousands of Canadians of indigenous lineage the chance to reconnect with their cultural heritage. It gives them access to the rights rooted in Indian status in Canada, but goes far beyond that, by allowing them to fully reclaim their identity.

It is worth recalling that prior to 1985, enfranchisement was a sinister assimilation policy under the Indian Act. Under this vile legislation, first nations individuals lost their entitlement to registration as well as membership in their home communities. Enfranchisement could be voluntary, but the government could also impose enfranchisement on individuals, either by virtue of their profession or because they had been residing outside of Canada for five years. When men were enfranchised, their wives and children were automatically enfranchised. This led to entire families and their descendants losing entitlement to registration, membership in their communities, and any associated benefits under the Indian Act.

In 1985, Bill C-31 created new categories under section 6 of the act for determining eligibility for registration, which restored access to registration for a large number of people and their first-generation descendants. As part of these changes, the emancipation process was eliminated from the act, and people who had already been voluntarily or involuntarily emancipated could request that their registration be restored. Although the provisions of the Indian Act regarding registration and membership were amended in 2011 through Bill C-3 on gender equity in Indian registration and in 2017 through the passage of Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Indian Act in response to the Superior Court of Quebec decision in Descheneaux c. Canada (Procureur général), these legislative reforms focused mainly on eliminating gender inequities in the registration process.

*Government Orders*

However, other injustices rooted in the grim past of emancipation are insidiously persistent. The descendants of those who were at one time subject to emancipation are still unable to pass on their right to registration in the same way as those who were not affected by this measure. Similarly, those who were subject to emancipation as a member of a band or community continue to be excluded from registration today.

● (1235)

The introduction of Bill C-38 offers the promise of better days ahead. After it is passed, many people will be in a different registration category and others will be newly eligible for registration. What is more, if the problems of individual and collective enfranchisement are resolved, nearly 3,500 people will be given the invaluable access to registration.

Right now, the Indian Act does not provide for the possibility of voluntary deregistration at the specific request of the interested parties. However, thanks to the proposed amendments, it will be possible for a person to have their name removed from the Indian register for various reasons, such as wanting to join indigenous tribes in the U.S. that do not allow those registered under the Indian Act to enrol; wanting to identify as Métis; deciding to no longer be recognized on the federal Indian register; or withdrawing consent to be registered as an adult, for those whose parents registered them as children.

Mercifully, Bill C-38 will guarantee that, when a person has their name removed from the register, they will still legally retain their entitlement to be registered under the Indian Act, the right to be registered again in the future, and the right to transmit this precious birthright to their descendants.

For some individuals, deregistration is vital because it is a matter of having control over their own identity. For others, it is a barrier to gaining membership in other indigenous groups, like Métis, if they have mixed ancestry. This has long hindered many people from accessing important services and benefits they should be entitled to through a group they wish to identify with.

For example, Métis lose their right to Métis membership if they are registered under the Indian Act. Bill C-38 will provide individuals with the right and ability to have their names removed from the Indian register. Once deregistered, the individual will not have the right to access any programs, services, settlements or benefits associated with Indian Act registration. Even if the individual later seeks to be re-registered, that individual will have no retroactive claim to any such benefits for the period in which they were deregistered. However, any individual who opts to deregister will retain their entitlement to registration under the Indian Act, including the ability to regain their status in the future.

When a woman who is registered under the Indian Act is a member of the band that she was born into, in other words, either the mother's or father's band, this is referred to as being a member of her natal band. If passed, Bill C-38 would recognize the acquired rights of all first nations to membership with their natal band. This bill would provide a legal framework to re-affiliate women and their descendants to their natal bands who were automatically moved to their husbands' band list upon marriage. Bill C-38 pro-

vides a valuable opportunity to re-establish important cultural and community connections for first nations women and their families.

Since this bill is intended as a response to historical wrongs perpetrated by Ottawa and its racist, sexist legislation that discriminates against indigenous people, it is imperative to remain vigilant to ensure that this bill does not itself become an indirect instrument of assimilation and cultural erasure of indigenous people by allowing overly broad access to their recognized Indian status for those unfamiliar with indigenous cultures.

Luckily, the limited yet still significant scope of individuals who will now be eligible does not seem to pose a threat of diluting indigenous identity, as once provided for in the Indian Act, along with ethnocide. The indigenous groups that the Bloc Québécois consulted did not seem consider that an imminent risk. However, we will remain watchful.

It is imperative that this bill be considered in its entirety, with careful attention paid to its consequences and impacts, to ensure that it truly rectifies past wrongs while respecting the rights and identity of indigenous peoples.

From the 19th century on, women and their descendants have been the victims of blatant gender discrimination when it comes to registration and band membership.

● (1240)

In 1869, with the passage of the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, the definition of "Indian" was no longer based on first nations kinship and community ties. The act was deliberately designed to remove families headed by a non-Indian man from first nations communities by building on the predominance of men over women and children. The 1869 law also included a provision concerning interracial marriages. Known as the "marrying out rule", it was retained in the first Indian Act of 1876. This rule removed entitlement to registration from Indian women who married non-Indian men, while granting entitlement to non-Indian women who married Indian men. In addition, children of entitled men who married non-Indian women became entitled under the Indian Act, while children of women who "married out" were no longer entitled. This is clearly a flagrant inequality.

In 1951, important amendments were made to registration, namely, the creation of a centralized Indian register. Later, other amendments further reinforced the discrimination against women and their descendants, especially the double mother rule. Gender discrimination in the Indian Act was challenged under national and international human rights legislation, which brought to light the fact that women were excluded from first nations communities and were being deprived of the ability to retain their indigenous identity in the eyes of Canadian law.

### *Government Orders*

For decades, indigenous women fought for their rights in court, challenging the patriarchal provisions of the Indian Act. In the 1960s and 1970s, women like Jeanette Lavell from the Wikwemikong nation, Yvonne Bedard from the Six Nations of the Grand River, elder and advocate Mary Two-Axe Earley from the Kanien'kehà:ka nation, and Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas from the Malecite nation took legal action to fight the Indian Act's discrimination against women and their descendants. These courageous women paved the way to reform and justice and thus helped to advance the cause of indigenous women's rights and to fight the systemic injustice that has long marked the history of the Indian Act.

The chief commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, Marion Buller, said the following after tabling the more than 2000-page report:

Despite their different circumstances and backgrounds, all of the missing and murdered are connected by economic, social and political marginalization, racism, and misogyny woven into the fabric of Canadian society.

As much as indigenous communities need to rebuild, Quebecers and Canadians need to become aware of the collective trauma experienced by these communities, understand it, and ensure that nothing this disgraceful ever happens again. Quebec Native Women had this to say:

[In the case of many of the missing or murdered women] [o]ne might claim that the person responsible for [their] death is the one who gave [them] the beating that led to [their] passing. In fact, this interpretation was favored by former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper when he insisted on the criminal, as opposed to sociological, nature of the murders of Indigenous women in the country (La Presse Canadienne, 2014)...Beyond the single act of violence perpetrated by one person against another, it is the accumulation of each of the above-mentioned acts of violence that led to [their] death.

According to Viviane Michel, a former president of Quebec Native Women, it is essential that indigenous women, families and communities have the opportunity to be heard as part of any inquiry. She also said that understanding the deep roots underlying the systemic discrimination faced by indigenous women is crucial to ensuring their dignity and safety.

• (1245)

In listening to the testimony of indigenous women, Quebec Native Women counted four types of violence.

The first type of violence is structural violence. This all-encompassing form of violence refers to the systemic effects of policies of erasure and assimilation since at least the middle of the 19th century. The Indian Act is the quintessential example of a system that governs all areas of the lives of first nations people, including political, economic, social, legal and cultural.

The second type of violence is institutional violence. This second form of violence, which necessarily flows from the first, has more to do with the repercussions associated with specific institutional regimes, whether in education, health or public safety. The residential school system is a prime example. Not only did this violence manifest itself in the lives of residential school survivors, but its consequences have spanned generations and have permanently altered the life trajectories of thousands of children by insinuating themselves into every aspect of their existence.

The third type of violence is family violence. This expression is frequently used in an indigenous context to emphasize the fact that violence affects not only couples, but also the children and potentially other people connected to the family.

The fourth and final type of violence is personal violence, which includes instances of physical violence, psychological manipulation and financial control, to name but a few. It involves individuals.

In their descriptions of the encounters, the families and survivors who spoke to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls all linked their experiences to colonialism, in its historical or modern form, through one or other of four main factors: historical, multigenerational or intergenerational trauma; social and economic marginalization; maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; ignoring the agency and expertise of indigenous women and girls.

The trauma of Canada's indigenous people is both individual and collective. Expert witness Amy Bombay's testimony at the child and family welfare hearing highlighted the importance of the concept of historical trauma to speak to what she called the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding that happens over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences.

It is the response to this trauma that perpetuates this colonialist legacy, which has become embedded in all of Canada's indigenous cultures through no fault of their own. This response, which can take the form of various social problems, is always aimed at surviving this trauma. Throughout history, the Canadian government and the clergy planned the collective trauma with the ultimate goal of driving all indigenous communities to extinction. Those communities have since been left to deal with the consequences alone. One day, Canada will have to confront this reality.

We have a duty to remember precisely because the past determines our present and future. However, this duty to remember only makes sense in this case if we learn from the past. If we, like the Prime Minister of Canada, get used to shedding crocodile tears and settling for continuing under the Indian Act, then our collective duty to remember will be in vain. We need to build a new system, ideally an independent republic of Quebec, based on a new, respectful dialogue with all nations. That is what the Bloc Québécois is advocating for.

*Tiawenhk.*

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the many examples the member brought forward when talking about the real need. I think they amplify the importance of Bill C-38.

I know from personal experience in dealing with constituents, in particular a very good, dear friend of mine, Mr. Chartrand, that we have been trying as much as possible to make sure there is some justice in regard to someone getting registered and being identified by their heritage. It has caused a great deal of frustration.

I am wondering if the member could provide his thoughts on that. It is important to recognize, as we move forward, that leadership has to be driven from indigenous communities. This is an important aspect, and we have to ensure that we turn to that leadership to make sure we are getting this right. Would the member agree?

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, of course, and as one might imagine, when I was asked to speak to this issue, I immediately contacted the grand chief of my nation, the Huron-Wendat Nation. I asked him what he thought of this. It goes without saying that this must be done.

That being said, when it comes to leadership, it takes two to tango, as they say. It has to come from both sides. The desire for dialogue and leadership in dialogue must come from both sides. Unfortunately, I often get the impression that things move far too slowly in the House.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I am wondering, and what I want to ask the Bloc Québécois member, is why the Liberals took so long to move second reading of the bill. They introduced Bill C-38 a year ago.

Why are they dragging their feet on this matter? Does this suggest a lack of sincerity and enthusiasm when it comes to indigenous relations? Can my colleague comment on that?

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating our colleague on his excellent efforts to speak French. Allow me to applaud him. I understood his speech completely.

First of all, I would like to say that, for my own sake, I have long given up trying to explain the Liberal's slow response to a host of issues. Some things are better left chalked up to the mysteries of life. Even on my deathbed, I doubt I will have the answer.

That said, I want to come back to something I mentioned earlier. At some point the government needs to stop with the words, the processions, the public ceremonies and the crocodile tears. People need to stop pretending they find this tragic. At some point, they have to get moving. Why does it always take so long for something to get started? It is unacceptable.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the structural violence that was committed against indigenous identity, indigenous language and indigenous families, we also have to talk about the resistance to defend that identity. That is why I think this is so important, and I thank my colleague for his speech. We have to be rooted in the history of this country and what happened.

I will talk about Beaverhouse. Beaverhouse is a community between the Algonquins of Timiskaming and Abitibiwinni and the

### *Government Orders*

Ojibway Matachewan, yet it was ignored by the federal government, which said it was not a real band. For 100 years, it had no legal rights. It had no legal rights to represent itself and no legal rights to defend its families. When the sixties scoop came, they went after communities like Beaverhouse to trash and destroy them.

Chief Marcia Brown Martel led the legal battle to bring the children home. It changed Canadian law because this little community stood up. It was only last year that Beaverhouse was finally recognized as a band. It had been on its land since time immemorial.

Colonialism destroyed and attacked communities in different ways, but to repair the damage, which is our obligation, is going to take a multi-faceted approach. What does my hon. colleague think about the need to address the individual impacts that were felt by various communities and various nations by the colonial system across this country?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be sure that I understand the situation that my colleague just described to the House. His intervention was very interesting.

Something that has always bothered me is the use of the term “indigenous people”. Of course, people use it to be brief and concise, but indigenous people are not a homogenous group. We refer to first nations because there is more than one nation. Each nation has its own values, its own culture, its own identity, its own language and its own interests. We obviously need to differentiate when speaking about each of these nations.

It would be like saying “all of the peoples of the world”. Obviously, there are a lot of things that all of the peoples of the world have in common, but the fact remains that we cannot treat them as though they are all identical. That is how we need to look at things when we are dealing with adults. It helps us break away from the colonial mindset.

• (1255)

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague and riding neighbour from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for his eloquent speech. As he himself is a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation, I think he knows what he is talking about. He is well read and very passionate about the issue.

I also liked the fact that he talked about the future republic of Quebec, which will truly establish a nation-to-nation relationship. I was pleased that he did not talk about the future monarchy of Quebec, although that would be unlike him.

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A bit earlier in the debate, I asked a Liberal member a question about the very nature of the work being done to try to correct a fundamentally racist and archaic piece of legislation. I told her that we should simply tear up the Indian Act and start over on a respectful and new foundation in order to be able to work intelligently nation to nation. She told me that within many first nations across Canada, there is no consensus. Again, we have this sort of claim that it is up to the federal government to build consensus.

I would like to hear the thoughts of my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, who, I repeat, is a member of the Huron-Wendat Nation. I would like his view as a first nations member. According to him, how should we proceed with building consensus among all the first nations of Canada?

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, neighbour and friend for his question.

Let me make one thing clear. The title of this bill, while perhaps a little better than the title it replaced, is in itself a sign that it must be abolished. I used the word “Indian” unwillingly, and it turned my stomach every time I used it throughout my speech. I was using it for the sole reason that it is the title of the act. Indians do exist, and they are the inhabitants of India. It is not the term for first nations, Métis and Inuit people. These people are known as indigenous people.

Again, as our NDP colleague said in his previous question, each and every one of these indigenous people must be treated individually. What I am trying to say in answer to the question is that it is possible that many communities will see benefits as a result of several provisions of the current legislation. However, the best way to do this is to open a dialogue and start from scratch.

There is no requirement that the same law apply to all first nations. In order to determine what should replace the current legislation, it is important to listen to the first nations communities themselves. We will have to listen to what they want to do. If there is no consensus, obviously that also shows that there is no consensus in favour of it. If there is no consensus against it, there is no consensus for it. We can look—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie):** I thank the hon. member. I spent the last 30 seconds motioning for him to conclude his remarks. He will have time to answer a brief 30-second question.

The hon. member for Desnethé-Missinippi-Churchill River.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the 2021-22 departmental results report for the Department of Indigenous Services Canada indicates that the department's ability to meet the target that it set for itself was only achieved at a level of 26%. In other words, of the goals the department set for itself, it was able to achieve only 26%.

My colleague has indicated that he is a member of a first nation, and this department is meant to provide services to first nations people across our country. Does he think that achieving 26% of the targets it set for itself indicates that the government is serious about its commitment to meeting the challenges faced by first nations people across our country?

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie):** The hon. member has only a few seconds.

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, I only have a few seconds. A quick question lends itself to a quick answer. I apologize for not heeding your instructions. I do not want you to think, even though we were friends even before we sat together, that I do not respect your authority as Speaker.

My very short answer to the question is no.

● (1300)

[*English*]

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** *Uqaqtittiji*, before the Indian Act, first nations, Métis and Inuit thrived and passed on intergenerational love from generation to generation. The Indian Act is an attempt to erase indigenous peoples from the lands we now call Canada.

Bill C-38 is about status. It could have been about addressing discrimination to the fullest extent. I struggle to support Bill C-38, an act to amend the Indian Act. I am conflicted and disappointed to witness yet another form of incremental change proposed by the Liberal government.

As the Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group have clearly stated, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples says indigenous peoples have “the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture”. This bill does not meet this minimum standard. For decades, first nations have fought for their rights to be upheld. If Bill C-38 is passed as it is, discrimination against first nations women and their families will continue.

There are two reasons I support getting this bill to committee. Number one, while experts say it does not go far enough, this bill is needed, and number two, the failings of this bill to respect the rights of indigenous peoples will show, through public discourse at committee stage, that amendments are necessary.

Bill C-38 was tabled because of a court case, *Nicholas v. Canada*. It is not because the government is taking a proactive, co-operative approach to reconciliation. Introducing this bill is the minimum requirement set out in that case. After years of discrimination caused by enfranchisement in the Indian Act, 16 courageous plaintiffs sued the Canadian government in June 2021. They agreed to pause proceedings on the condition that legislation be introduced to address this inequity.



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The Liberals' commitment to reconciliation with indigenous peoples is abysmal. If their commitment was real, Bill C-38 would be fulsome. It would have addressed all discriminatory provisions of the Indian Act. Incremental changes are not sufficient to ensure the advancement of indigenous peoples' rights.

I acknowledge that the Indian Act must be abolished. It is a complicated assimilative tool going back generations. The Liberal government has shown that it is not ready to abolish the act. Bill C-38, like previous court cases, makes amendments that are narrow in scope. Future court cases will be imminent if amendments are not made to this bill. Discrimination will be allowed to continue without the ability to seek reparations.

The Liberal government has shown that it is not ready to undertake the full-scale reconciliation needed to adhere to international law as the governing party. The following background will be the tip of an iceberg. All parliamentarians must commit to learning more about the Indian Act and how it continues to implement the genocide of indigenous peoples.

The Indian Act was established in 1867. John A. Macdonald understood the strength of first nations, Inuit and Métis as a threat to his causes. He had to find a way to weaken them. The Indian Act was the tool to continue the process of genocide against the first peoples who thrived on the lands we now call Canada. The Indian Act is a long-ago piece of legislation that was introduced in 1867. The act remains today.

Since its inception, the Indian Act has continued to deny equality for first nations. The Indian Act allows discrimination without justification. The Indian Act denies women status and therefore rights by gaining status. The Indian Act introduced residential schools, created reserves and imposed a band council system. The Indian Act also tells first nations who can have status and who cannot.

• (1305)

Before the creation of bands by this act, indigenous peoples had their own forms of governance. I am thankful for the strength of those who maintained their governance. I am thankful to Inuit elders. I am thankful to hereditary chiefs. I am thankful to the Wet'suwet'en. I am thankful to the Saysewahum family and the many others who keep indigenous legal orders alive.

The Canadian government has known about sex-based inequities in the Indian Act for decades. Bill C-31 in 1985, Bill C-3 in 2011 and Bill S-3 in 2017 have attempted to eliminate sex-based inequities. None of these bills worked to the fullest extent; what they did was complicate indigenous identity for some and not for others.

The Indian Act continues to divide indigenous peoples against each other. With each amendment, the Indian Act becomes more complex and confusing to navigate for indigenous peoples. Indeed, I am told by many how confusing it is to know if they have status, how to get status and if their children will be able to get it. They ask, "What are the implications of being removed?"

It is a shame that in 2020, the Minister of Indigenous Services tabled one of three reports after Bill S-3 to amend the Indian Act was passed. The final report made recommendations that are not

being addressed in Bill C-38 by the Minister of Indigenous Services today.

As of 2020, there were over 12,000 applications for status still needing review. The special Bill S-3 processing units created in 2016, as of February 2023, have 1,770 files in progress and 3,990 files in the queue. The bill before us would do nothing to address this backlog. First nations are waiting up to 18 months for a decision by Indigenous Services Canada. This is unacceptable.

Bill C-38 would address enfranchisement, deregistration, loss of natal band membership and certain offensive language. These are long-awaited amendments that indigenous peoples have demanded for decades.

Enfranchisement is a particular genocidal policy and a clear example of Canada's attempts to assimilate indigenous peoples. Enfranchisement was either voluntary or involuntary. Women were enfranchised when they married a non-indigenous man between the years of 1869 and 1985. Other examples of enfranchisement included going to university, becoming a doctor or lawyer, working as a minister, seeking to vote and if one sought freedom from residential schools. Amendments introduced in 1985 attempted to remove enfranchisement. Obviously this did not work.

Bill C-38 would still discriminate against women and children who were involuntarily enfranchised. Descendants are unable to transmit entitlement to registration to the same extent as families that were never enfranchised. Those who were enfranchised as a band or collective have no entitlement to register under the Indian Act today.

I will now turn to deregistration, which provides for removing status from membership. There can be any number of reasons to deregister. These provisions would keep the safety of not impacting the children of those who may have deregistered.

• (1310)

The third component of Bill C-38 is on natal band membership. Bill C-38 would provide a legal mechanism to re-affiliate women to their natal bands. This amendment would serve to allow for membership to be reinstated on a band list based on specific conditions. It would address reinstatement of membership for a group of individuals who were originally prevented from being reinstated based on oversight.

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Finally, the bill would amend outdated language, which is a small but important step. The offensive language regarding first nations peoples who require dependency on others would be amended. The offending definition of “mentally incompetent Indian” would be replaced with “dependent person”.

Bill C-38 would address these cases, and it is estimated it would impact around 4,000 people. Many more would remain discriminated against.

The Liberals had a chance to remove discrimination from the Indian Act once and for all. Bill C-15, on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, became law in Canada. The Liberals had a chance to introduce that bill so that it would be in alignment with international law. Instead, they are introducing more piecemeal legislation. The past court challenges, *Descheneaux v. Canada*, *McIvor v. Canada*, and *Matson v. Canada*, make it clear. The Senate committee on aboriginal peoples makes it clear. The Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group makes it clear. So many more make it clear. The Liberal government's pattern of reluctant piecemeal changes in response to litigation is unjust.

There is no justification for Canada to ignore, and indeed infringe on, indigenous people's rights. Parliaments would debate again after the passage of Bill C-38 why it is not okay to keep disrespecting indigenous peoples and infringing on their rights.

Two other major issues not addressed are the second-generation cut-off and the ability to seek reparations. The second-generation cut-off in section 6(2) is not addressed in Bill C-38. This is shocking, given how much attention has been paid to this section in past works. In its Bill S-3 review, the ministry of Indigenous Services Canada reported on it. The Indian Act Sex Discrimination Working Group in its works reported on it. The Senate committee on indigenous peoples reported on it. They all recommended to remove provisions related to the second-generation cut-off.

If bands reject second-generation cut-off, it is because they are not being properly resourced by Indigenous Services Canada to meet the needs of their increasing membership.

Section 6(2) is sexist, and it is problematic. Who a child's mother is, is usually readily apparent. Who the father is, is not always apparent. Whether the father acknowledges his paternity, and this can be counted as the second-status parent for purposes of eligibility for status, is essentially his decision. The two-parent rule continues Canada's program of forced assimilation. Maintenance of the two-parent rule would fulfill the genocidal intention of the Indian Act, getting rid of “the Indian problem”.

Until this rule is amended, hundreds of thousands of indigenous people, mostly women and their descendants, will be discriminated against.

First nations children were robbed of their mothers. First nations children continue to be robbed of their mothers. The current child welfare system continues to separate indigenous peoples from each other. The Liberals say they will consult on second-generation cut-off. Consultation should not be necessary. Discrimination is discrimination. No amount of consultation will result in the justification of it. The government must interpret the rule of law as adhering to international human rights laws and the charter.

• (1315)

We are told by the Liberals that the public portion of this consultation will not begin until 2024. It will be much longer before legislation is drafted and presented before the House again. This tactic to delay is a denial of the rights of indigenous peoples. We should not have to wait for discriminatory provisions to be removed. There is no justification for discrimination to be allowed to continue.

Another form of oppression is preventing indigenous peoples from seeking reparations. Bill C-38 includes specific clauses that will not allow victims of these policies to seek reparation for the discrimination they have experienced. First nations women and children will continue to be harmed, yet they will not be able to seek reparations, even if discrimination is found.

In past bills, there were related provisions legislating that governments are not liable for harms done under the act. Persons are prevented from seeking claims against the government for discrimination caused by the implementation of the Indian Act.

These injustices remain in Bill C-38. According to human rights laws, Canadians are allowed to seek reparations. Why can first nations not do so?

Bill C-38 is a flawed proposal. While it addresses some injustices in the Indian Act, discrimination against first nations would continue. Bill C-38 continues the Liberal incremental approach to reconciliation.

The Liberals' interpretation of *Nicholas v. Canada* is about status. Bill C-38 must not just be about status; it must be about addressing discrimination and violations of basic human rights. It must be about reconciliation.

I ask this again: Why is it that when Canadians experience human rights violations, they are allowed to seek reparations, when first nations are not?

I hope that Bill C-38 can be salvaged. I hope that, at committee, we hear from experts explaining why improvements must be sought to ensure that first nations' rights are on par with Canadian human rights.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague from the NDP is very passionate about the issues she speaks of. I serve on the indigenous and northern affairs committee with her and I know that she is very serious about solving these issues.

She spent a fair amount of her time going to great lengths to explain the shortfalls of this bill. She talked about the second-generation cut-off and how much work has already been done on that.

As we have talked about today, since this bill was introduced, it has taken almost a year for us to actually get to debate on this. We have had a lot of time to initiate some of these changes.

With all those frustrations and concerns, has there been any attempt by her or her party to utilize these discussions to leverage their coalition agreement with the Liberals to actually include some of these indigenous issues in their agreement, to get some action?

**Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqqaqtittiji,** when it comes to the confidence and supply agreement, we have discussed, very clearly, what the conditions are. In terms of indigenous issues, we have been clear about what we need to do, so there would be no surprises.

I shadow the Minister of Indigenous Services, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Minister of Northern Affairs. I continue to work with the ministers that I shadow to make sure that we are going beyond what is said in the confidence and supply agreement, so that indigenous people's rights are being respected.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nunavut for her speech. She too, like our colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, is very credible. She is very concerned and knowledgeable about the issue, to say the least.

Earlier, I was talking about consensus-building, which is not the federal government's role within first nations.

Since the beginning of this debate, we have been talking about the Indian Act, about reviewing it, improving it and making changes to it. Basically, my question to my colleague is this: Rather than talking about legislation, should we not start talking about agreements between the federal government and first nations?

• (1320)

[English]

**Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqqaqtittiji,** indeed, nation-to-nation conversations are absolutely important. When it comes to recognizing the right to self-determination and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, we must show through our actions what reconciliation actually means. That also means including the use of indigenous legal orders.

I hope that, through our conversations, we will continue to advance the importance of nation-to-nation relationships.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the wisdom and knowledge she has brought to the House on this issue.

Successive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed indigenous, Inuit and Métis people with their incremental approach to reconciliation. In fact, I still remember that the Conservatives under

the Harper government said that the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls issue is an Indian issue. Here we are today with this bill, yet another bill with an incremental approach.

Can the member advise the House on what generational damages she sees for the people, the women and families on the ground as a result of Canada's colonial and incremental approach to ensuring indigenous rights are respected.

**Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqqaqtittiji,** being Inuk, I have grown up in a colonial system, and people do not understand that a lot of the time. All I have to say to better describe it is that my dad committed suicide. I was raised in the foster care system. I have too many families that I have to thank for helping raise me to be who I am.

The unfortunate truth about my story is that it is a common story of indigenous peoples. What I just shared is common to so many first nations, Métis and Inuit. With the ignorance we experienced from regular, mainstream Canadians, we had to start using terms such as “systemic racism” and “genocidal policies”. The terms help explain what the impacts are of these discriminatory policies, discriminatory lies and administrative tactics to not only steal our lands but continue to steal our time and oppress us.

I am so thankful to indigenous peoples who keep our culture alive and who keep our languages alive.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I must say, at this great distance, that I speak to you acknowledging that I am on the territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, who held this land on the southern Vancouver Island and the islands I represent, whom I have the honour to work with. I try constantly to remember that I am in a nation-to-nation relationship with five different first nations that are on this territory. Although, as the chiefs will always remind me, they are Indian Act nations and, in reality, we are villages within a much-larger nation of the W̱SÁNEĆ nation.

I am deeply honoured to share a working place with the member of Parliament for Nunavut, and I appreciate her voice and leadership more than she knows. I was so disappointed when I read Bill C-38. She confirmed for me my sense that this is so much less than what one should expect at this point.

I was the first member of Parliament, as far as I know, a number of years ago, to call for the repeal of the Indian Act in the House of Commons. I turned to my colleague at the time, Romeo Saganash, to tell him I was about to call for the repeal of the Indian Act. I asked him if he thought that was okay, because I had not consulted with a lot of first nations before I did that. He said that nobody asked them before they passed the legislation, so he thought it was okay.

*Private Members' Business*

We have a long road to go. It is not a slow road, and yet the steps being taken by the government are slow and often completely contradictory in terms of reconciliation.

I wanted to express my deep support and gratitude to the member and let her know that, where I can, I will do what she recommends on Bill C-38. It obviously needs—

• (1325)

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie):** Unfortunately, I must interrupt the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I need to allow time for the answer.

The hon. member for Nunavut.

[English]

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, solidarity is so important, and in a party system, it is very hard to see solidarity. I do feel the sense of solidarity the member has shared with me, and I think we all need to talk about solidarity more often when it comes to discussing indigenous people's rights.

I started off my conversation about intergenerational love and how we lived with it since time immemorial. Since 1867, all the successive governments stripped us of our intergenerational love. We have shown that, through our strength and our willingness to understand that our culture is too important, it is for us to manage the wildlife and the environment. We are the right people to be the leaders in Canada.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a Métis, an indigenous Canadian, I am happy and pleased to see this bill coming in. It has taken a long time.

However, I am concerned about the NDP-Liberals and how they have worked against indigenous people in many respects, such as with natural resources projects. There have been projects, such as northern gateway, that were approved and wanted by indigenous peoples. Why are the NDP and the Liberals working against indigenous peoples?

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** *Uqaqtittiji*, when oppressed people have been led to poverty and have been suppressed for generations, the options they have become fewer.

The industry and the mining companies provide an option that looks attractive because governments are failing indigenous peoples. When indigenous peoples are saying they support it, it is because it is the only option left. I thank the Wet'suwet'en who continue to fight against the LNG project.

**Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I really have appreciated hearing the debate in the House today. It draws our attention to the fact that this is a very complicated issue that we really need, in the House, to listen to far more than to debate amongst ourselves. I thank the last member for her speech on her concerns about the circumstances that our first nations and our indigenous peoples find themselves in.

Part of the challenge, I do believe, is that indigenous communities are multiple and they come from very different perspectives themselves. I have had conversations with young leaders in the in-

igenous community who say that their circumstances are so complicated. In their minds, it will take time. What they want to see is something that is really important. I will focus on just this one point and get into the bill more at the next opportunity I have to speak.

The bill would provide strides toward reconciliation and the reversal of discrimination and inequalities within the Indian Act, but it is only a milestone in a long journey of self-determination for first nations across Canada. What I hear more than anything, over and over again, from indigenous individuals who want to see a good future for themselves and their families is that they do not want to be stakeholders in Canada. They want to be shareholders. I look forward to that day with them.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1330)

[Translation]

### NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EYE CARE ACT

The House resumed from September 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care, be read the third time and passed.

**Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the bill before us seeks to establish a federal eye care policy.

The federal government fails at almost every one of its basic mandates, like having a half-decent foreign policy and a border that is not a firearms drive-through. I will not even mention passports. It is therefore not surprising for the government to try to change the channel by undertaking something outside of its jurisdiction. However, the Bloc Québécois, as always, will participate in good faith in the study of this bill. Even if it is hard to fathom what the federal government has to do with eye care, one cannot be against motherhood and apple pie.

Losing one's eyesight is a curse that affects too many of our constituents. Let us examine the issue together, look at what the government is doing—or rather not doing—and try to find ways to minimize the damage.

As an economist, I will start with some raw numbers. I know the Speaker will like that. Call it occupational conditioning.

It is important to remember the impact that these problems can have on everyday life. When a person experiences sensory loss, it compromises their safety and their relationship with the world. They lose their main connection with the world. That is not something that I would wish on anyone, even my worst enemy.

*Private Members' Business*

The population of Quebec is growing older and that is causing an increase in health care needs. The demand for care for eye conditions and diseases is no exception. In fact, there are already huge economic and financial costs associated with that. In 2019, Canadian society paid close to \$9.5 billion in direct costs and \$4.3 billion in productivity losses directly related to vision loss.

According to the Canadian Council of the Blind, these costs, particularly those related to vision loss in Canada, will only increase and could go from \$32.9 billion in 2019 to \$56 billion in 2050, which represents an increase of 70% in 30 years.

In addition to this growth in the demand for health care, which is expected to continue, the Canadian health care system has been institutionalizing a fiscal imbalance between the federal and provincial levels of governments since the 1990s. That was when major cuts were made to the Canada health and social transfer. In other words, Quebec has no authority to raise enough taxes to cover the growing costs of health care, while the federal government is collecting far too much considering the services it offers and their dismal quality.

The causes, as we know, are the so-called federal spending power, which allows the government to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction, along with inadequate intergovernmental transfers, the most problematic of them being the Canada health transfer.

According to the 2002 report of the commission on fiscal imbalance, this federal transfer not only applies to areas under provincial jurisdiction, it includes terms and conditions that unquestionably limit the provinces' decision-making and fiscal autonomy.

Unless and until health transfers become more generous and more flexible, Quebec's health care system will struggle to provide care to all Quebecers who need it, including, of course, those having problems as a result of eye disease.

Bill C-284 certainly is a step in the right direction. Overall, it does respect provincial jurisdictions. However, there is one exception, namely the first of the four pillars of the proposed national strategy, which interferes in an area of provincial jurisdiction. I believe that it is always important to remind the federal government that anything having to do with hospitals or clinical practice is the responsibility of the Government of Quebec and the other provincial governments.

Nevertheless, bringing in a federal strategy for eye care, especially when the time comes to play a role in funding research and approving drugs or devices, was more than necessary for advancing treatment in this field. That is why the Bloc Québécois will join the Canadian Ophthalmological Society and the Canadian Association of Optometrists in supporting Bill C-284.

Eye disease will become an increasingly bigger problem over the years, as I mentioned earlier. We are pleased that a bill addressing the issue has been introduced to move forward on this important issue, although we will reiterate again and again that provincial jurisdictions must be respected.

Although we do support the bill, it would have been nice if it had been more ambitious, while still respecting provincial jurisdictions. No one can be against developing national strategies and designat-

ing certain months to raise awareness, as the bill plans to do with the month of February, but sooner or later, the Quebec health care system will need transfers.

● (1335)

Once this bill passes, it will be high time for the federal government to finally provide the health transfers that will allow for meaningful investments to make concrete improvements to eye care services in Quebec. For example, these transfers could make it possible to adapt online government resources or offer people enhanced coverage under the Quebec health insurance plan, RAMQ.

Quebec's department of health and social services is already doing a lot through RAMQ. Quebec has one of the best provincial eye care plans in Canada, but it costs money. Indeed, on March 9, Quebec increased its coverage for ocular prostheses, something that had not been done in at least 30 years.

The rest of the provinces offer eye care coverage that varies from government to government. The provinces have already done a great deal of work, but there is still a lot to do. Of course, that requires investment. All in all, we agree with the spirit of the bill, and we will ensure that future bills addressing eye care get more and more ambitious, especially when it comes to health transfers.

When examining this bill, the Bloc Québécois will obviously take the time necessary to ensure that provincial jurisdictions are respected, as I mentioned, and that the federal strategy complements what is already being done in Quebec. Doing no harm is the least the federal government can do.

The Bloc Québécois will always be there to support measures that will enable Quebec to take better care of its people. Let us remember that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and the Liberal government has a lot of good intentions. We will simply ensure that the initiative, which is commendable overall, does not turn into yet another headache for those in Quebec who are actually taking care of our citizens.

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise on behalf of the New Democratic Party to talk about Bill C-284, an act to establish a national strategy for eye care. I want to thank my colleague, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, who brought forward Motion No. 86 in a previous Parliament to make this a reality.

*Private Members' Business*

In 2003, the Government of Canada promised that we would have a national vision health plan. Twenty years have gone by, and nothing has been done. The issue of health and vision care is fundamental to quality of life.

I will say at the beginning that I have had bad eyes my whole life. I have had to wear glasses. When I realized I had a cataract, I was shocked. The effect it had on my ability to work was dramatic. I could not read reports. I was stunned at how quickly my vision deteriorated, yet in the midst of the height of the COVID crisis, I was able to get into a public hospital in Canada to get treated. My quality of life turned around immediately. I know it was much to the chagrin of Conservatives that I was back at work the next day, holding both the Conservatives and the Liberals to account.

Issues of health care and vision care are fundamental. We see that cataracts, for example, affect 3.5 million people. Age-related macular degeneration affects 1.5 million people, and glaucoma affects 294,000 people. Diabetic retinopathy affects 749,800 people. This is affecting people in Canada, so to have a strategy to make sure we are including vision care in the overall understanding of health care is very important.

Certainly at the heart of the New Democratic Party's vision of health care, from 1961 with Tommy Douglas, is the belief that we need head-to-toe health coverage for everyone in Canada. It is not just about quality of life; it is also about the impact on our economy. It is about those we love being able to live lives of dignity. Deloitte just put the cost at \$33 billion in 2019, from a lack of proper eye care for people.

If it is diagnosed early and people have access to treatment, vision loss can be prevented in 75% of cases. How do we make sure that happens? It is about having timely access. It is about being able to go to an eye doctor. I mention this because in Ontario, the government of Doug Ford, the man who promised the people of Ontario that he would give them buck-a-beer, targeted eye care against seniors. As of September 1, once-a-year eye coverage that had been available has now been moved to once every 18 months. The Conservatives say that this is not a problem and that it is saving us some money, but here is the kicker: When someone is 84 years old, suddenly has a worsening eye condition and is told that they are not allowed follow-up eye coverage and will have to wait another 18 months to be seen, this is the difference between being able to see and going blind. However, Doug Ford said that seniors are no longer eligible for that care.

Adults with lazy eye are also no longer covered in Ontario. I talked about cataracts and having lived through the frightening impact of suffering a cataract. People are no longer eligible to have cataract surgery in the Ontario of Doug Ford unless they can prove that their condition would cause significantly decreased vision. It is up to the person who is not able to see to prove to the Conservative bureaucrats in Ontario that they are eligible and that they deserve cataract surgery.

Doug Ford also does not think retinal disease is an issue that should be looked after. Corneal disease is no longer a priority for Doug Ford. Optic pathway disease is no longer a priority for Doug Ford. In each case, the person must prove they are suffering significant impacts before they are eligible for treatment. Otherwise, they

pay out of pocket. For people who cannot pay out of pocket, particularly in times of high inflation, the impact is the potential of going blind.

• (1340)

I think that any ordinary, decent human being would realize and agree that that is a real misuse of public trust, but then this also is the government that decided that, instead of favouring seniors with eye care, it would look after Mr. X in the Greenbelt.

Who was his other friend, the guy who calls himself the Phoenix Kiss? Is this like an episode of the *Sopranos*? Mr. Phoenix Kiss says, "Meet the fixer." He really fixed Doug Ford, with this bogus transfer of public land so that insiders could make money. Then, of course, there were the gifts at Doug Ford's family wedding. There were developers showing up to give money.

Members do not want to stand up and defend Doug Ford? Okay, I will continue.

One could hear the music playing as if it were right out of *The Godfather*. That was criminal, corporate, Conservative culture to a T. Those are the same people who say, "You know, when we get in-to power we're going to do nothing for people except sell off a whole bunch of public buildings paid for by the taxpayer to our friends". I wonder if Mr. Phoenix Kiss and Mr. X will be invited. Actually, Mr. X does know the member for Carleton who lives in the mansion at Stornoway.

I raise these issues because this is about issues of priority. In Ontario, senior citizens have a right and should be able to know that if they have problems with cataracts, or a degenerative visual disease for which they can get treatment, without regard to whether they are an insider developer who hangs out with the Ford family at their weddings. That is what public health care is about. Public health care is about the obligation of federal and provincial officials to put in policies that make sure that we develop the long-term benefits for the people of our country.

*Private Members' Business*

The New Democratic Party thinks this issue of a vision care strategy is really important. We are going to need to see, of course, some standards that we put in place to ensure that across Canada we are addressing the serious issues concerning lack of service for those who are suffering from visual impairment. For people who are blind, there is a real lack of services. We have seen in indigenous communities a lack of ability to access proper treatment, especially at a young age. When the inability of a child to see properly at a young age is identified, we are able to rectify problems that will affect their learning from the get-go. I certainly remember back in grade 3 when the nuns were yelling at me because I was heckling, it was also because I could not see the board. Then they gave me glasses and I became a much more focused heckler.

I know that my laser eye now has caused a lot of problems for both Liberals and Conservatives because I stay focused on the issues and it is not just the blur that it used to be. I can actually identify the differences between these parties and where they are both bloodily similar. That requires really good political eye progress.

I would stay all day talking about the issue of proper eye care coverage and the need for us to take responsibility on this issue, but I want to say that New Democrats support this bill. We think it is a good initiative. It is a bill that we have supported in the past. We supported it when it was sponsored by the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung. We have waited 20 long years to have a national vision care strategy and we need to get it implemented.

We need to also start talking about a long-term path to providing public coverage for all forms of eye care. This kind of care is fundamental to the value and quality of life and it is fundamental to the value and quality of our society. We will certainly be supporting this bill.

• (1345)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-284. I will only take a few minutes to express my support for it.

I want to congratulate the member for Humber River—Black Creek for bringing the bill forward. She has championed it at every stage. I know she has been here in the House to listen to the debate and has heard what members have had to say as it made its way through committee and back to us now for its final hour of debate.

I thought it would be important to point out some striking statistics that relate to the eye health of Canadians. In 2019, the year for which we have data, \$38.2 billion was lost in the Canadian economy, 1.2 million Canadians were blind or partially sighted, eight million Canadians were at risk of blindness and 1,292 deaths were associated with vision loss.

About 75% of individuals can be prevented from going blind if diagnosed early. Unfortunately, we all take our eyesight for granted until it is often too late. Bill C-284 attempts to raise awareness of the impacts of vision loss and blindness, improve eye health care and support, and foster innovative research to advance new therapies for vision loss.

It is important to try to put ourselves in the shoes of others. A close friend of mine, whom of course I will not name as I do not want to embarrass him, is slowly starting to lose his vision as a re-

sult of a genetic problem with his eyes. He is an individual who works in a technical field that requires him to always look at what he is doing and use his hands, sometimes on very small instruments. I think quite often about what will happen when he gets to the point his father did and he does not have the vision he requires to do his job.

Let us for a second think of the impact that has on people, not just from an economic perspective, because obviously they would be at a disadvantage, but also from the perspective of how it affects them psychologically. Having a strategy for how we will address issues like this, how we will support Canadians like this and how we can do more research and education around strategies related to the vision of individuals and the deterioration of it is incredibly important.

I want to again congratulate the member for Humber River—Black Creek for bringing forward this very important piece of legislation. I express my support for it and have heard around the House of others who support it. I really hope it will pass and make its way over to the Senate, where it can be adopted and then become law.

• (1350)

**Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on an important matter, the future of eye care in Canada, Bill C-284, which was presented by the hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek and addresses a matter of national concern and would ensure Canadians have access to a coordinated and comprehensive eye care response.

I thank the member opposite for bringing this bill forward. I am happy we have had some productive discussions over its content. One of my first concerns when I heard about the bill was the possible overreaching of power between the federal and the provincial government, because this does end up in the hands of health care, which is the responsibility of provinces, but I am so glad this bill would not do this. It is more about collaboration and what we can do to make sure we have national eye care and health for all Canadians.

I am surprised by one of the statistics I found, which is that 75% of Canadians have some type of vision loss or eye impediment. I am a prime example; I wear glasses. It is no surprise that a lot of us, as we get a bit more mature, start having eye difficulties. The other side of this is the fact there are a lot of diseases, such as macular degeneration, which are very hard to deal with. Any time one has loss of vision, it becomes quite incapacitating.

I will go off topic a little. I was at a conference a couple of years ago, and one of the guest speakers was a motivational speaker. He was a thalidomide baby and was born without arms. He said that every time he went to a classroom, the first question people always asked was how he lived without arms and whether he missed them. He would reply that he never had them so never missed them.

*Private Members' Business*

For most Canadians, it is the exact opposite when it comes to eyesight. Most of us are born with healthy eyesight and we take for granted the fact that we have good eyesight and we never think about losing it. We do not wake up and say, "Wow, I can see this morning." It is not until one has a disease or injury and loses their eyesight, or until one has an impediment to their eyesight, that people think about it.

I think it is very important we bring recognition to this. We also want to make sure there is a good strategy in place for Canadians and that we do not go after any vulnerable or marginalized communities. We need to ensure every Canadian, regardless of their social or economic background, has equal access to quality eye care. One's eyesight is very important. It is the number one sense that people are most afraid of losing. However, like I say, every day we take it for granted.

My grandfather had macular degeneration, and he told me an interesting story. He was not fully blind, but he was legally blind, and he could still see out of the corners of his eyes. He was legally blind and hard of hearing in his early 90s, and he said it made for a very long day. He still lived on a farm and he looked forward to cutting the grass in the summer, but he would cut the grass every day. I asked him how he saw to cut the grass, and he said that he could still see out of the corners of his eyes. He figured that if he cut it every day, he would cut every piece of grass at least once in a week, because he did not think he would miss the exact same piece of grass seven days in a row. This was something he did to keep his mind active and keep busy throughout the whole summer. This was one of the things he lived for. Unfortunately, he passed away a number of years ago, but that is life. At least he tried to live his life as best as he could with the impairment he had.

The big challenge when one has an eye impacted, whether it is through disease or injury, is to try to make the best of the situation. It is so easy to get down and ask what we can do now and think that because we cannot see then we cannot do anything. However, as we have seen through many different types of programs for Canadians, such as service dogs for the blind, Canadians can lead a functioning life.

• (1355)

We know that on every street corner, there are beepers to make sure they know when to cross the street. There are many things we try to do, but the main thing is hoping that Canadians do not have to go through this type of situation of losing their vision. A very important thing about this situation is that we want to make sure Canadians have a great eye care service.

Something else I found out are the studies on exposure to blue light. One might think, "What is a blue light?" Every one of us looks at our cell phone at least once or twice a day, or we look at computer screens. This is actually starting to have an impact on our vision. It is quite a horrible thing, when we start thinking that it could cause earlier macular degeneration in our children or our young adults. We need to start looking at what kinds of opportunities there are so we do not have these kinds of things affecting our eyesight.

For myself, the glasses I have right now do have a blue light filter on them so that it is not as hard for me to look at computer

screens. People are already starting to use technology in place to offset some of the things that are affecting our eyesight.

I have to admit that, even growing up, I was one of those people who probably did not take care of my eyes as well as I could have, because, being on a farm, it is quite easy to be in dusty conditions. When someone is using a grinder and not using goggles, they might even get a bit of a grinding file in their eyes. I have experienced a few horrible situations, yet one does not think about it and how it could impact one's life later on. As with any injury, all of the issues that could potentially happen seem to materialize the most later in one's life.

The thing with vision loss is that it is not just about how it impedes a person's life. It is also about their abilities, their mental health and the social integration and productivity they have. I talked about how one can have service dogs for the blind. Someone can have a cane to monitor where they are, but we want to make sure that people do not get to that stage. That is the one thing about this whole bill: making sure we have a structure in place between national and provincial jurisdictions to make sure that Canadians are taken care of the best they can be.

I did talk a little bit about how modern technology, such as the blue light filter, can help with eyesight, but there is also laser eye surgery. I know that the first time I heard about this, I was quite young, and I was wondering why anyone would want to cut the cornea of their eye to shape it so that they do not have to wear glasses. However, if someone wore glasses with very thick lenses, it was actually quite liberating to not have a heavy pair of glasses on their eyes. People were always concerned, wondering whether the scar tissue would be as strong as the original skin cells themselves. I think, as time has progressed, laser surgery has really materialized into a safe procedure.

Another thing is cataracts. People did not think about them. In the past, cataracts would go across one's eyes, basically like wax paper, and there was not much that could be done. Now, however, not only can doctors reverse that process, but they can also actually, when the lens is changed, get people back to 20/20 eyesight.

There are a lot of technologies out there that are helping with eye research and how it can advance Canadians, to make sure that they do not lose their vision. Technology is one of the biggest ways through which I am hoping we can solve a lot of our problems around the world, but more so with eye care, so it is very important that we have brought this forward.

In many cases, we can talk about how good technology is. At the same time, there are always limitations. One of the limitations I learned about regarding macular degeneration is that there is some new technology that was proposed that it is still in the final testing phases with Health Canada. How can that be rectified? I think, bureaucratically, there are some opportunities that need to be looked at so we can address that. That is something we need to start looking forward to. What kind of new technologies are out there that can save our vision?



*Private Members' Business*

I think it is very good that the member did bring this bill forward. Hopefully, we can actually get a better case for our health care for our eyes, and in the future, work collaboratively with the Government of Canada as well as with all the provinces.

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is not easy to speak after everyone else. I will be repeating things that others have already said. At least it shows that we are sometimes capable of sharing the same vision and seeing eye to eye—no pun intended.

Every time a bill introduced in the House of Commons has any direct or indirect bearing on health, we are forced to point out that health is the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces and that Quebec already has a number of programs specifically addressing eye health. My colleague from Terrebonne discussed this matter at length just now. I will use different words, but essentially, we are saying the same thing. Naturally, there is always room for improvement.

All we can do is once again point out that the funding from Ottawa is not meeting the needs and that the health care transfer agreement that was signed in March 2023 was very far from meeting the real needs of our health care systems. That is an obvious sign that the provinces were forced to sign the transfer agreement. The federal government twisted their arm to get them to sign it. It is so easy for the federal government to achieve its ends, given the ongoing fiscal imbalance between the federal government and the provinces. That is exactly what my colleague from Terrebonne was saying.

I would like to remind the House of certain facts. This is too good an opportunity to pass up. Ottawa offered only one-sixth of what the provinces were calling for, or \$46.2 billion over 10 years. In Quebec, three ministers pointed out that the federal funding was far below what Quebecers expected.

Let us not forget that the federal government continues to withhold Quebec's share of the \$25 billion that it had promised in the bilateral health agreements. Again, instead of sending that money to Quebec, which already knows its needs in health, the federal government is withholding the money to try to impose its priorities. I want to take advantage of the time I have left to call on the federal government to sign an agreement with Quebec that recognizes asymmetrical federalism and respects Quebec's jurisdictions.

That being said, I will come back to Bill C-284, which seeks to raise public awareness of eye disease and its treatment, as well as prevention, in order to improve health outcomes for Canadians. The Bloc Québécois voted in favour of the bill at second reading and we will also vote to pass the bill at third reading. Amendments were made that confirm our position.

In its initial version, the bill called for the Canadian strategy to impose clinical practice guidelines on the provinces. Here again, the federal government wants to lecture us and argues that it can do better. However, it is the professional associations that govern these professions, and they fall under provincial jurisdiction. In Quebec, the Ordre des optométristes du Québec was established under the

province's professional code and the Optometry Act. In addition to regulating the profession, the order ensures the quality, practice and continuing education of its members. It stands to reason that clinical practice guidelines cannot be imposed by the federal government. The government acknowledged its mistake and removed that aspect from the bill, thus limiting its jurisdictional encroachments.

The fact remains that item (a) of the content of the strategy remains an irritant, because, as mentioned, training and guidance do not fall under its jurisdiction. I would remind the House of the wording of item (a):

(a) identify the needs of health care professionals for training and guidance on the prevention and treatment of eye disease [including clinical practice guidelines].

This is another attempt to intrude. The training of health care professionals is a matter for Quebec and the provinces. Despite that, and since the term “identify” is not prescriptive and the bill contains some good elements, such as improving the examination of drugs and devices related to eye disease, as well as developing research, we will vote in favour of the bill.

I would like to highlight an important beneficial element of the bill. Point (b) of the eye care strategy mentions promoting research. Quebec is actively involved in ophthalmology research through its universities and hospital network. For example, the Vision Health Research Network, which brings together the Maisonneuve-Rosemont hospital research centre, the Université de Montréal hospital research centre, as well as seven Quebec universities and several integrated health and social services centres, conducts basic, evaluative and clinical research on eye health.

I am pleased to hear that the strategy will aim to enhance research ecosystems and that Quebec will be able to contribute its talents to tomorrow's advances in eye health, because research is definitely expensive.

• (1405)

In his speech, my colleague from Mirabel talked about how important eye health is. According to the statistics that he quoted from 2019, 1.2 million Canadians suffer from diseases that could lead to vision loss, and 4.1% of those people could become blind. He also pointed out that eight million Canadians suffer from an eye disease that may lead to blindness, and that, for some of these diseases, blindness is preventable. What is more, the health care costs related to these diseases can reach up to \$9.5 billion. Let us not forget the social and human costs, either. I could once again talk about the importance of increasing health transfers, but my colleague from Terrebonne gave such a good speech about that and I already spoke about it briefly.

The federal government has a role to play in funding research and approving drugs and devices, for instance. The bill is now generally more respectful of the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

*Private Members' Business*

I salute my colleague from Humber River—Black Creek and congratulate her on her bill, because eye care is never a priority. Because it is never a priority, people lose their eyesight. Highlighting this neglected health issue is a major part of this bill and is part of the reason it is so relevant. We have to keep talking about it. As my Conservative colleague mentioned earlier, we live in the screen age. In Quebec, a coalition of experts that created an initiative called Pause Your Screen explains the following on its website:

Prolonged screen use can cause dry eyes (because we blink five times less when looking at a screen), eye strain, blurred vision, headaches, burning, itchy eyes as well as a loss of attention or focus. In the long term, screen use can lead to ocular dryness, fluctuating vision, and photophobia (extreme sensitivity to light), cause or aggravate eye coordination problems, and foster the progression of near-sightedness.

That is a serious problem.

We will now turn our attention to pollution and its effects on eye health. I like to make the necessary connections between pollution and health. A 2021 study reported that researchers had conducted a large-scale project to better understand the development of eye diseases. They found that air pollution can have serious consequences for eye health, especially in terms of age-related macular degeneration. The study was published in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology*. With tens of thousands of study subjects, it showed that people with higher exposure to air pollution presented higher rates of age-related macular degeneration. We know that air pollution has a significant impact on health. This is yet another reason to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> levels and transition to renewable energy sources as quickly as possible.

The bill also designates February as age-related macular degeneration awareness month. That is the name of the disease. As the population ages, the frequency of this disease will increase. Now, we also know that high levels of air pollution will also increase the frequency of this disease.

I will close by saying that if some people remain blind to environmental problems and pollution, then there is a good chance that they will go blind from the CO<sub>2</sub> pollution in the air.

• (1410)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek for her right of reply.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is an exciting day for me, as the presenter for this bill. From the beginning, I dedicated this bill to my grandmother, who was blind when she passed away; to my aunt, who had macular degeneration and was blind when she passed away a few weeks ago; and to my mentor, Paul Valenti. All suffered from blindness through various diseases.

As we celebrate October as Vision Month and Children's Vision Month, I am honoured that I got our bill moved forward this fast, even though it seemed like ages to me. However, at least it moved forward and is here at the last hour. I want to thank my fellow MPs for their support, especially the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay; the member for Scarborough North; and the Assistant Deputy Speaker, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung. All were very helpful in helping to trade up the system

that we work in, in order to get this moved forward with their additional support. I also want to thank the Hon. Don Boudria, a former colleague whom we all know and a good friend to many of us in the House, for his continued support and invaluable advice at each stage of this bill as to how one gets a private member's bill through the system faster than the regular system.

I thank the countless organizations that have been calling for an eye strategy for Canada since 2003, including the Canadian Council of the Blind and Michael Bergeron, Dr. Keith Gordon and Jim Tokos; Fighting Blindness Canada and Dr. Marie Simone; the CNIB and Thomas Simpson; Canadian Association of Optometrists and Laura Laurin and François Couillard; the Canadian Ophthalmological Society and Dr. Phil Hooper; and the University of Waterloo, with Dr. Stan Woo. There were so many who were helpful in moving this forward.

Members have heard from many of my colleagues that probably one in five Canadians has an eye disease, and some of them are unaware of that. A big part of what I want the eye strategy to do is to raise that awareness of how important one's eyes are. There are many children under 18 and seniors over 65 who are still not getting eye exams. By the time they get an eye exam, especially for a senior, they may quite possibly have developed glaucoma, retinopathy or many of these other eye diseases.

Seventy-five per cent of eye diseases are preventable, but in order to prevent them, people have to know they have the problem. We all neglect it, me included, usually until it is too late. We have an aging population. The pandemic also delayed paying attention to what was happening among a lot of people.

I am pleased to see that we have gotten this far on the bill. I look forward to working with the Senate as soon as possible. The Senate is very aware that the bill is coming, and senators have been asking when the bill would finally get through the House. I will now turn my time and effort over to working with the Senate to get it through as quickly as possible.

Canada has waited for a long time. The vision community has been waiting for years for us to live up to a commitment that not only our government but also other governments have made. We have made a commitment to the United Nations as well that we would have an eye strategy. As a result of the upcoming vote, hopefully this coming Wednesday, we will get a vote from the House of Commons and move the bill off to finalize the work in the Senate.

Again, I thank all my colleagues for their encouragement and support. I look forward to next Wednesday, having this vote here in the House and really moving it forward. I thank everyone who is here in the House very much.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1415)

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Speaker:** The question is on the motion.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy A. Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, I would like a recorded vote.

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 25, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

It being 2:16 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:16 p.m.)



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