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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 4, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ORDERS OF THE DAY

● (1000)
[English]

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed from October 3 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, just to refresh the House, this debate has been going on for a couple of days now, and it might be helpful to return to Mr. Berthold's amendment, which we are debating today.

The motion is:

That the government's failure of fully providing documents, as ordered by the House on June 10, 2024, be hereby referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The amendment reads:

That the motion be amended by adding the following:

provided that it be an instruction to the committee:

(a) that the following witnesses be ordered to appear before the committee separately for two hours each:

- (i) the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry,
- (ii) the Clerk of the Privy Council,
- (iii) the Auditor General of Canada,
- (iv) the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police,
- (v) the Deputy Minister of Innovation, Science and Development,
- (vi) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons,
- (vii) the Acting President of Sustainable Development Technology Canada, and
- (viii) a panel consisting of the board of Sustainable Development Technology Canada; and

(b) that it report back to the House no later than Friday, November 22, 2024.

We are now debating that motion to amend, which arose because of some underlying circumstances. I thought I would deal with those first, and then I will return to procedural matters, the question

of privilege itself and the merits of the question of privilege a bit later on in my remarks.

I will start by dealing with the underlying issue, which is, of course, that Sustainable Development Technology Canada, SDTC, was found to be egregiously in breach of its mandate on a level that makes even the sponsorship scandal under the Chrétien Liberals look like it was merely dealing with sort of piggy bank stuff. That millions of dollars have been reported by the Auditor General to have been allocated in a way that is a clear violation of basic conflict of interest rules as well as the internal rules for disbursements that SDTC had is really quite striking.

However, an element that was also raised by the Auditor General that has not been discussed, which I will spend the first part of my remarks talking about, is very important. In addition to the fact that members of the board of SDTC were arranging to transfer contracts to companies in which they had an interest as shareholders and, in some cases, primary officers, there is the fact that the results produced by these contracts were spectacularly unimpressive in terms of the stated goal, which is to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. The Auditor General could not look at all of the projects and instead took a representative sample of 18 completed projects. In her report, she stated, "We found that in 12 out of 18 completed projects in our sample, the projected reduction of greenhouse gas emissions were, on average, half of what was presented at the time the project proposals were assessed."

This raises the very important point that it may very well be the case that one of the reasons for this really extraordinarily poor level of delivery of performance is the way in which these contracts were allocated, who they were allocated to and the criteria that was looked at, which may have been enforced in a very lax manner, because the real purpose of giving out these contracts may well have been to provide income to those who were in fact involved in bidding for those contracts.

● (1005)

Of course, this is a profound conflict of interest. However, one of the things that we see over and over again when we are dealing with conflicts of interest in general is the phenomenon that it is not just that money gets transferred to people to whom it should not be transferred; it is that the end results of which the money has been spent are spectacularly bad. This, in fact, is the whole reason for avoiding conflicts of interest. If people simply handing money to themselves produced spectacular results, we would have no reason to object. However, that never happens. It did not happen in sponsorship and, it appears, from what the Auditor General was able to discover, that it did not happen here.

Privilege

Was the sample of 18 completed contracts a representative sample? We cannot be 100% certain. That is, of course, one of the things that will be determined when that impressive list of witnesses comes before the procedure and House affairs committee. We will, for example, be able to ask the Auditor General whether she believes that sample was genuinely representative. Were those projects unusually good or unusually bad as compared to the rest? I suspect the sample was representative, but she could confirm that. That is pretty important information to have.

I do want to point out that the government itself clearly thought that this was an issue, although it will not actually admit that because, on June 4, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry announced that the SDTC program would be shut down. Now, the government did make an attempt to say that, nonetheless, it had impressive results. A spokesperson, Janemary Bennigan, stated, as follows:

With respect to stewardship of public funds, SDTC has strong monitoring processes in place to ensure that every project...—every dollar—

I love that “every dollar”.

— is accounted for and has been correctly disbursed to the innovative clean tech projects and technologies that Canada needs to succeed in the new economy.

That, of course, is obviously, on the ground, not true. The program would not have been cancelled if the government thought that. At any rate, that is what they said.

I have to stop and point out just how meaningless this whole exercise will have been, even if these had been successful. Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are not primarily caused by air traffic; by road traffic; by people using old-fashioned, non-electric, gas-burning vehicles; by heating their houses with oil, or, as is the case with many people in my constituency, in rural Ontario, with wood. Those emissions would be small compared to the amount of wood that has been destroyed by fires in this country, fires that, while to some degree were caused by the sources that the government always points to when responding to questions about the fires, were also largely caused and greatly exacerbated, in terms of the amount of carbon put in the atmosphere, by bad forestry practices and bad forest fire management. Those were the responsibility of governments, to some degree provincial governments and to some degree the federal government.

In 2023, fires raged across this country and turned skies orange in places as far away as New York City and the state of Maryland. These fires consumed 184,961 square kilometres. I am not quite sure how the estimate I have here was that precise, but 184,900 square kilometres is a round estimate. That is 18.5 million hectares. It is 5% of Canada's entire forest cover. To give some perspective, Canada is the country that has retained the largest percentage of its forest cover in the entire world. Less than half is being logged, but 5% was vaporized in a single year. That put three billion tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, obviously many times the amount that this program through SDTC would have mitigated by many multiples. In fact, three billion tonnes of carbon dioxide is equivalent to four times global emissions from all aviation worldwide. Our greenhouse gas emissions from all other sources, all the stuff we are trying to vaporize the economy to stop, reduce or mitigate—

• (1010)

That is excellent mitigation right there with the lights going off in the House of Commons. Right there, we could probably reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Well done.

Our greenhouse gas emissions from other sources were 708 megatonnes. Just to be clear, that is 708 million tonnes versus three billion tonnes. We became the world's third largest greenhouse gas emitter in that year and put out more than the whole nation would do in this entire decade as a result of those fires. That is 10% of overall world emissions, which were 39 gigatonnes in 2023. This is data, by the way, from the Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research, EDGAR, a well-respected source that even the Liberals cannot accuse of being somehow a front for the groups that they like to accuse of being climate denialists.

I am not saying that the government is responsible for all of this. I am just saying it is responsible for some of it. There is no doubt that the mountain pine beetle destroying forests and turning them into tinder was a significant, highly burnable potential. Tinder was a colossal feature of this and the fact that climate change caused temperatures to rise sufficiently to enable the mountain pine beetle to cross mountain passes that were previously seen as being an impenetrable barrier is unquestionably at the root of a substantial number of the forest fires, at least in the western part of the country.

However, bad forestry practices were also a source of this, allowing forest tinder to burn up and not building firebreaks. Not anticipating led to colossal fire. It is not as if this is the first time, as if we could not have learned from the examples of previous fires. I note that the extraordinarily well-publicized fires in Yellowstone in 1988, which is a lifetime ago, burned 3,200 square kilometres. The reports that came out afterward indicated that the wrong kind of forestry practice of excessive fire suppression, which led to a buildup of tinder, then meant that when a fire occurred, it would be far greater in extent and scope and far more damaging.

Privilege

Those lessons have been well recorded for decades and were not taken note of. They were not taken note of, for example, in the lead-up to the devastating Jasper fire earlier this year. As we know, the fact that these conditions were in danger of being replicated were noted as early as 2017. Obviously, that gives seven years of lead time in which the government could have done something. That fire put much less carbon into the atmosphere than the ones a couple of years back. The fact is that bad forestry management, this time in a national park, which is exclusively federal jurisdiction and means the Liberals cannot blame the premiers, resulted in a disaster. This is after those fires, so the government literally learned nothing.

We became the world's number three greenhouse gas emitter. We put more carbon into the atmosphere than global airplane emissions for four years, 10% of all emissions, and we learned nothing because the government is fixated on one particular solution, which, in fact, will only nibble at the edges of the problem while ignoring this colossal other issue.

I experienced this kind of danger myself a few years back. I used to live in Australia. The Australian Capital Territory, which is mostly beautiful, forested alpine wilderness, was struck by fires that raged January 18 through 22, 2003. They destroyed nearly 70% of the Australian Capital Territory's pastures, pine plantations and nature parks.

● (1015)

I was not there when it happened, but I was in one of those nature parks. When I lived in Australia, I was dating a girl who lived in Canberra, the capital of Australia, and we would go out. Our recreation was to go on nature walks in the forest preserves around Canberra, which were very beautiful at the time. They call it "bush-walking" in Australia. Fortunately, because of the fire-resistant nature of Australian forests, much of the native foliage has largely recovered from those fires.

At any rate, I remember going to the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in the hills around Canberra in January 1999, four years before these devastating fires, and arriving at the front entrance to that park. There had been a dry spell. There is an entrance with a gravel road that people have to go through. The park ranger at the entrance had parked her car to block that road, facing the wrong direction, facing out from the park. She said that the park was closed because there was a fire hazard. The reason for the fire hazard was that it was forest fire season. Forest fires are quite common in Australia. On a previous occasion, I had not been able to get to my home because my whole neighbourhood was affected by a fire and shut down. I had to spend the night in a McDonald's.

At any rate, on this particular occasion, the park ranger said that there had been no fires there since 1939 and that the total fire suppression approach had led to, at that point, 60 years of detritus, of debris, building up. This meant that, if there was a fire, it would be extraordinarily severe and fast-moving. She said that, in the event that there was a fire, she would have to run to her car and hope she could drive out faster than the fire was moving; that was why her car was parked facing away from the park.

A few years later, there was another set of fires on the outskirts of Melbourne. They were even more devastating, and people were

burned alive in their cars as they tried to escape the fires. The park ranger was quite right to be thinking this way. My point is that this is widespread knowledge. It is widely known, and if the right things are done, the damage can be controlled by the government.

The Liberal government did nothing to control any of this. The result is that it is partly responsible for these massive carbon emissions, and this far outweighs the amount it was ever hoping to reduce in carbon emissions through this program. As we discovered, these programs were, on average, producing half the benefit that was recorded.

In addition, there was a series of abuses of process that arose because this is such a badly designed program. I now come to the reason we are dealing with all of this. Those abuses resulted in a motion that was produced in committee and then sent to the House and concurred in. This was a motion to produce a full reporting of a series of documents for the intention of taking them to our legal counsel, who would then pass them on to the RCMP.

The government withheld some documents entirely and redacted others severely. When confronted about this, it then came back and lectured us. One has to read the government House leader's report to believe it. The government lectured us that the fundamental parliamentary privilege of summoning all and any documents should not be allowed to happen when it might be used in some way that interferes, in the government's opinion, with some worthwhile objective. Effectively, our privilege in this matter has been extraordinarily narrow.

I will just add that the House leader came and made this claim to us not during the debate, but afterwards. This is an outrage in itself. The reasons for this will not seem obvious to someone who is not deeply imbued in parliamentary procedure, but it is an extraordinary thing to say. She was rightly chastised by the Speaker when he made his ruling, in which he said that there was a prima facie case and that we should have this debate. I thank him for that, and I thank all the members who have been participating in this debate.

● (1020)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was actually looking forward to the speech by this member. In my view, he has much knowledge of the constitutional aspects and of how the House of Commons should operate. However, I was surprised to find that, while a portion of his speech was about SDTC itself, quite a large portion, the bulk of his speech, was about firestorms. I did gain some knowledge from his observation on firestorms.

The member obviously knows that, under our system of government, the legislative, the judiciary and the executive have their own responsibilities and powers. The RCMP has written to the law clerk of the House of Commons to say that it cannot use these documents for its investigations.

Privilege

Does anything prevent the RCMP from getting any records on its own through a proper legal process?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I think that two issues are being conflated here. The separation of the executive, judiciary and legislative functions is less formalized here than it is under the United States Constitution. People often regard these as being much more systematic silos here than they actually are. What I think is really going on here, to the extent that it is legitimate, is an issue of what we would call the *sub judice* convention. This is the idea that when a matter is before the courts, it ought not to be discussed here. That is a convention. It is not a hard and fast rule of law.

None of this stuff is actually before the courts now or before the courts yet. The RCMP might choose to lay charges at some point. The thing about this right now is that the motion calls for these documents to be submitted to the House of Commons, not for the purpose of making them public but for the purpose of having them go directly to the law clerk.

Once they were in the hands of the law clerk, there would be about 30 days for the law clerk to go through them and determine what should be released to the RCMP. I believe that is what the motion states. The RCMP would be in a position to co-operate with the law clerk to confirm that, yes, this should be excluded or, no, that should not. This would be based upon the investigatory parameters that they are going to face and the restrictions that might be placed on wrongly obtained evidence being used in a trial. That can only happen if the materials are submitted. Withholding them is depriving the law clerk and the RCMP of their ability to do their job.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to take my colleague back to 2005. Sheila Fraser, who was the auditor general at the time, published a scathing report on foundations. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Liberal government created some fifteen foundations. As early as 2005, the former auditor general found that \$9 billion had been transferred to these 15 foundations between 1998 and 2002. That is equivalent to about \$17 billion today. She also found that the government had very little control over these foundations.

Should action not have been taken at the time to do away with this type of arm's length foundation that manages taxpayer money?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, that is a good question.

Those foundations are a sort of quasi-government creature. They also exist in the United Kingdom in the form of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations.

The United Kingdom was experiencing the same problems we have here. I think that the changes that were made in the U.K. to improve the issues with quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations could be used as a model here.

• (1025)

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston for his very thoughtful words and address. He has identi-

fied something without putting a label on it, so I want to ask him about the label.

I am not quibbling with the member, because there was a massive amount of greenhouse gases emitted from the fires that occurred in Canada in 2023. The figure I found from NASA was 640 million metric tons. He is right, it outstrips the emission of an industrialized country for a year.

He is quite right that the mountain pine beetle epidemic was brought about by warming winters, which meant that we no longer got the cold snap that stopped the pine beetle. British Columbia lost an area of forest two times the size of Sweden. Ironically, in British Columbia, that led Gordon Campbell, who was pretty much known as a right-wing premier, to develop North America's first carbon price and put a tax on carbon in B.C. at that time. He was trying to get ahead, bend the curve and reduce greenhouse gases.

The name for the thing he is talking about is a “positive feedback loop”. As the climate warms, certain natural processes accelerate. We get drier, hotter conditions that lead to a fuel load in the forest. The insect outbreaks that would normally be knocked back are not. The melting permafrost is the big kicker of a positive feedback loop, with a vast risk of mass amounts of methane reaching the atmosphere.

Does my hon. colleague believe that we should have a proper discussion in this place about the science of the real risks we face in the climate crisis?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, there are several different things to unpack in that question. I know the next speaker is going to be this very same member; she knows a great deal about this topic. I hope that, if she does not mind veering away from the prepared text she had, she will share her thoughts on the subject.

With regard to the issue of methane gas, in general, I heartily agree with her that trapped methane gas is very much a real issue. There is a formula that gets tossed around: Methane gas is 21 times as problematic as carbon dioxide. I am never quite sure exactly what that means, but clearly, molecule per molecule, it is a very serious issue.

If we look at human-caused climate change, the cause from humans emitting methane is much more serious than one would think from listening to the popular discourse. There is a very interesting argument to be made. There is a book called *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum*. I do not know whether the member has read it, but if she has not, I know she would find it fascinating. The author argues that humans have been causing greenhouse gases to release for far longer than we think, and it started with human rice cultivation, which caused an enormous amount of methane through the creation of artificial swamps.

This is a good area to study for sure. I am out of time to talk about the positive feedback loop, but maybe the next question will deal with that.

Privilege

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I ask a question, I just want to take a moment to wish my son Henry a very happy birthday today. I just like to get it on the record so that he knows I am thinking of him when I am not with him.

My question is procedural. The member and I both spent time in the procedure and House affairs committee. During Harper's reign, there was a very clear example of this happening before; he was held in contempt of Parliament, and there were these sorts of discussions.

How long are we going to keep this in the House, and when can it finally go to the place that it belongs, the procedure and House affairs committee, to get the work done so that the House of Commons can do its work? Does the member have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, first of all, happy birthday to Henry. Since we are on that trend, on October 10, it will be my brother's birthday, so happy anticipated birthday to Blake. As usual, he will be getting a book on flying for his birthday gift. My brother is a pilot; in fact, he flew over Parliament Hill as the lead aircraft in the July 1 Canada Day celebrations in a 1928 De Havilland DH.60. I have no other way of getting that on the record, so there we are.

There was a finding of contempt. It was brought forward via the procedure and House affairs committee. It never actually made it to the House. I know this because I was still debating it in that committee. I had the floor when the bells started ringing for us to come out for a vote of confidence in the government. In 2011, the intention was to introduce a motion that would bring down the Harper government on a finding of contempt from that committee. As members can guess, I was dissenting in that report, so I did not agree with it. The actual motion that came before the House was simply to find no confidence in the government, with no explanation. It was very similar to the first of the non-confidence motions that the current government faced about a week ago.

I do not think I actually answered the member's question; I guess I did. Yes, this should be going off to the procedure and House affairs committee as soon as it can.

• (1030)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston for having established some discussion on the real issue of climate change as we approach the motion on the question of privilege in front of us and the levels of breakdown of normal processes that occurred within Sustainable Development Technology Canada, which has now absorbed us for several days of debate.

I will cut to the chase and say this: With respect to the views of the Green Party, when Parliament requires documents to be submitted, they should be submitted in full so we can work on them.

I also recall the incident that my colleague was just referencing, which had to do with the documentation of Afghan detainees. My hon. colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound knows much about this as well. We did, at the time, realize that evidence was coming to light that Canada was complicit in sort of grabbing anyone off the street who might be considered suspect, including street

vendors and other people who were not combatants, and turning them over to U.S. forces, where they faced torture.

That was the issue we were last seized with in the House with a demand for documents that was thwarted. As my hon. colleague recalls so correctly, it led to an election and to not talking about the issue ever again. One of the first things I did when elected as a member of Parliament was to try to pursue it with questions on the Order Paper to try to find out, if we could, what had occurred and how it was that Canada was caught up in doing something that, certainly on the surface, violated international law and subjected totally innocent people to torture.

However, we are where we are now, discussing Sustainable Development Technology Canada. It is really important that we define and try to avoid the obvious partisan appeal of screaming “scandal” and “corruption” in ways that will alarm Canadians by suggesting that this is just a cesspool of corruption here in Ottawa. I do not think it is, but there are some strands that require full inquiry and transparency.

I am glad we are having the discussion here today. A lot has already been said in previous speeches. I am going to start with saying something about the context of a setting that I hope is helpful to Canadians, which is that there are a lot of different kinds of corruption. We throw the word around. I want to clarify that, in this particular narrative, I see three different kinds, and some are more alarming than others.

The first, and of course this is the issue that Canadians think of right away, is when a bunch of politicians are pointing fingers and saying that certain individuals are corrupt. The first and completely unacceptable level of misuse of public funds is when public funds are taken to enrich oneself. This is the kind of issue that we faced here when we called to the bar the head of GC Strategies, Kristian Firth, who had made millions on the ArriveCAN app. We know that story, and we have not concluded it. We have not had an RCMP investigation. We did not get the money back. Taking public funds to enrich oneself is an egregious wrong.

The second form of corruption that comes into the story of the process of government's allocating public funds is a failure to exercise proper oversight. In other words, the people involved are not enriching themselves nor their friends, but the system somehow breaks down through some kind of overload, allowing our public service to descend to a level that falls below mediocrity and become incompetence.

The third level of corruption at play here is when public funds are shovelled into projects where the goal is political. That does surface in the instance we are debating, and I want to go into it somewhat. This may cause discomfort for some of my friends on the other side, because a lot of public money is being shovelled into technology that simply does not work, because it helps the narrative that we can keep producing fossil fuels and meet greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, doing both at the same time.

Privilege

In other words, the strategies on the climate crisis could be described as someone having their cake and eating it too, the kind of diet to lose weight that says that, by the way, we can keep eating chocolate cake because we have a magic pill to take later. In the same category are some of the things that were referenced by the previous speaker about projects with environmental benefits that were exaggerated and not proven.

● (1035)

This particular category of energy projects is called carbon capture, utilization and storage. It is heavily favoured by the oil sands companies, particularly by the Pathways Alliance corporations operating the oil sands. It is the category that first triggered interest by any of the auditors, so let me start with that one because chronologically it comes first.

The first time an Auditor General report said that we had better ask Sustainable Development Technology Canada to improve its performance was in 2017. A branch of the Department of the Auditor General is the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development, which I wish had been created as a separate office, like the parliamentary budget office.

I remember appearing before the environment committee when the chair was the late Hon. Charles Caccia, who at one point had been environment minister under former prime minister Pierre Trudeau. Charles Caccia's committee looked at how to set up a commissioner for the environment. It was one of the red book promises of the Liberals in 1993. It decided it could put it in the Office of the Auditor General. That is why we have the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development as a branch of the Auditor General's office.

The report of the commissioner in the fall of 2017 looked in detail at a number of energy projects, those that dealt with trying to reduce greenhouse gases through new clean-energy technology projects. It found there were several sources of funds that went to them, which were reviewed by the report of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development: the clean-energy fund run by Natural Resources Canada; the ecoENERGY technology initiative, also run by Natural Resources Canada; and the sustainable development tech fund administered by Sustainable Development Technology Canada.

In 2017, just to note the date, the commissioner said that overall they were very pleased to find that the funds were being well administered, that they were audited and that close attention was being paid to conflict of interest. Nonetheless, the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development said that Sustainable Development Technology Canada should take steps to ensure that we know that the projects are achieving their goals. We needed to follow up. The recommendations were clear that it should, in the words of the Auditor General, "improve its challenge function over projected sustainable development and environmental benefits."

This lays the groundwork for the commentary we find in the Auditor General's report that was recently quoted by my friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, the part of the Auditor General's report that states, "We found that in 12 out of 18 completed projects in our sample, the projected reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

were, on average, half of what was presented at the time the project proposals were assessed."

My hon. colleague asked what could be the reason SDTC was shovelling money out the door for projects that did not work; it must have been to get money into the hands of the people they wanted to have the money. I would posit a much more likely explanation, which is that the government has put forward a plan to achieve greenhouse gas reductions that depends on achieving magical results from unproven technologies. Therefore, we have seen a big increase in the amount of money that goes to carbon capture, utilization and storage, despite the fact that all around the world it has been shown not to work, and the projects within Canada have not achieved the demonstrated promised results. That is clear.

By the way, carbon capture, utilization and storage, for anyone who does not know, says basically that as we produce more fossil fuels or as we burn coal to create electricity, we will find a way to get the carbon that would otherwise be going into the atmosphere, capture it and drive it deep underground. Therefore we will avoid the impact of anthropogenic greenhouse gases by sweeping them under the carpet and hoping they stay there.

They tend not to stay there. It is a very expensive way to reduce greenhouse gases even if it works, and it tends not to work. The one thing we can absolutely prove about carbon capture, utilization and storage is what it captures. It captures public money. It captures politicians. It does not capture carbon much. It does not work.

However, when we look at the Auditor General's reports, and particularly the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development's report, we find that even though the results were not showing that it worked, by budget 2017, hundreds of millions of dollars more were dedicated to it. They were writing a report that stated their plan to reduce greenhouse gases, that this much of their target is going to be achieved by something that they just love and Pathways Alliance just loves, and that it is all wonderful. However, it is not even in the footnotes; it is not proven, and it does not work.

Privilege

Therefore I put to my friends here that part of the incentive for shovelling money out the door for projects that did not work was that there is an ideological article of faith in the Department of Natural Resources Canada and in the industry that the “have our cake and eat it too” strategy is going to work and help us meet our targets. That is not classic corruption, and my Conservative friends should look at it, because I know, to the extent that we have any idea what the Conservative Party would want to do about climate change, the Conservatives have said it would be technology. I suspect they would not have a problem with shovelling more money to the oil sands companies in what is essentially a disguised subsidy.

• (1040)

[*Translation*]

Obviously, that is another way to subsidize the fossil fuel industry. The government created a public fund to pay for technology that does not work. That technology is and always will be a failure.

[*English*]

This is always going to fail.

Let us now look at the other aspects of the SDTC issue and what we learned from it. One aspect clearly is that it was a fund created under the Chrétien government that was working very well for a very long time. It was supposed to look at technologies that were unproven and emerging. The government was not supposed to step up and say, “We love this one. It may never work, but it is really good in press releases, so we are just going to keep throwing money at it.” It is the case that in the fall 2017, the report of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development said that the operation did not have a problem with conflict of interest.

We certainly know from the 2024 report of the Auditor General that there was a lot of difficulty with conflict of interest. The way the board was being run was rife with conflict of interest, and that is a terrible shame because this was an operation, as I have said previously in this place, that, over decades, had worked in assisting companies with emerging technologies, which tend to have trouble getting seed funding through commercial banks and so on. It is very hard to get investment capital for something that is innovative, unproven and not an article of faith of the government of the day, which we would have to shovel money at, whether it works or not. In other words, Sustainable Development Technology Canada had done much good work.

The chair of the board changed after the 2017 report that found no conflict of interest problems, and I always feel awkward about using the name of a private citizen in this place, but she had to resign as chair of the SDTC board. Annette Verschuren had private interests in and continued involvement with companies that received SDTC funding. This violated the conflict of interest guidelines of the organization.

This also violated basic conflict of interest guidelines. I do not know about the rest of my colleagues here in this place, but when I was first elected and read the ethics code, I thought to myself, “Does this really need to be written down? Do people not know this?” The conflict of interest guidelines said that no member of Parliament should hire a family member in their office as that would be a conflict of interest. I remember thinking, “Who do they

think we are? They do not have to write this stuff down.” Apparently they do though, and one cannot be chair of a board and forget that they cannot distribute money to themselves when they are on that board.

Now, whether this rose to the level of criminality is something else to be explained and examined. The steps the government has taken so far mean that this is no longer going on. The SDTC operation has been folded into the National Research Council. The board members have completely changed. The new board operates to make sure these funds continue to flow to legitimate projects.

It is very important that operations are not tarnished by what is a completely unacceptable episode. To call it “sloppy” would be a compliment. How on earth do people sit around a boardroom table and say that, because of COVID and because everybody is getting this benefit, it cannot really be seen that I gave myself a special benefit? This is the kind of argument we heard in the committee. We also heard the people involved say that they talked to a lawyer, and they said it was okay. I practise law, and I ask what kind of lawyer gives that advice.

There is a code of conflict of interest that must be followed. Every member around that boardroom table had a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that happened. There was a large system failure, but let me say very clearly that this is not at the level that it would be so easy to say this was a bunch of Liberals doing favours to other Liberals. We do not have evidence of that. I certainly would like to know the political affiliations of the various people who got the money, but we know a lot of the money went to the oil sands, so I do not think this is your classic hand-in-the-cookie-jar kind of scandal.

This is a large system failure that concerns me greatly. I worked in the Government of Canada many decades ago when I was non-partisan. I was not a member of the party at the time, and I am very proud of my record of working in the office of the minister of environment from 1986 to 1988 when there was a majority Progressive Conservative government under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

The Government of Canada in those days was a gold standard. I do not mean just in a political sense, and I especially mean in a non-political sense. I mean the civil service, the people who rose to the level of deputy ministers. It was really gold standard stuff. There were deputy ministers, such as Arthur Kroeger, Harry Swain, and Gordon Ritchie, who were people of great intellect who were completely non-partisan. They provided to the government of the day advice that was evidence-based and solid. Those kinds of civil servants, and unfortunately some of them have passed away, so I guess they are rolling in their graves, are wondering what the heck happened.

Privilege

• (1045)

Where did this mediocrity creep in? Whatever government is the government of the day, and I think, in fairness to some of my colleagues who are currently on the front benches of the Liberal Party, the level of competence at the civil service had already been significantly eroded, and then we were hit with COVID. Fixing this is going to be a bigger problem than pointing fingers across the aisle. Fixing this will require that we no longer have captive regulators that do what the industry they review as their client wants. I see far too much of it throughout the government of Canada.

I saw Environment and Climate Change Canada pick the target of net zero by 2050, and I am sure it was not because science dictated it. Science says that is fraud, but it was the kind of target that the oil sands industry was not going to mind because they can pretend they are going to meet anything set for 2050 through magic later on. We need to be honest and transparent. We need to face facts, and in this kind of debate, I commend all of my colleagues for digging into the facts to make sure that conflict of interest guidelines are never blurred again and to make sure that, when public funds go to reducing greenhouse gases, we get value for money by actually reducing greenhouse gases.

• (1050)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with almost everything the hon. member has said. She did classify the corruption into three categories, which was very well put. I also share her thoughts on the carbon capture and storage thing that is going on. The systemic failure she mentioned is a matter of real concern.

The RCMP has written to the law clerk of the House of Commons stating that the records they would obtain through this process could not be used in the investigation. I would like to know if there is anything that prevents the RCMP from getting the same records, the same documents, through a proper legal process.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Nepean for his commentary, particularly on carbon capture and storage, which is another fake solution to climate change. My concern with this argument is that Parliament has the right to ask for documents. The Speaker has said we have the right to ask for those documents. We do not know that there is any criminality involved here. If it turns out that the documents we get cannot be used in a criminal investigation, so be it. The RCMP can decide, after it looks, there is nothing there, and we can move on. Nothing is violated in anybody's rights. Parliament has a right to ask for documents. Those documents should be produced.

I really hope that my friends on the other side will realize that we have had enough of this debate now. Can we please get back to the business of the House and do the work the people sent us here to do?

I ask the government to be transparent. When the House asks for documents, the government should give them all to us. If the documents cannot be used in a criminal prosecution, that is what it is. To my colleague, it is not an illegitimate process. It is not that it fails to be a proper legal process. It is just the right of the House to ask for documents.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was asked yesterday during debate about what could be done to prevent something like this from happening again. One thing that I think is missing is the will of the government to demand that the taxpayer be made whole. There seems to be a lack of a penalty for people who are caught furthering their own personal interests when they are put into these positions of trust at these board levels.

I am just wondering if my colleague would share that same view that there needs to be tougher penalties for people who are found to be furthering their own interests and that the government should be demanding the taxpayer be made whole.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, we have a number of cases that have come before us recently, and one that is more egregious is that of GC Strategies and the money given to an individual for work that we could say was really not done.

By the way, I would love to sue IBM for the Phoenix pay system. That was a big amount of money for something that completely failed, and it cost Canadians and individual civil servants who did not get paid properly. There is no accountability.

How do we get accountability when we are dealing with third-party contractors, whether it is McKinsey, Deloitte, GC Strategies or IBM? I used to practise law, so my first impulse is always to sue the bastards.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for her speech. Along that same line, I would like to ask her a question about the use of third parties, whether they are foundations or sub-contractors. It seems to me that the government resorts to this kind of practice far too often, at the expense of civil servants. They are the ones with the expertise and, more importantly, they can be held to account more easily when there is a problem, with spending, for example.

That said, it is not just about purely financial or, worst-case scenario, quasi-illegal situations. This practice also creates other problems. For example, in some cases, third parties are not required to comply with the Official Languages Act. Is too much distance being put between the government and those who provide the final service? The result is that, ultimately, the government is no longer accountable for anything.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, accountability is at the heart of this debate. It is also about the role of our public service relative to that of independent third parties who carry out contracts for large global corporations like McKinsey.

I think it is essential to build a stronger system for public servants. At present, our public service system is weaker than in the past. We have to make an effort to improve the situation and give support to our civil servants, not global companies like McKinsey, which make big profits.

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, here we are debating documents, again, and I know my Conservative friends want to forget about the Afghan detainee documents that drove the House to a similar situation. To the member, talking about accountability and public service is really important, but one of the tools we need is to update our Crown copyright laws. Crown copyright in Canada was brought in, I think it was 1901 or 1911, and it has not changed very much since that time.

This refers to the release of documents for studies, to the business sector, to the not-for-profit sector, to general Canadians, and it would also provide a solution to some of the problems we face here in the House. I would like to know the hon. member's thoughts. The Liberals had some interest in this with the former member for LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, who they then removed as a justice minister and has now left this place, who had an interest in updating Crown copyright because the United States, U.K. and Australia, basically anybody left on the planet, has Crown copyright in a democracy such as Canada.

When are we going to update that so we have more public documents, which the taxpayers paid for, accessible to businesses and not-for-profit organizations in parliament?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, believe it or not, I was not here in 1911, but the hon. member is right. He is absolutely right, and Crown copyright law needs to be updated. I also recall, and I can say his name out loud because unfortunately he is not here anymore, that David Lametti was keen on this. We do need to pursue it.

I remember a lot of my friends in the law community, and we used to talk about this, would refer to Canada's freedom of information law as being freedom from information, a system of no disclosure tempered by leaks. It is time to improve the Crown copyright laws, modernize them and make sure we do get to the place of documents and information being public by default.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said that she was hoping we would be able to get on with the regular course of business here in the House of Commons, but is it not up to the Liberal side of the House to comply with an order from the Speaker? It is pretty clear, and I am reading from his decision, “the Chair cannot come to any other conclusion but to find that a prima facie question of privilege has been established.”

Is it not up to the Liberals to comply with that order so we can get on with the ordinary course of business?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, that is one route. Another route would be a discussion among House leaders about a way to move forward and get the documents to take on the undertaking that they would be at the committee in time. The member for Langley—Aldergrove is not wrong, I just think the House and the Canadian public would be heartened to see us work together more so we could get on with some bills that need to be passed, but I do not disagree.

That is absolutely one way this would end, so too would be a decision between the official opposition, the government and other

Statements by Members

parties in this place to find a way to move forward. A case of privilege was made. We have had the debate. We need to continue to dig into this matter. For that, we need the documents.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a few points on the current status of our economy.

First, the Canadian consumer price index is at a 22-month high. A study commissioned by Bloomberg and conducted by Nanos Research shows consumer confidence is the best it has been in about two years. Second, inflation has come down to 2% and has been in the target range the Bank of Canada wants for the last eight months. Third, the interest rate is now 4.25%, and I expect it to go down by a further 50 basis points this month. I expect it to come down to 3.75% by December and further down to 3% by July of next year.

The other point I would like to make is on the cost of living. It is still a matter of concern to most Canadians, but it has been falling in terms of percentage. It has already fallen by 7%.

Hopefully, with inflation falling, interest rates falling and consumer confidence increasing, we should see it get eliminated.

* * *

• (1100)

ARSON

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to an Ethiopian couple who tragically lost their lives in an arson attack at the House of Covenant International Church in Winnipeg last month.

Geda and Zenabu recently came to Canada with hope but instead were met with horror. They were living above their church, which provides affordable housing for newcomers. In the middle of the night, a heinous act of arson consumed the church, and the couple trapped above were killed.

This is not an isolated incident. The government recently revealed that nearly 600 places of worship have been burned. Canada needs to protect places of worship from arson.

I have introduced Bill C-411, the anti-arson act, to address attacks against our churches, mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues and mandirs.

I extend my sincerest condolences to the family of the victims and members of the Ethiopian Society of Winnipeg, who continue to grieve at this time.

*Statements by Members***SPINNING WHEELS RELAY TO END PARKINSON'S**

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Saturday, I had the privilege of welcoming to Parliament Hill, alongside my colleague the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, dozens of cyclists who participated in the Spinning Wheels relay to end Parkinson's.

Three teams of cyclists completed a combined 10,000 kilometres across Canada. They travelled through all 10 provinces and through two territories, including remote northern regions and indigenous communities. Their mission was to raise awareness about Parkinson's, show the benefits of exercise in alleviating the symptoms of the disease, connect with others and build a community.

It was no easy journey. Over two months, these cyclists laughed, cried, became both physically and emotionally drained, and dealt with emergencies, but ultimately rode on. They are an inspiration to us all, and I invite everyone in the House to join me in applauding their tremendous accomplishment.

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HAZARDOUS MATERIAL TRANSPORT

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, recently Michigan approved an American billionaire's desire to ship hazardous material across the Ambassador Bridge to Canada. With this change taking effect in less than two weeks, the federal government and the Province of Ontario have been silent. It seems they simply do not care, even though the City of Windsor is opposed, as are the fire department, police association and many others.

Residents of Windsor are in a state of uncertainty and fear. We are allowing the profits of a U.S. billionaire to risk our water and our jobs. The lack of consultation, background studies and a clear safety plan is unacceptable. Our community deserves to know which neighbourhoods will be affected and what protocols are in place should an accident occur.

The Liberals are sacrificing our sovereignty and risking an environmental and economic disaster. The time for action is now.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge is opening up in months with a solution to this issue. Why the corrupt process right now?

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, like so many Canadians, from all walks of life, I am deeply distressed and saddened by the situation in Lebanon.

Within just two weeks, 1,000 civilians and 6,000 others have been injured because of air strikes by the Government of Israel. This includes two Canadians who have lost their lives. My thoughts are with everyone impacted in the region, regardless of which borders one is living within and regardless of one's ethnicity.

Yesterday, I met with a young physician in my office. She told me the tragic story of two of her family members who were killed last weekend. She also talked about how a member of her family needs urgent medical care and cannot access that care because of

civilian pathways, roadwork and infrastructure being reduced and bombarded.

We need to see a ceasefire. We need all parties to stop the violence. We need peace in the Middle East.

* * *

● (1105)

HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL CHAPEL OF THE MOHAWKS

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, this past Sunday, September 27, I had the privilege of attending a momentous and historic event at His Majesty's Royal Chapel of the Mohawks, the only first nations chapel in Canada to have royal arms granted by the Crown, situated in my riding of Brantford—Brant.

The event was a celebration to commemorate the granting of the royal arms to the chapel by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, signifying the deep-rooted bond between the Crown and the Haudenosaunee. The coat of arms embodies the words “faith, hope, charity” and encompasses a tree of peace, building on the foundation, the partnership and the traditions that extend back to the 1600s.

I congratulate His Majesty's Royal Chapel of the Mohawks on the unveiling of this new emblem, serving as a tangible piece of our rich history.

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50TH ANNIVERSARY OF MISSISSAUGA

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I recognize that my beloved hometown, the city of Mississauga, turns 50 this year. From humble beginnings, Mississauga has grown into one of the largest cities in Canada. It is known as one of the most diverse cities, with over 60% of the population a visible minority.

At the heart of Mississauga's success are hard-working people dedicated to ensuring our community is vibrant and welcoming to people from all walks of life. It is an honour and a privilege to represent the residents of Mississauga in the House.

Here is one more thing we are especially proud of. Since “Hurricane Hazel” McCallion was elected in 1978, our city has been proudly led by women, Mayor Bonnie Crombie and now Mayor Carolyn Parrish, and we love it that way.

Here is to another 50 years for the city of Mississauga.

BERNIE MACNEIL BASEBALL FIELD

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today in proud recognition of the funding of the Bernie MacNeil field in Sydney, Nova Scotia, a project that was tirelessly advocated for by the Sydney Baseball Park Association and the hundreds of parents who voiced their support and helped fundraise for the field. I would like to thank the Jays Care Foundation for its contribution and all levels of government for making this dream of a world-class little league ball field a reality.

As someone who participated in sports as a youth, I know sports is a core part of childhood development. With the Bernie MacNeil field, together with a multi-sport facility next door at the former Centennial Arena, kids across Cape Breton will have groundbreaking opportunities to participate in athletics moving forward. Investments like these allow our youth to thrive, teaching them values and lessons that will sustain them throughout their lives.

I am proud to be part of a government that has continued to deliver on funding for sports infrastructure in Cape Breton and look forward to saying “Play ball” next summer at the new little league ball field.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, nine years of this Liberal government is nine years too many.

Canadians are poorer than ever. Affordable housing is becoming increasingly hard to find. The high cost of living is forcing a record number of Canadians to turn to food banks. Today, thanks to Liberal soft-on-crime policies, crime is the only thing thriving in Canada. That is no joke.

The time has come for this Liberal Prime Minister to do Canadians the one favour he can still offer them: Call an election. Quebeckers have spoken: This centralizing, inflationary Liberal government no longer has a place in Canada.

The Bloc Québécois has also spoken. It is not there to serve Quebeckers. It is there to keep the Liberal Prime Minister in power. The Bloc Québécois continues to support outlandish Liberal ideas that are keeping Quebeckers down. It cannot even insist that the Liberals withdraw their order, which threatens to wipe out Quebec's forestry industry. The Bloc Québécois, what a misnomer. In the House of Commons, we call it the “Liberal Bloc”.

* * *

[English]

OLDE FORGE COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week we celebrated National Seniors Day. Last weekend, I met with a wonderful group of seniors from my riding at Woodroffe United Church, organized by the Olde Forge Community Resource Centre oasis program.

My riding has many buildings where most of the residents are older adults. They call these NORCs, naturally occurring retirement

Statements by Members

communities. The Olde Forge, with partial funding through the federal government's New Horizons for Seniors program, provides co-ordinators in these seniors buildings who facilitate social gatherings, food and nutrition events, wellness and physical activities, and anything else the seniors want. These seniors told me that because of this program, they feel less lonely, are healthier and can stay in their homes longer. This pilot project is now in four buildings in my riding, the three Ambleside buildings and the Rosewood.

I want to thank all the staff, the volunteers and the participants for contributing to a better community.

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● (1110)

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up.

The carbon tax is jacking up the cost of everything and what do the Liberals do? They appoint carbon tax cheerleader Mark Carney as their phantom finance minister to advise on economic policy. At the same time, he presides over a massive corporation that sought \$10 billion to take over our pension system. Can the Liberals get by just one week without helping their billionaire buddies at the expense of Canadians? Apparently not.

Canadians are sick and tired of it. Life for working Canadians has never been so hard. Food costs \$700 more than it did last year, forcing millions of Canadians to line up outside of food banks, but for well-connected Liberals like carbon tax Carney, life has never been so good.

Only common-sense Conservatives will end the conflicts of interest and bring home lower prices for Canadians. Let us have a carbon tax election so we can bring home powerful paycheques for all Canadians.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up.

With the House of Commons ground to a halt because of the Liberal government's refusal to turn over documents, I would like to take some time to remind the House of another Liberal scandal that will not be going away anytime soon.

Statements by Members

The labour minister from Edmonton is still under a cloud of guilt for his shady business dealings with Stephen Anderson and their company Global Health Imports. We have all heard about the excuse of the “other Randy”, but after the minister admitted recently that he had in fact been in contact with his former business partner despite previously saying otherwise, the suspicion of Canadians has only grown. My advice to him is to just tell the truth. It will make him feel better. He would also not have to worry about trying to keep his story straight because there would only be one version of the story.

After nine years of the corrupt government, corruption is one of the many crimes that Canadians want to see a Conservative government put a stop to. Let us bring it home.

* * *

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my great honour to rise today to celebrate community newspapers in all of our riding. This past week, I had the great honour of attending the 50th anniversary of the Ottawa South Community Association Review, also known as OSCAR. In this era of declining traditional media and the rise of social media, it got me thinking about the important role that community newspapers play. They are run by volunteers and tell our local stories.

In my community of Ottawa Centre, I am so grateful to have the Glebe Report, which also celebrated its 50th year last year; The Mainstreeter; Centretown Buzz; and the Kitchissippi Times. They are incredible papers that are telling stories every week about our communities and are incredibly important sources of information.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of the volunteers at all of these community newspapers for the incredible job they do week after week, month after month.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it has been months since the UN Secretary-General first referred to Gaza as a “graveyard for children”. Civilians continue to face indiscriminate bombing and starvation. Now the people of Lebanon face unimaginable danger in the deadliest escalation of violence between Israel and Hezbollah since 2006.

The threat of war between Israel and Iran looms over all in the region. The starvation and perpetual bombing of the displaced population in Gaza, which includes one million children, are intolerable. Attacks on civilians in Palestine, Lebanon and Israel must stop. Nobody in the region is safer today than they were 12 months ago. There can be no military solution to their suffering.

There should be no support from Canada for warmongers anywhere. The NDP is renewing our call for a full two-way arms embargo, recognition of the state of Palestine, sanctions on extremist Israeli leaders, a permanent ceasefire and the release of all hostages.

[Translation]

MANICOUAGAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am immensely pleased to rise today to mark the 70 years of the original chamber of commerce of the north shore, the Manicouagan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The chamber of commerce is a true link between businesses from Pessamit to Godbout, indigenous and non-indigenous communities and the industry, and it has become essential to the socio-economic fabric of Manicouagan. It brings together that which builds and makes the north shore we know and love: innovation, valour and ambition.

To the passionate board of directors, the team that is as dynamic as it is dedicated, and to the visionary entrepreneurs, I say thank you for inviting us every day to work together toward a common goal: To grow the north shore, with its endless economic potential, where our wealth ensures our prosperity and our leadership calls for sustainable development. Thank you for shining bright and for making us shine as well.

As I look forward to celebrating with them all the success of those who are part of the history of the chamber of commerce and those who will ensure its future, at the unforgettable business gala on 19—

• (1115)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, Sustainable Development Technology Canada was a federal foundation funded by over a billion dollars of taxpayers' money. It violated its own conflict of interest policies 186 times, awarded \$76 million in contracts inappropriately and awarded \$59 million to 10 separate projects that were clearly ineligible. In 63 separate instances, directors of the program voted in favour of payments to companies in which they had an interest.

Parliament has made a reasonable request for the government to help the ongoing RCMP investigation by handing over documents to Parliament. However, the government has refused. The obstruction has grinded Parliament to a halt. It is time to axe the tax, cut the corruption and call an election.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, have members heard the phrase “the Conservative hidden agenda”? It is something Canadians really need to be aware of. When it comes to the leader of the Conservative Party, nothing could be further from the truth. He is good at slogans and is great at bumper stickers.

Let me give a tangible example of the hidden Conservative agenda. Yesterday, during the debate on the national disability program, I asked this on three separate occasions: Would the Conservatives commit to no cuts on that program? Not one of them, not even their critic, would commit to saying they would not cut the national disability program.

These are the types of things the Conservatives are hiding from Canadians, because they know that the Conservative hidden agenda is something Canadians will not support.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up for the Prime Minister and his de facto finance minister, carbon tax Carney.

Since taking on the role, the friends and business interests of carbon tax Carney have benefited from billions of tax dollars, including \$2 billion for his buddy at Telesat, and Brookfield getting a seat at the table to get its hands on 10 billion Canadian tax dollars. Suddenly, carbon tax Carney is raising funds for the Liberals in exchange for all of those billions.

Will the Liberals co-operate with an investigation from Canada's lobbying commissioner?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Death Valley well driller is poking more dry holes.

Outstanding Canadians stepping up to advise the Liberal Party, or any party, is a very good thing. What the member wants to cloud is the fact that inflation is down, interest rates are down, wage settlements are up and the economy is up. We have reached a soft landing in this country.

The Conservatives should stop talking the country down. We are going to continue lifting the country up.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, like all Canadians, I wish that every time we looked for a scandal, it was not just surface deep, like the public safety minister being found guilty of breaking the law. The Prime Minister broke the law. The trade minister broke the law. These guys cannot help themselves.

Now the member wants to tell us that Canadians have never had it so good. That is why they have carbon tax Carney, who is lining the pockets of his friends and his own so that he can raise a little cash for a dying Liberal Party.

Canadians have had absolutely enough after nine years of their corruption and graft. Why will the Prime Minister not subject his new de facto finance minister to the conflict of interest regime? Is he worried that he is going to be found guilty of breaking the law too?

Oral Questions

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the predictions of impending doom coming from the member in particular and his political party really sound discordant to Canadians.

What is happening across this country? After the pandemic, we have achieved a rare feat: a soft landing, no recession, wage gains, inflation coming down and interest rates coming down.

The finance minister, this very week, is putting in place measures that will make young people more able to purchase a home. These are things that we do when—

• (1120)

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

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about what the Liberals have achieved: record lineups at food banks, with 25% of Canadians not knowing where their next meal is coming from and not able to heat their homes, and a third of food bank users being children.

Canadians are starving and freezing in the dark after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government and their carbon tax on everything, which is being boosted by carbon tax Carney, who is only doing it, of course, to raise his stock portfolio, as we saw with Brookfield stocks hitting a six-month high. In exchange for policies from the government, he is fundraising for it.

Canadians are broke. The Liberals broke them. Let us have a carbon tax election.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians know where this government stands. We have offered immediate and direct support to families, especially when they needed it most. We have delivered household savings and significantly strengthened our social safety net. We have promoted fairer practices and greater competition across our industries.

Notice that there are real solutions and zero slogans from this side. I guess that is just the Liberal government.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, nine years ago, this government was promising the moon and stars. Instead, we are left with a Canada where seniors, families and young people are struggling. This government has wasted Canadians' money and created record inflation. Two million Canadians are turning to food banks to put food on the table. Rent has doubled. The homelessness crisis is now affecting young students and grandmothers who can no longer make ends meet.

Will this government do the right thing and call an election?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what Canadians are worried about is the Conservative Party's agenda and secret plans.

What does this member propose to eliminate? She is going to make cuts to food banks and housing assistance. We are well aware that the Conservative Party is proposing to do away with tens of thousands of jobs in Canada's public service.

I think it is high time that this member and her party released their secret plan, which is harmful for Canada.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, here are some facts: Canada has fallen behind the U.S. in economic growth and productivity. That is not all though.

The OECD predicts that within the next three decades, Canada's economic growth will be at the bottom of the heap compared to other OECD member countries. Canadians want to take back control of their lives. The only way to do that is to call an election and bring a Conservative government to power.

Does the Prime Minister have the courage it takes to call an election?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when there is an election, this member will have to stop making false allegations and disclose the Conservative Party's secret plans to make budget cuts, impose austerity, withdraw supports for our seniors, withdraw housing measures, withdraw infrastructure supports for our municipalities, and the list goes on.

Our economy is doing well. Interest rates are falling. Inflation is down, and we have avoided a recession. We have a lot to do and we will keep doing it.

* * *

SENIORS

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, the House is calling for a 10% increase in OAS for all seniors aged 65 to 74, but it is by no means alone. Yesterday, CTV released a survey. Do members know that a whopping 79% of Canadians agree with us? That means 79% of people clearly see that depriving seniors aged 65 to 74 of a pension increase that is being paid to seniors over 74 creates two classes of seniors.

Will the Liberals finally say yes to a request being made not only by the House, but by 79% of Canadians as well?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was recently in my colleague's beautiful riding, and, after making some checks, I can confirm that 8,700 of her constituents are now receiving dental care because of the federal dental care program that she voted against.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, 79% of the population agrees with the Bloc Québécois that we must increase old age security for seniors aged 65 to 74. Everyone understands that it is unfair to create two classes of seniors. The Liberals are also going to have to see the light or they will end up paying a political price.

Do they understand that if they say no to 79% of the population, that 79% of the population might feel like saying no to the Liberals?

• (1125)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizens' Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is also important to inform that 79% that it is our government, who, since 2015, did all the great things for seniors. What did we do? We reset the age of retirement from 67 to 65. We increased by 10% the pension for the most vulnerable seniors, including women, those living with disabilities, those who are in need. We increased the guaranteed income supplement. Who voted against those measures? The Bloc Québécois did.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, Lebanese Canadians have told me they are terrified for their loved ones. They are horrified by the Israeli bombs destroying their family homes. Canadian citizens are trapped; leaving Lebanon is getting harder. Nowhere is safe.

We have been demanding sanctions on Netanyahu, an arms embargo and safe evacuation routes, and for the government to step up and push for a ceasefire. People in the region want peace and security.

Why is the government not doing everything in its power to end the war?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think every member of the House has raised concerns about civilians in Lebanon, as we have about civilians in Israel, in Gaza and in the West Bank. We will continue to advocate for peace. The violence and destruction in Lebanon has to end.

Canada has joined with its allies and has called for an immediate 21-day ceasefire. That is the only way we can get diplomacy to work. Wars kill people. Diplomacy will work; we have to give it a chance.

*Oral Questions***HOUSING**

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, rents are skyrocketing and families cannot find an affordable place to live. Liberals and Conservatives have stood by and done nothing while corporate landlords buy up previously affordable apartments to jack up rent and increase profits for their shareholders. Now we find out that these landlords may be using AI software to coordinate rent increases and price people out of their own home. It is the same software that is under investigation for illegal price-fixing in the United States.

Why will the Liberals not act to stop greedy corporate landlords from ripping off Canadians and using AI as a strategy to evict people from their homes?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is an experienced member of the House. Surely he knows that rent is a provincial area of jurisdiction.

However, we have not turned away from our responsibility to help renters at this time. We have added to supply. We have waived GST on the construction costs of apartments for middle- and low-income Canadians. The Conservatives would reimpose that. We need to add supply in the context of high interest rates. The measure is doing that. We put forward a renters' bill of rights as well. This is the first time the federal government has acted in that direction.

We are going to continue to support renters.

* * *

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is breaking news: The RCMP commissioner has confirmed that the Prime Minister's hand-picked directors of the green slush fund are under criminal investigation. What we have now is the Liberals' not only defying an order of the House to produce the documents and turn them over to the RCMP, but also obstructing justice by refusing to co-operate with the RCMP investigation. Nine green slush fund appointees have been implicated in funnelling \$400 million to their own companies.

Are the Liberals obstructing justice so their cronies can avoid jail?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am disappointed in the Conservative Party's approach, and I am not alone. If we look at what the Auditor General of Canada and the RCMP are saying with respect to the Conservative tactic, and people should really note this, they are extremely uncomfortable. You have caused a great deal of discomfort to those independent offices because of your behaviour here on the floor of the House of Commons—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I ask the hon. member to speak through the Chair. I hope I have not caused anything to anyone.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that the Conservative Party needs to be more sensitive and listen to what the RCMP—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for South Shore—St. Margarets has the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, the House was listening to the RCMP when the RCMP commissioner said yesterday that he is investigating the corruption with respect to the green slush fund.

The Liberals use the charter as an excuse. The charter does not exist to protect the Liberals and prevent and create obstruction-of-justice opportunities. As Liberals cling for dear life to the secret documents, they obstruct justice. Hundreds of millions of dollars have already been funnelled to Liberal cronies. What is the true number? Is it billions of dollars? Is it \$2 billion?

Will the Liberal who is obstructing justice and knows the true amount of the—

● (1130)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, instead of the Conservative Party's playing games at great expense to Canadians, being solely focused on its party's fortune and anything else or trying to filibuster on the floor of the House of Commons, why does it not listen to what the RCMP and the Auditor General are saying, which is that the Conservative tactic causes great concern. The concern is justified, as the Conservatives are trying to blur the whole issue of judicial independence. Shame on them.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, we honour the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, not the charter of crime and corruption as the deputy House leader seems to contend.

After nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up. Guess what; conflict of interest is up too.

With respect to the Liberal green slush fund, the Auditor General reported that 82% of transactions, nearly \$400 million, poured into the pockets of Liberal insiders. The House demanded that the government hand the documents to the RCMP. The Prime Minister refuses. How many more millions of dollars, taxpayer dollars—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor

Oral Questions

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would note that the member made reference to the Charter of Rights. Yesterday I heard a Conservative member say that parliamentarians should have the right to put people in jail. Conservatives have no credibility when it comes to the issue of the Charter of Rights and protecting judicial independence. They were literally laughable yesterday in terms of their performance on this issue. They should be ashamed of the way they throw to the side the independent office of our RCMP and walk on—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Calgary Heritage has the floor.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, the charter protects people from government; it does not protect politicians from prison. I think that the deputy House leader would be well advised to think about how every parliamentarian is not above the law.

While Canadians struggle with higher taxes, grocery prices and housing costs, Parliament halts, yet the Liberals still hide the truth, refusing to release documents. Two million people turn to food banks. Liberal insiders get rich. The RCMP investigates.

When will the Liberals comply with the RCMP, stop obstructing justice and give Canadians their money back?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I realize that the member across the way is relatively new. Let me give him a bit of a refresher and talk about Conservative corruption. There was the anti-terrorism scandal, the Phoenix scandal and the G8 spending scandal. Do members remember the gazebo scandal, the ETS scandal of \$400 million and the F-35 scandal? What about the Senate scandal, not to mention the election scandals? That one is plural because one of the Conservative members actually went to jail.

We do not need to be taking lessons from the Conservative Party of Canada on scandals; it led the way.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years, this Liberal government, supported by the Bloc Québécois, is not worth the cost or the corruption. The Liberals have lost control. Corruption is now the norm.

The latest news is that the RCMP has opened a new investigation into the Liberal green fund. Nearly \$400 million from the Liberals' green slush fund was given to Liberal cronies. The Auditor General alone identified 186 conflicts of interest.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to tell the whole truth? Why is he hiding documents that the RCMP needs for its investigation? Who is he trying to protect?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am not too sure whether the member across the way heard what I said in terms of the Conservative corruption that is out there. This is serious stuff. Where were the Conservatives when this

type of corruption was taking place? I talked about the anti-terrorism scandal, and the list goes on.

I want to focus on the election scandals because the only parliamentarian I am aware of who was literally taken away in leg irons was the parliamentary secretary to former prime minister Stephen Harper, Dean Del Mastro. Where was the Conservative Party when the Conservative Party demonstrated so much corruption?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years, the culture of secrecy and corruption instilled by the Liberal Prime Minister is so deeply ingrained in the Liberals and their cronies that we have reached the point where the House can no longer even do its work.

This government is hiding documents from Parliament and Canadians. It is once again disobeying an order of the House. It is disrespecting a majority of parliamentarians, who voted for an investigation of the green fund. Canadians are suffering. Two million of them are turning to food banks every month to put food on the table.

When will the Prime Minister pay Canadians back for his incompetence and corruption?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me pick up on when the member made reference to disrespect. What I see as disrespect is when the official opposition and the leader of the far-right Conservative Party completely ignore the advice that is being provided by the independent institution of the RCMP and by the independent Auditor General. I think it is irresponsible. It is ridiculous that the leader of the Conservative Party ignores the information.

At the same time, when we talk about corruption, talk to me about the individual who walked away in leg irons because of Conservative—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères has the floor.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, the House voted to end the two-tier approach to seniors by increasing the OAS pension for seniors aged 65 to 74 by 10%. Seventy-nine per cent of the population agrees with us. The Minister of Seniors will have to explain himself.

According to the new electoral map, he is penalizing more than 12,000 seniors in the riding of Gatineau and 30,000 in the Gatineau census division he represents as a member of Parliament.

Oral Questions

Can he tell these people why he would rather go to the polls than give them one penny more?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for correcting the math and statistics on the wonderful riding of Gatineau today. However, I did not hear an apology.

I encourage him to consider at another mathematical figure, the number 10,000. In his riding alone, 10,000 people are now eligible for the federal dental care plan that we put in place and that is helping so many people, even though he voted against it.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, soon there will be an opportunity to apologize to many seniors.

What good are the Liberals to seniors? The Minister of Seniors is holding back 10% of the OAS pension from 12,000 seniors in Gatineau. The Liberals' Quebec lieutenant is doing that to 14,000 seniors in the riding of Québec. The Prime Minister is denying 8,000 seniors in the riding of Papineau their pension increase. We in the Bloc Québécois are going to do everything we can for those seniors.

Sometimes these Liberals make us wonder if we would not be better off having an election.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, not only have we helped seniors by targeting the most vulnerable seniors, but we have also invested in housing. We are proud to have increased old age security and raised the income exemption to help seniors who still want to stay connected to the workforce.

Does anyone know who voted against all those measures? That member and his party, the Bloc Québécois, did.

* * *

[English]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of these NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, corruption is up and time is up.

Now it is confirmed that the RCMP is doing an investigation into this Liberal green slush fund. Taxpayer funds, \$330 million, were paid out in 186 cases of conflicts of interest. It is despicable that Liberal insiders lined their own pockets.

Those who broke the law must be brought to justice, so when will this scandal-ridden government hand over all the documents to the RCMP and recover every last dollar of embezzled funds?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when will the Conservative Party actually start respecting the independence of the RCMP? When will they start respecting the independence of the Auditor General? When will they actually start to work for Canadians inside the House of Commons by stopping talking so that we could actually get on to government legislation and do what the motion that they brought forward says, which is to see the motion actually go to the standing committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, nine years of this Liberal government has meant nine years of scandals. The RCMP has just opened another investigation. Corruption has become synonymous with this Liberal government.

Canadians are still waiting for answers about the Liberal green fund that doled out \$390 million in 180 conflict-of-interest cases. This is Canadians' money we are talking about. Canadians cannot afford housing or food, yet Liberal cronies have been lining their pockets.

When will this corrupt Liberal government allow Canadians to see their money again?

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to answer this question, and I think in fairness what I would like to suggest to the members opposite is that they really do listen to what the RCMP and the Auditor General have to say on the issue. I want to do a comparison, as I have tried to highlight the many different scandals of the Stephen Harper era, in which the leader of the Conservative Party today was a part of the cabinet. I think that they need to start reflecting internally on their behaviour, because not once did they ever make the type of inquiry or demand, rather—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe has the floor.

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of this NDP-Liberal government, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up, time is up and incompetence is up. The Minister of the Environment ignored the science, and as a result, Jasper burned. The proof is that his own executives were caught discussing cancelling prescribed burns for political optic reasons, yet prescribed burns are an essential tool for preventing wildfires.

Will this minister accept responsibility for his failure and apologize to the 2,000 residents of Jasper who have lost their homes and their businesses?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what the member opposite just said is simply not true, and if I was not in this House, I would probably be using another word. There have been 15 prescribed burns in the last 10 years, and the email he is referring to is Parks Canada employees discussing whether to use mechanical removals or prescribed burns.

What he is saying is absolutely false, and he should be ashamed.

Oral Questions

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Environment claims to be proud of his preparations for the catastrophic Jasper wildfire, yet one-third of Jasper was destroyed, there was \$1 billion in damages and 2,000 people were left homeless. It can hardly be described as a success. Everyone knew Jasper was a tinderbox. My former colleague Jim Eglinski even tried to warn the government in this house as far back as 2016, yet not enough was done to protect the town of Jasper.

How many more parks need to burn down before this minister is replaced by somebody who knows how fire works?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us talk about what we are doing on this side and what they did when they were in power. The last year that party was in power, there was \$2 million to fight forest fires with Parks Canada. What we have done in the last few years is \$85 million to help fight forest fires and to give the means to our forest firefighting force at Parks Canada to work with the Alberta government, to work with the city of Jasper.

It was \$2 million on their side and \$85 million on our side.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, indigenous elders endured genocidal policies resulting in indigenous women and girls being missing and murdered. Thanks to the Liberals, Wiikwemkoong first nations elders are on the verge of exile. Long-term care facilities are important for passing on intergenerational love and knowledge to keep indigenous peoples alive.

Liberals are refusing an act of reconciliation. When will this government deliver the funding needed for the Wiikwemkoong elders' home?

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is true that elders are an important part of indigenous communities. We know that it is important to continue to support indigenous women, especially on Sisters in Spirit Day.

I would also like to congratulate the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association on their brand new indigenous women's Resilience Centre, which opened last month. It is the first ever in provinces across Canada. Congratulations to the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association on an amazing achievement.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister said the government would hold back the Canada disability benefit until July 2025. What a disgrace. Over a million people with disabilities live in poverty today. They need support to pay for rent, groceries and medication. The Conservatives are no better. They will cut dental care, health care and essential services that persons with disabilities are entitled to. The government needs to act now, not next year.

Will it stop the delay and deliver the Canada disability benefit immediately?

• (1145)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservative Party will do nothing at all for persons with disabilities. We are the party that has stood by persons with disabilities. In our budget, we have \$6.1 billion to help lift people with disabilities. It is the biggest line item. We are proud of the Canada disability benefit. We are standing with the disability community, working together to uplift people. We are the government that is doing this.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians deserve reliable and safe travel options. That means efficient airports that can adapt to high demand. It also includes targeted investments in regional airports, such as at the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport located on the beautiful Toronto Islands.

Could the Minister of Transport update this House about a recent announcement that will benefit Canadian travellers and improve connectivity?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians are asking for better service at airports. Last week, I was pleased to make an announcement at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport about pre-clearance at that airport. Canadians can expect smoother travel between Canada and the United States, more travel options, more economic growth, more tourism, more trade and more security. That is what it is all about. Unlike the opposition, we are here for Canadians. We are here for productivity—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister from Edmonton misled committee when he testified that he had no communications with his shady business partner at or around the time of an alleged half-million dollar fraud implicating a “Randy”. When phone records demonstrated that that was not true, he changed his story and admitted to phoning and texting the shady business partner at that very time.

Oral Questions

If the minister is not the Randy implicated in the alleged fraud, why did he mislead committee?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is all about character assassination from the Conservatives. Not once, but twice, the minister in question has actually been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner.

Having said that, instead of attacking personalities day in and day out, maybe the Conservative Party should start listening to what Canadians are wanting to deal with. Why is the Conservative Party not being a little bit more forthright on what its hidden agenda is really about? Canadians want to see a dental program, a pharmacare program, a school food program, a child care program and a health program.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us get this straight: text messages implicating Randy, the minister's shady business partner cannot identify another Randy, we know that the minister contacted his shady business partner at the time of the alleged fraud, and text messages place the Randy in Vancouver at the same time as the minister.

How much evidence is it going to take for the Prime Minister to fire this corrupt minister?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have already answered that question.

At the end of the day, what is it going to take for the Conservative Party and the leader of that far-right Conservative Party to understand that there is an obligation to be responsible here, in Ottawa, on the floor of the House of Commons? That means allowing debates to occur on the important issues that Canadians are facing today. Instead of focusing their attention on the Conservative Party, they should be focusing their attention on Canadians.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member dodged the question the first two times, so let us give him a third time. The Minister of Employment and his business partner, Stephen Anderson, have refused to co-operate with an investigation into their fraud-ridden company. For months, this minister claimed that he had no communication, that he was not the one referenced in the text, and that he had nothing to do with his former business partner. Finally, after relentless pressure, the minister admitted he did text his business partner and he even called him to discuss their business, which is something he is prohibited from doing by law. Why did the minister, who claimed he had nothing to hide for months, hide this damning evidence?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have indicated very clearly that the Ethics Commissioner, an independent officer of the House of Commons, has, not once but twice, cleared the minister.

Having said that, my challenge to the Conservative Party across the way is to understand that the Conservative members actually have a responsibility to Canadians that goes beyond serving the Conservative Party of Canada. I would suggest that they are doing a great disservice to Canadians in every region of the country by their

behaviour, day in and day out, on the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1150)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would say that the Liberal government has a responsibility to tell Canadians the truth. The minister, only after turning over his phone to the Ethics Commissioner and only after months of relentless pressure, finally admitted that he did indeed talk to his business partner, which is something he is not allowed to do under law. The minister admits that they discussed business. This was after his business partner lied to a parliamentary committee by ridiculously claiming that the nine references to the minister were just an autocorrect. If the minister cannot be trusted to disclose what he called “just an innocent conversation”, how can he be trusted to be truthful?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, not once but twice, the Ethics Commissioner has cleared the minister. That is the truth. The member makes reference to the truth. This comes from a Conservative member and a Conservative Party that spreads so much misinformation, false facts and fake news, name it, through social media. When are the Conservatives going to start to be honest with Canadians and tell Canadians what their hidden agenda is all about?

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Senate is thumbing its nose at farmers. Here is the proof. Bill C-282, which contains only one provision and which was supported by all parties in the House, has been stuck in the Senate for over a year. The Senate has taken over a year to examine a single provision that seeks to protect supply management. By way of comparison, do members know how long the Senate took to pass Bill C-76, which was passed yesterday? It took three days.

Peter Boehm and Peter Harder, two senators appointed by the Liberals, are blocking Bill C-282. They are thumbing their noses at farmers and at all of us here, the elected officials. Will the Liberals ask them to stop?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our party has always supported supply management. Our party supported Bill C-282, which is at issue here. We are waiting for the other chamber to pass Bill C-282.

However, we have not heard much from the party opposite. The members of the official opposition have been fairly quiet on this issue. I hope that they, too, will make some calls to their Conservative colleagues on the other side.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, what we want is for the Liberals to talk to the senators, because the senators' priority should be to approve bills passed by the elected members. Everything else comes second. Democracy comes first.

Oral Questions

Two senators whom no one knows and no one voted for are blocking the will of all the parties to pass Bill C-282. I would remind the House that if the bill does not pass by October 29, the Liberals will have to answer to Canadians. It is therefore in their best interest to rouse the Senate, whether to protect our farmers or their own posteriors. Will they get on with it?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, our party has always supported supply management and will continue to do so. We expect that the other place will pass Bill C-282.

I know that my Bloc Québécois colleagues are doing their job when it comes to the Senate. We are doing our job when it comes to the Senate too. We are making calls, but once again, I have not heard the official opposition party making many calls about this bill from the other side of the House.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the corruption. We now know the Prime Minister's friend and media buddy, Tom Clark, was instrumental when it came to purchasing his new \$9-million luxury condo on Billionaires' Row in New York: a condo that includes Italian marble, a \$5,000 coffee machine and a golf simulator. This comes as Canadians continue to struggle with an unprecedented cost of living crisis. Will the Liberal government admit there is no justification for Canadian taxpayers' having to foot the bill for this lavish condo?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the truth is simple. The fact is that the new residence that has been purchased will cut costs and save money. On this side of the House, we will always stand up for Canada and the best interests of Canadians. We will engage with international leaders. We will continue to do the work that we need to do internationally, diplomatically, while saving taxpayers' money.

* * *

• (1155)

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberals, taxes are up, costs are up, crime is up and time is up.

The Liberals' \$60-million arrive scam exposed contracting fraud on taxpayers, called "bait and switch". High-priced consultants overbilled, under-delivered and sometimes did not even do the work. High-priced consultants lined their pockets while taxpayers were paying the bills.

Canada's contracting watchdog is launching a review. How much contracting fraud will taxpayers be on the hook for, and will the Liberals get Canadians their money back?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovern-

mental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have said time and time again that we expect our procurement process to follow all the rules and regulations. Any misconduct will come with severe consequences.

The CBSA has already implemented a number of measures to strengthen the transparency around procurement processes. It is working with the various commissioners to find additional ways to ensure that Canadians can have trust in our procurement process with CBSA, and we are supportive of the CBSA's work in this area.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to media reports, the Liberal government has covered up the contamination of a Transport Canada dock operated in northern Albertan indigenous communities. "The big dock", as it is referred to, is known as a community hub. It is where couples go for a walk, where people fish and where kids go to play and swim. Did the government really cover up the contamination of this dock, yes or no?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to say that safety is my top priority as Minister of Transport. I hear and understand the concerns from the first nations communities. It is absolutely crucial for remote, northern and indigenous communities to have access to the safe and reliable connectivity that they need. I will work with them to ensure that the operations at the facility are being carried out safely. The work is ahead of us, and we will make sure that we are on top of it.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, wildfires are becoming more and more unpredictable. As keepers of the land, indigenous communities have long held deep local knowledge to mitigate their impacts. Earlier this week, the Leader of the Opposition tokenized indigenous cultural practices when it comes to protecting the environment.

To the Minister of Indigenous Services, why is it important that first nations take the lead when protecting communities, lands and waters?

Oral Questions

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, there is a direct link between climate change and the extreme wildfires that we have been seeing across the country, worsening for first nation members. We have changed the way that the Government of Canada supports first nations so that they have the supports financially and from a self-determination place to be able to protect their communities. The good news is that, during the last wildfire season, half as many people evacuated from first nations communities.

We are going to continue to work with the real experts in this country: first nations and their partners.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is another day with another shooter on our streets. This time, it was a 21-year-old dirtbag or, as described by a veteran detective, a “muppet”. Having a record of 21 failures to comply with court orders and, not surprisingly, being out on bail, he sent a young cop to the emergency ward with a bullet in his gut. The NDP-Liberal government’s hug-a-thug mentality is putting cops and the public in emergency rooms and in morgues.

When will the government prioritize safety rather than empathy for cop shooters?

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that last statement is just outrageous.

I live in the city of Toronto, where this police officer worked. My family, my neighbours and I rely on the police every single day, and we are grateful for the work they do.

This member is a former Crown prosecutor, as he likes to remind us time and time again. It is provincial responsibility to deal with the enforcement of bail laws. The Crown prosecutors are appointed by the Province of Ontario. The Justices of the Peace who administer the laws are appointed and paid for by the Province of Ontario. He is asking the wrong people.

● (1200)

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, almost everyone they arrest is out on bail. No one stays in jail where they belong.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Larry Brock: Madam Speaker, they laugh. This is the president of the Toronto Police Association; they should wake up. Every day, Canadians are waking up to more news of shootings and murders. The minister bragged that his bail reform bill would make our streets safer, but the truth is, more criminals are out on bail and Canadians are more frightened than ever. The bill is a complete failure.

How many more lost lives is it going to take for the government to finally embrace jail, not bail, for serious violent offenders?

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again, he is pointing in the wrong direction—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. There was a question; we allow the parliamentary secretary to answer.

From the top, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, every single day in the province of Ontario, there are Justices of the Peace, appointed by the provincial government, who are letting people out on bail. This is because the conditions inside provincially built, provincially funded and provincially operated prisons are inhumane and not okay for people, even prisoners, to be in. There are judicial decisions by Justices of the Peace, who have considered this fact regularly. They said that, until those conditions change, that is going to be a major consideration when they are listening to bail applications.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fact is, after nine years under the NDP-Liberals, violent crime in Canada is up 50%. That is their responsibility, and it is really no wonder. Police report that there are 790 repeat violent offenders just walking the streets in Mississauga and Brampton. Police say almost everyone they arrest is out on bail, yet Liberals have made it very clear, especially yesterday in question period, that they support repeat violent offenders getting bail no matter what, no matter who gets hurt.

What is it going to take for the Liberals to realize that their catch-and-release policies are costing innocent Canadians their lives?

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, they just do not understand. They do not want to understand. The laws are in place. They cannot be enforced properly because the province is underfunding the system. One hour ago, none other than Ben Mulroney was on his podcast saying that one of the biggest problems is the lack of resources provided by the provincial government in the province of Ontario. That is why people are getting out on bail, full stop. They need to pay attention and look in the right direction. The laws here are in place. They need to stop sensationalizing and be serious.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Halifax Regional Municipality is home to a thriving maritime defence industry, Fleet Week, the Halifax International Security Forum and, of course, our Atlantic navy fleet. In Dartmouth—Cole Harbour alone, we are home to a thriving defence innovation ecosystem, including the Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship and hundreds of start-ups and established companies working and innovating in this sector.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence share with the House how our government's investments in defence and industry will benefit the Halifax Regional Municipality, Canada and the world?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a proud founding member of NATO, we know Canada must do our fair share on the world stage. This week, I was very pleased to open one of three international headquarters for the NATO Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic, or DIANA, in Halifax. DIANA will facilitate co-operation between military operators and NATO's best and brightest start-ups, researchers and tech companies.

While the Conservatives are against funding for NATO DIANA, on this side of the House, we are investing in Atlantic Canadian ingenuity and promoting NATO's defence excellence here at home.

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HEALTH

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canada made a commitment to eliminate new cases of HIV by 2030. There is still time to stop the spread of HIV, which is now hitting indigenous women and other marginalized Canadians hardest. Community-based HIV organizations have laid out the necessary path in two proposals; it would cost less than \$175 million.

Will the government provide the necessary funding to community-based HIV/AIDS organizations to ensure that all Canadians are able to access HIV testing and then get connected to care, or, despite its promises, is the government okay to continue to see the number of new HIV cases in Canada rise instead of falling?

● (1205)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his steadfast advocacy for patients suffering from HIV/AIDS. I believe that the member opposite would agree that we are all committed to making sure that we provide care for people who suffer from HIV/AIDS. That is why our government has invested almost \$90 million to help tackle sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections across Canada. This includes over \$30 million under the HIV and hepatitis C community action fund and the harm reduction fund.

Of course, there is more work to be done. We will continue to work with all members of the House to ensure that all Canadians suffering from HIV/AIDS—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the parliamentary secretary.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

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DENTAL CARE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Madam Speaker, Quebecers who use community clinics, hospital dentistry departments or long-term care facilities currently do not have access to the federal dental care program because of disputes between the Government of Quebec and Canada.

Some are children, vulnerable people, less fortunate people or individuals living with disabilities. Dentists are sorry not to be able to register their patients. All these people are being held hostage, being penalized because our governments cannot get along.

Can the Prime Minister tell us where they are in their discussions so that this unacceptable situation—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. Minister of Labour and Seniors.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I share the member's outrage at the Quebec government's actions. It wants to keep the most vulnerable people in our society from receiving dental care. We are talking about people in long-term care homes and children at Sainte-Justine hospital who do not have access to care, despite having paid their taxes.

Normally, Bloc members would be outraged by such a thing. I invite them to join us in speaking out against the Quebec government's actions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): This concludes question period.

I wish to advise the House that the volume of earpieces will now be reset.

[English]

Members using their earpiece at this time will have to readjust the volume.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to present a petition in which petitioners are calling on Parliament to pass Bill S-281, known as Brian's bill, in honour of Brian Ilesic, who was murdered in a triple murder at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. The petitioners are calling for this bill to be passed to prevent criminals convicted of multiple murders, or murder for that matter, from being eligible for parole after serving their minimum sentence.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the petitioners from my constituency of Saanich—Gulf Islands have been persistent in raising issues, including in this petition, relating to the need to protect old-growth forests and the species that depend upon them, particularly the marbled murrelet, an extraordinarily small seabird that only nests on the forest floor of old-growth forests. The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to immediately protect all critical old-growth habitat for marbled murrelets. That habitat could be protected federally through the Canadian government's commitment to the Migratory Birds Convention Act.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition, signed by a number of my constituents, supports my private member's bill, Bill C-377, which would allow parliamentarians to apply for a secret security clearance. They call upon the House to swiftly pass my bill to allow parliamentarians the ability to apply for a secret security clearance.

• (1210)

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition I have, the constituents of my riding point out that after nine years of the Liberal government, the economy is in terrible shape and there is crime, chaos and drugs in the street. They are calling upon the government to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget, stop the crime and immediately have a vote of non-confidence.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Privilege

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[English]

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this organization had incredible potential, with a billion dollars. It received a clean audit in 2017 after being under Conservative stewardship, but following the appointment of a Liberal-friendly board chair, we saw conflicts of interest and, frankly, grift and corruption.

Does the member think we need these documents to be referred to the RCMP so that Canadians can get accountability for their money?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the question of referring them to the RCMP is of less critical importance to me as a parliamentarian than delivering documents, when Parliament asks for them, to Parliament. That was part of the motion that was carried.

The RCMP is, of course, an agency separate from Parliament, and I think it is important to recognize that. However, once the House has them, we should make them public, and that would include the RCMP.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate for quite some time and am learning some interesting things, but some of the confusion I have has still not been clarified. I keep hearing that Parliament is supreme. I agree that Parliament is supreme in many ways, but does it have absolute power when we say it is supreme? I am not very sure we have that.

The Canadian system of government, as we all know, has three branches. There is the legislative branch, which passes laws; the executive, which implements those laws; and the judicial branch, which interprets them. Both the RCMP and the Auditor General have expressed their concern that the separation of powers is getting blurred in this instance. Parliament has many powers, but we are subject to the Constitution. With my limited knowledge, I can say that we have a process to amend the Constitution, but as long as there is a Constitution, we have to follow it. Whatever we do has to be done within the confines of what is laid out in the Constitution.

Whenever the word “supreme” is used in the democratic context, it reminds me of the word being used to describe, say, the Iranian Supreme Leader, who has trampled on the basic fundamental rights of millions and millions of Iranian people. The current government, the current system, describes him as the Supreme Leader, basically giving him the absolute power to do anything he wants.

Privilege

There are other countries in the world where the word “supreme” is used in the constitution, such as North Korea. The North Korean constitution explicitly names its chief as the supreme leader, who represents the state. Whenever the word “supreme” is used, I am slightly uncomfortable because, in my view, it denotes absolute power, and we know that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is something I am concerned about.

The Westminster system of democracy we follow is being followed in other parts of the world. Some follow exactly the model in the United Kingdom. Some others have small variations, but fundamentally they are all the same. In some countries, there is no clear division of power, although it may be in the constitution. In one of the biggest democracies in the world, where legislators interfere directly in the workings of the executive, the day-to-day administration that is the sole responsibility of the executive, there is constant and direct interference. We are not that.

We are a different society. We follow the Constitution. Some people ask me how Canada can be rich and successful when there are other countries that have more richness in natural resources than Canada. I explain to them that Canada is rich, successful and one of the best countries to live in in the world because of the way society has organized itself. Society has promoted the democratic concept, and elected officials at all levels of governments are answerable to the people who elect them. That keeps a good check on the powers of elected officials.

In Canada, we have always followed the rule of the law. There are many countries that may be richer in natural resources than us but are not as successful because the way Canadian society has organized itself is not practised in those countries. Again, whenever people say Parliament is supreme, this is the concern have. I think we should understand what is allowed by law and the Constitution and what the convention is. Convention is as important as the rule of law, just as the spirit of the law is as important as the letter of the law.

• (1215)

On SDTC, I am disappointed about what happened. Three objectives brought me into politics, and the third objective was to ensure that Canada continued to remain at the forefront of knowledge-based economies. The world is moving toward a knowledge-based economy, so I wanted to ensure that Canada was at the forefront of the new technologies and innovations that are heralding countries into the global digital economy.

Before joining politics, I was on the board of Invest Ottawa, a great organization that was set up to promote Ottawa and lead Ottawa into the new world by promoting the technology sector. Ottawa is a government town. We all know that. A maximum number of federal employees live in this beautiful city. However, the City of Ottawa, when the then mayor Jim Watson was elected, formed Invest Ottawa so that we could focus on using the knowledge power we have to promote the technology sector.

I was working in the private defence technology sector when I was asked to join the board. We are so proud that Ottawa is moving in the direction that was envisaged when Invest Ottawa was formed.

SDTC was a good addition to the various institutions that promote not only new technologies but sustainable technologies, all those things that help Canada get to its rightful place at the forefront of the knowledge-based economy. I was happy to see that SDTC was funding new and sustainable technologies. However, I was very disappointed when reports started coming out about the conflicts of interest being floated. The number of instances was very painful for me to hear.

Now that SDTC comes under the Natural Research Council of Canada, NRC, it is a matter of concern to me. I mean no disrespect to the bureaucrats and officials working at NRC. They have been successfully managing certain industrial assistance programs, like IRAP, the industrial research assistance program, but it is still a government department. It does not have the flexibility that an arm's-length body like SDTC has.

We have great Crown corporations, from Export Development Canada to other major Crown corporations. SDTC, on its own as a Crown corporation, had the flexibility of conducting its operations. Many things related to new technology are not available in paper well in advance for people to gain knowledge, understand them and take moves to promote them. That needs people in the field to help guide funding for new technologies and new companies. SDTC was a good way of promoting this, but now it has gone to the Natural Research Council of Canada.

I have a bit of a concern with the bureaucratic rules. There is certainly not a problem with bureaucracy by its definition, but sometimes the rules involved in bureaucratic systems tend to tighten the flexibility required to promote new technologies. That is an unfortunate development.

Now I am waiting and seeing. The funding streams have been restored; I believe they are working now. I am looking forward to seeing how companies are getting funding through the NRC house they are in. That is a matter of concern.

• (1220)

Speaking again of SDTC and new technologies, I am very interested in the mines-to-mobility sector. At this moment, the world is moving toward a clean economy. It is a trillion-dollar opportunity, but more than that, it is a necessity. It is necessary for us to be part of the clean economy, but this necessity also offers an economic opportunity. Mines to mobility is a small part of the larger movement toward that. This strategy is expected to position the government at the forefront of the new electric vehicle sector and everything connected to batteries, including energy storage.

The potential of energy storage is huge. It makes wind and solar power much more viable propositions. Today, wind and solar power are economically viable on their own, but the efficiency that would allow us to achieve energy storage through batteries makes them much more viable and would transform the movement toward a clean economy.

I am from Ontario, and I am glad to say that Ontario is one province that has moved away from power generation using coal. I wish the rest of Canada would move toward that. Recently, I heard a report that one of the G7 or OECD countries had become the first country to move entirely to power generation without using coal. I think we should move toward that.

Coming back to SDTC and mines to mobility, there are certain things organizations like SDTC can do, including identifying new technologies. However, these new technologies have to be implemented. When the Liberal government was formed in 2015, it renamed the industry ministry as Innovation, Science and Economic Development. I told the then minister to please not use the word “innovation” in any sentence unless the word “commercialization” is also in the same sentence.

There are still problems with mines to mobility. There are regulatory barriers regarding the time required for the development of new mines; for the exploration of new mines, it is still too long. I know the federal government is working with the provinces. It has formed, for example, what is called the Ontario table with the Province of Ontario so we can align our resources; stop the sequential approval process, as opposed to what we can do concurrently; and reduce the time required to develop new mines.

While that is a problem, in mines to mobility we also have a problem related to the processing of minerals. Today, China controls 70% to 90% of the processing of the critical minerals most essential to the electrical vehicle industry and energy storage industries using batteries. We do not have enough projects in the pipeline to be comfortable that we will take our rightful position in the entire mines-to-mobility spectrum. That is pending. Hopefully, we should be able to address this.

Our system of federation means certain powers are not with the federal government but with the provincial government. Under the mines-to-mobility strategy, one key component is transmission and distribution. The electric grid is under provincial jurisdiction, and I do not see a lot of things happening there. I hope the federal government will take a step forward, working with the provinces, to make sure that with the huge usage of electricity that is expected to come, we have enough power generation and a grid for the transmission and distribution of it.

● (1225)

On the power generation front, I have no issues. I think we can crank up power generation by using the natural gas we have. However, the electricity grid for transmission and distribution is something we need to look at.

Again, SDTC was a small part of our bigger objective to move toward this clean economy, these trillion-dollar opportunities. I think we have to refocus on bringing back its original objectives.

On this particular motion, there are some concerns. Both the RCMP and the Auditor General have expressed deep concerns that we are blurring the separation of powers described in our Constitution.

I was first elected in 2015, and for the first four years, I was a member of the public accounts committee. I did not know the im-

Privilege

portance of that committee until I joined; then I realized it is the most important oversight committee the House of Commons has. That is where I interacted, for four years, with the then Auditor General, and I learned quite a bit about the role of the Office of the Auditor General and how important it is in the functioning of our country's system.

Whenever the Auditor General expresses any concern about any of the things we do, I take it with the utmost respect and seriousness. That is where I have a problem with this motion. The RCMP and the Auditor General are concerned about the blurring of this division of responsibility and separation of powers.

In July, the RCMP wrote to the law clerk of the House of Commons. It had difficulty accepting and using the documents, or the records, that have been contemplated through this motion in its investigation because that would trample on the charter rights of the suspects.

My problem is that if the RCMP is unable to use the records and the files we intend to pass on to it, then are we not defeating the very purpose we want to achieve? What we are doing here, in my view, is counterproductive to the ultimate objective of all members of the House. Our objective is that any suspected corruption should be thoroughly investigated and the criminals brought to justice. However, the process we are adopting here may act as a barrier to achieving that. That is the major problem and the major concern I have.

I have listened to many of the members here and asked questions several times. The RCMP is an independent body, and it knows what to do and how to do it. We do not have to tell it how to do it. If the RCMP wants any record or any file, it knows the process. There is a legal process it can go through and obtain whatever it wants to complete its investigation, but we should not hinder its ability or capacity to do its work.

● (1230)

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the intervention from the member for Nepean, and as a fellow member of the industry committee, I also appreciate the work he does. He always asks very thoughtful questions and I appreciate that.

Privilege

I listened intently to the member's intervention on this privilege motion. I know he had an extensive business career before he was elected in 2015. In that situation, when he was an investment banker, if he had found that one of the people who worked for him had taken client money, would he have waited until the RCMP discovered it and applied to the court to get the documents, or would he have called in the police himself and turned the documents over?

That is the essence of and the difference in the argument the government is making versus the one we are making in regard to this production of documents.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, just as a clarification, I was not an investment banker; I was an investment adviser. Though "investment adviser" sounds big, it is basically a sales job of getting the business, but that is not the question here.

With respect to the example the hon. member gave, about an employee who does something wrong and whether I would report him or her to the RCMP, that is exactly right. I would do that. However, the situation here is not the same. The RCMP is aware. In fact, if I recall, during question period the hon. member mentioned that the RCMP has started the investigation, or something to that effect. When the RCMP starts that investigation, there is a legal process through which it can obtain any records it may need in the investigation and that will not trample on the charter rights of any Canadians.

• (1235)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have seen before with the current government, when there have been document production orders from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, is that the government has used things like invoking cabinet confidence to not release documents to the RCMP. The RCMP has been very clear that this is a fact in matters dealing with the current Prime Minister.

What the House has done here, though, is make a legally binding order of the government. Therefore, we have a solution to the problem the RCMP would eventually face when looking to get these records, and that is the government looking to obstruct it. However, we also have a legal order from the House of Commons to produce them. What is the legal basis on which the government thinks it can now just decide what the House of Commons can and cannot do? Does the Prime Minister know better than the majority of members democratically elected to the House of Commons?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned that the RCMP will eventually face problems. The RCMP has not expressed any problems. The RCMP has not stated that it is not getting the records or documents it needs in this investigation. If the time comes when the RCMP explicitly states that it is facing problems, then a solution can be worked out. However, let us not presume or assume that the RCMP will eventually face problems and try to push forward a solution that is actually counterproductive.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Nepean said he was concerned with conflicts of interest and is disappointed. I would say that is putting it mildly because we are talking here about 186 conflicts of interest involving board members, in which \$330 million improperly went out the door, much of it funnelled into board members' companies.

The Minister of Industry knew about it or had to have known about it, given the fact that an assistant deputy minister sat in on each and every board meeting when these conflicts occurred.

What does the member say about the minister's responsibility and, frankly, his complicity in the corruption at the green slush fund? If one were to listen to the member's remarks, one would be under the impression this was some distant arm's-length foundation, when nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member about the severity of the conflict of interest, especially when huge amounts of money are involved. I absolutely agree that this matter has to be investigated. If there is corruption or any criminality there, it has to be investigated and the criminals should be brought to justice. My only question is this: What is the process? The process, in my view, is that the RCMP is aware of it and, according to another member today, the RCMP has started its investigation. Let us go through that process. Let us not do something that actually hinders the process of investigation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that people following the debate understand that the ministers responsible took action. Independent reviews were done once it was found out. We had the Auditor General of Canada taking action, and we have complied with and are working with the Auditor General. At the end of the day, there was a freezing of the new funds that were going to be allocated. These are all tangible things to ensure accountability. In terms of transparency, we had a standing committee that has had all sorts of discussions on it. Today's debate is to send it back to a standing committee.

I would ask the member to pick up on the point of why the Conservative Party does not listen to what the RCMP is actually saying, considering that this motion is being brought because of the very real concerns of the RCMP.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that there are various actions that have been undertaken. The moment this was brought to our notice, the Auditor General looked into it. There was a process involved. I honestly have the same concern that the member has that the process we are going through is a bit problematic. I am still not very clear whether it is going to be productive.

My concern is that the process we would be adopting here would be counterproductive and may actually hamper the investigation.

Privilege

• (1240)

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North has clearly not followed all of the facts on this. The member does not clearly understand that a whistle-blower went to the minister's department. For 40 months, while the current minister was sitting in his office, he had an ADM at every meeting at which 82% of the transactions were conflicted. After a whistle-blower was going to the department over three months and became frustrated, as nothing was happening with the minister, that whistle-blower went public, and this appeared in the media. Then, all of a sudden, the minister realized that there was something going on in his department and that he should be doing something.

It is a total falsehood to claim that the minister and the government did anything. They did not do anything until it was out in the public. I would like the member to comment on that.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, as to the conflict of interest, I think we should first thank the whistle-blower for publicizing it. I certainly appreciate that. Thankfully, we have a whistle-blower protection act that was passed. We need more whistle-blowers in the various government and arm's-length organizations, or wherever corruption takes place. It should not happen.

I think it is all very clear what has been done since then. The Auditor General has looked into it. Reports have been produced, and according to the same member, the RCMP has started its investigation. It should have been done a bit earlier, but at least now it has started. Let us see how it goes and wait for its logical end.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, to the main question that we have here, the House, by majority vote, not just by the Conservative vote, made a decision and ordered that these documents be produced.

On what basis can the government refuse a legal order of the majority of democratically elected members?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, I have a small concern. Whenever the majority of the members here decide something, is it absolute? That is my question.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to join in on today's debate on the question of privilege and the violation of parliamentary privilege by the Liberal government in its refusal to produce documents as they relate to the SDTC scandal.

I will do a quick recap for those who are just tuning in. We know that the government took Sustainable Development Technology Canada and turned it into a green slush fund for Liberal insiders and friends. The Auditor General did a complete investigation on the governance of SDTC because a whistle-blower had come forward, and she found over 390 million dollars' worth of contracts had been given inappropriately by the board of directors, the members of which all had multiple conflicts of interest.

SDTC was a Crown corporation. It was fully funded by the taxpayers of Canada, and every person who served on that board of directors, including its CEO, was appointed by the government. The Liberal Minister of Industry individually appointed, through orders in council, all of those directors. It should be noted, as a former

chair of the environment committee who worked closely with SDTC, that the organization had worked perfectly until 2017.

The former minister of industry, Navdeep Bains, is no longer a member of the House. He was hired by Rogers and is making a pile of money there. In 2017, he fired the existing chair and board at SDTC and loaded it up with Liberal friends and insiders, many of whom had already received grants through Sustainable Development Technology Canada.

When the Auditor General started doing her research, she found that there was \$58 million involved. We are not talking about pennies here. This makes ad scam look like nickel-and-dime stuff. This was \$58 million that was rewarded on 10 ineligible projects. She found another \$334 million, in 186 cases, of money that was given to projects in which the nine board members had a conflict of interest and never recused themselves from the decision-making process. For almost 59 million dollars' worth of projects, there was no contribution agreement or terms that were met.

The Auditor General made it clear that the failure of this is that of the Liberal Minister of Industry, who did not follow through on his oversight or make sure governance was followed. He turned a blind eye when they found out that they were actually handing out money to Liberal insiders. We know that the Minister of Environment was tied to Cycle Capital, one of the companies that was receiving grants from SDTC, and we know that there was a board member on that fund who was also with Cycle Capital. He said that his shares increased by 1,000% after receiving SDTC funding. The Minister of Environment benefited as well. That is corruption at its core.

We also know that, yesterday, the RCMP opened up its investigation into the nine directors identified by the Auditor General in the SDTC green slush fund scandal.

Should we be at all surprised by this? This is a Liberal government that has always been ethically challenged. It is plagued by scandal, and the Liberals have a culture of corruption. All I have to do is go back. I mentioned ad scam from 2004. I was elected in 2004, and we were dealing with the ad scam fallout back then, but we have witnessed it going on and on as we have moved forward.

Let us not forget the SNC-Lavalin scandal in 2019, where the Prime Minister put pressure on his justice minister at the time, Jody Wilson-Raybould, to approve contracts for, and also provide a pardon to, SNC-Lavalin so that it could tender and bid on government contracts again. She said no, and the Prime Minister fired Jody Wilson-Raybould because she would not follow his word.

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• (1245)

She did her job as the Attorney General of Canada to make sure that the law was respected and that these individuals would not be given a free pass for their fraudulent activities in other countries and here in Canada. We know that the Prime Minister was found in violation by the Ethics Commissioner for putting undue pressure on Jody Wilson-Raybould. Of course, that was not the first time he was found in violation of our ethics rules. It was only the second time, but he is the first Prime Minister in history to face an ethics scandal.

We look back on the WE scandal of 2020, and here we had the Liberals trying to shovel over half a million dollars into the hands of their friends at the WE Charity. Luckily, we were able to get that stopped, but we found out that Liberal insiders, including Bill Morneau, who is the former minister of finance, was actually tied directly back to the WE Charity. His daughter worked for the WE Charity, and he was in there advocating, not recusing himself from decision-making processes.

We look at all the foreign interference that has taken place and the blind eye that has been given by these Liberals on what is happening. The arrive scam is another one where, again, we had millions and millions of dollars going into the pockets of two guys. We found out later that the ArriveCAN app could have been set up for about \$80,000. We are talking about \$54 million-plus that was used by these individuals to enrich themselves because they were tied directly to Liberal insiders.

Let us not forget about the Winnipeg lab documents in 2021, which started in 2020. The House requested and ordered for the production of documents. The government stalled that and blocked it. It even took the Speaker to court to try to stop the production of these documents, which showed, when we did receive them finally this year, that the two scientists in question were actually operatives for the People's Liberation Army in Beijing. The documents also showed that viruses and intel on different vaccines were shipped to China, and who knows what other security breaches happened at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. The Liberals were too scared to let the public see it. They were so scared in 2021 that, instead of providing those documents and having everything come out through the Supreme Court, they called an election. That, of course, broke Parliament and the process stopped.

I think that some of us over here would actually like these guys to call an election now so that we can have an election that would stop the documents from coming forward, if that is what the Liberals want to do. Then Canadians could make the decision on how badly they want to put the Liberals in the penalty box based upon the continued unethical behaviour and corruption that plagues their government.

I have mentioned that there has been ongoing ethical violations by the government as well. The Prime Minister was found guilty for taking a private vacation on billionaire island and using an un-sanctioned aircraft. We know that Bill Morneau was found out in the WE scandal, and he had to resign over it. We know that the public safety minister has been found guilty by the Ethics Commissioner on two different occasions, including awarding family members clam contracts in one of the Crown corporations. He was also

found guilty of having his sister-in-law, I believe, made interim ethics commissioner. How could he be unbiased when they are family members? It would make for interesting family gatherings, such as Christmas supper. We also have the trade minister, who went and gave her BFF and campaign manager contracts directly out of her office without tendering them out at all, and she was found in violation of the ethics rules.

Now we have the Liberals obstructing our parliamentary process. They are also obstructing justice. Will they turn these documents over to the RCMP? I doubt it. They are going to claim some sort of cabinet secrecy. We have to make sure that the rules of this place, our parliamentary procedure, our Constitution, our charter, even the British North America Act, are respected. That is the last thing the Liberals are doing.

• (1250)

The Liberals keep claiming that the issue is all about charter rights, but I will repeat what the leader of the Conservative Party said yesterday. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is designed to protect the people from the government, not provide a cover for the government to hide documents from the people. We have to recognize that the supremacy of our democratic institution, the Parliament of Canada, is the overall legislative body that writes the rules, writes the laws and directs our justice system, not the other way around. The Liberals are always trying to tilt the discussion.

If we look at the rules, we see that Standing Order 108(1)(a) gives the power to the House of Commons, to committees and to Parliament, to order the production of papers. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, which we often call Bosc and Gagnon, chapter 3, page 137, says this about Parliament:

The only limitations, which could only be self-imposed, would be that any inquiry should relate to a subject within the legislative competence of Parliament, particularly where witnesses and documents are required and the penal jurisdiction of Parliament is contemplated. This dovetails with the right of each House of Parliament to summon and compel the attendance of all persons within the limits of their jurisdiction.

It goes on to say:

The power to send for persons, papers and records has been delegated by the House of Commons to its committees in the Standing Orders. It is well established that Parliament has the right to order any and all documents to be laid before it which it believes are necessary for its information....The power to call for persons, papers and records is absolute....

It is absolute, yet the Liberals here continue to avoid, dither, delay and deflect rather than comply with an order of the House.

The Speaker came to the conclusion that a prima facie question of privilege has been established, which is what we are in here debating today and have been debating all week. The Speaker said, "The procedural precedents and authorities are abundantly clear. The House has the undoubted right to order the production of any and all documents from any entity or individual it deems necessary to carry out its duties."

A majority of duly elected hon. members from across the country are calling on the government to deliver. I wonder whether we are going to see the Liberals try to block the process again, either by taking the Speaker back to court because they do not respect Parliament or by proroguing and stopping all processes again? It is possible, and it is something we are all wondering about.

However, if the Liberals really think the issue should be something that the people of Canada should have a say on, then let us call an election. Then we can talk about things like the carbon tax and how it is impacting and hurting Canadians from coast to coast. We can talk about how the Liberals' out-of-control and hug-a-thug policies have created crime and chaos on our streets, the worst we have ever seen. We can talk about how the housing crisis is making it impossible for young Canadians to achieve the Canadian dream of owning their own home.

We can talk about how the reckless spending is breaking our country, driving up inflation and hurting employment right across this country, never mind that productivity is on the downturn, and that we are now making 50% less and the Americans are making 50% more than we are. That, to me, is troubling to say the least, because when the Liberals came to power, the financial situation in this country was strong; Canadians were making more money in the middle class than Americans were. Now we have fallen so far back because of the uncreative and negating policies that have hurt Canadians all over our country.

• (1255)

We know that this all came to light because of a whistle-blower who has come to committee. I want to read some quotes into the record. There are a couple that I think are really important. The first one states:

The true failure of the situation stands at the feet of our current government, whose decision to protect wrongdoers and cover up their findings over the last 12 months is a serious indictment of how our democratic systems and institutions are being corrupted by political interference.

This is by the Liberals themselves. We hear in here all the time that they are not at all trying to comply with the Auditor General's report or what the industry committee has said. They have not tried to comply with the order to produce the papers that are so necessary in getting to the bottom of what happened here, how their friends and Liberal insiders are getting rich while the rest of us continue to get poorer.

The testimony goes on to say:

...I think the current government is more interested in protecting themselves and protecting the situation from being a public nightmare. They would rather protect wrongdoers and financial mismanagement than have to deal with a situation like SDTC in the public sphere.

Again, the issue is not being brought out into the open. If we want to talk about transparency, we know that sunlight is the best disinfectant, so let the sun shine in. Open up the louvres, and maybe we could get the sunlight down here and have some actual truth and honesty coming from the Liberal government.

The whistle-blower goes on to say:

I know that the federal government, like the minister, has continued saying that there was no criminal intent and nothing was found, but I think the committee would agree that they're not to be trusted on this situation. I would happily agree to

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whatever the findings are by the RCMP, but I would say that I wouldn't trust that there isn't any criminality unless the RCMP is given full authority to investigate.

As we know now, the RCMP is going to do its job and get down to the bottom of the issue.

When we look at the scandal, we see that SDTC had its hands on about \$100 million a year of taxpayer money to hand out to help new start-up companies bring in new sustainable projects and new technologies, helping Canadians with bringing in some new technologies to deal with everything from waste water to greenhouse gas emissions and new software programs that would help reduce waste in our homes. However, because of the political interference from Navdeep Bains when he was minister of industry, by the Order in Council appointments that were made through him by the current Prime Minister and his Liberal cabinet, individuals came in and ultimately enriched themselves.

The key problem in all of this is that the SDTC executives who were put in as Liberal insiders decided that, instead of helping out other companies, they would enrich themselves. They decided to help their own companies and grant themselves their own government funds, which is a complete violation of proper governance and is criminality. The former minister of industry decided to willfully turn a blind eye, and the Liberals have been trying to cover up ever since.

Therefore I do not think any of us are surprised that we are here again having to try to convince the government to come clean, produce the documents, and allow Parliament to do the work it is elected to do and for the government to be held to account. Anything else we are seeing here is simply called a cover-up.

• (1300)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what is very clear is that for the Conservative Party of Canada, this is nothing but a game. That is the truth. If we listen to what the member opposite is saying, in his conclusions he virtually said that we should call an election. Then he went on about the slogans, the four bumper stickers.

The issue here before us is to allow the matter to go to the procedure and house affairs committee. Instead of that, the Conservatives want to filibuster.

The issue with respect to the content is this: If we ignore what the RCMP and the Auditor General have said, which is that they are highly concerned about the tactic the Conservative Party is using, then I could understand why they would be pushing for it. There is no justification. Let the standing committee deal with it. Why play the game? The people who are paying the price of this Conservative game are Canadians.

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Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North is once again standing up here working as the government's mouthpiece to deflect, delay, dither and essentially try to make false arguments. The RCMP and the Auditor General have never said anything of the sort, naming any party. That is complete misinformation coming from the member.

We need to also understand that Parliament is the supreme power in this country. As the rules state, as our Constitution dictates, there is nothing we undertake here that will be, in any way, impeding an investigation done by the RCMP.

I am glad to see that the RCMP is investigating. One of our slogans, if we want to talk about slogans, is "Stop the crime." Here we have the Liberals being complicit in a crime and helping with the cover-up of the illegal activities of the SDTC board of directors.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech. The Bloc Québécois agrees with the privilege motion we are discussing today. The government needs to be transparent. It has to be accountable and provide the information we need to be able to make decisions. That is our role.

My colleague speaks as though the Conservative Party of Canada is full of people who are always honest who have never had any problems. We know that Quebec's motto is "I remember". I would like to remind members of some noteworthy things that happened when the Conservative Party was in power. Today, it is in the opposition. Conservatives seem to think they are perfect and have a monopoly on common sense. I will remind them what common sense means.

In 2009, Richard Colvin, a former Canadian diplomat, had information on Afghan detainees transferred by Canada who were at risk of being tortured. We are talking about human rights; it is not a trivial matter. The Harper government, at the time, refused to give parliamentarians access to those documents. The same question of privilege we are discussing today was raised then. The Harper government refused to conduct independent inquiries. Peter Milliken, who was the Speaker of the House at the time, finally authorized the transfer of documents because everything had been redacted. We had access to nothing. It is funny, when the Conservatives are in opposition, they are the ones who are masters of transparency.

I would like my colleague to explain to me how Quebecers and Canadians can have confidence in them given this disastrous record.

• (1305)

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, it is interesting to listen to my colleague from the Bloc defend Liberal corruption. To answer his question on Afghan detainees, because I was here during that time, the government does have the power to limit access on things that affect national security and national defence. SDTC has nothing at all to do with anything other than Liberal embarrassment. With respect to the Afghan detainee issue, we did put in place a process that allowed members to actually look at the secret docu-

ments and report back if they saw anything that fulfilled any of the allegations that were being made by other parties.

Stéphane Dion and Laurie Hawn spent months going through thousands and thousands of pages of classified, top-secret documents on the activity of the Canadian Armed Forces as it related to Afghan detainees, and they came back with a nil report. There was no evidence other than allegations that were made through partisan interests.

I would also say that the rules are clear on this in Bosc and Gagnon; the House, as well as the Speaker, will recognize when there is information that could hurt the overall national security of the country.

I would say that the argument being brought forward from my friend in the Bloc does not hold water.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was kind of rich, I thought, that the parliamentary secretary talked about filibustering, when he has been up speaking on the very same motion and taking up time in the debate.

I talk to my father and to so many other Canadians who are so worried about the lack of transparency and the waste of taxpayers' dollars. They just want to know where their money is. They are so tired of the corruption with the current government.

I would like the member to comment on how important it is to restore trust in our democratic institutions, in our government. By covering things up, the government is continuing to tear down our democratic institutions.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, even the deputy minister of industry is saying that the money taken, potentially criminally but illegitimately, by Liberal insiders at SDTC should be paid back. We have not heard that from the Liberals at all.

On the issue of transparency, if the Liberals want to be transparent, they can turn the documents over today. However, no, they would rather sit here. As the member mentioned, the Liberal member for Winnipeg North, who has spoken more words in this chamber than all the rest of us combined, filibusters the most in this place. He has the gift of gab, but nobody has spoken so much and said so little.

• (1310)

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for laying out the timeline of what has occurred in this corruption and scandal.

I want to ask the member about something he touched on his intervention with respect to Parliament being supreme. The government is not fulfilling the will of Parliament. The government is discounting the authority and will that we as parliamentarians have given the government direction on.

Does it put questions in people's mind as to the functioning of our Parliament when the government is not following the will of Parliament?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with my colleague and friend from Kelowna—Lake Country.

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Canadians are concerned about transparency. They are concerned about the attack on democratic institutions. When we have the behaviour by the Liberal government of cover-up and corruption, bringing more polarization to this House because it refuses to comply with an order of the democratically elected Speaker of the democratic House of Commons, of course Canadians are going to question whether the House of Commons, our Parliament and our democracy are at risk.

I cannot stress enough that the Liberals have a choice. They can either continue to cover up their corruption and to try to talk this out, or do the right thing, which is comply with the order of the House so that they are not found in violation of privilege. If they are so concerned about it, they can turn the vote on the prima facie breach of privilege into a confidence motion so we can have an election to end this attack on our democratic institutions.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my intervention with a quote: “It’s hard not to feel disappointed in your government when every day there is a new scandal.” These are the prophetic words of the hon. member for Papineau, our current Prime Minister of Canada, and how true those words ring today.

After nine years of scandal, corruption and Liberal entitlement, the business of the House has been put on hold to discuss a new scandal of monumental proportions, the green slush fund. The government did not like that the former chair of Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, was being publicly critical of its agenda, so it fired her and replaced her with one of its friends. This replacement was known to the government as holding blatant conflicts, as she had interest in companies receiving funding from SDTC.

The PMO, the PCO and the minister were warned about these conflicts and the risks involved, but they appointed her anyway. The new chair went on to create an environment where conflicts of interest were tolerated and managed by board directors. What ensued was the creation of a slush fund for Liberal insiders.

The Auditor General found that SDTC gave out 390 million taxpayer dollars in inappropriate contracts. This included \$58 million for 10 projects that could not account for an environmental benefit or the development of green technology. In 180 cases, \$334 million went to projects in which board members held a conflict of interest. All the while, senior Industry Canada officials witnessed these conflicts but did not intervene.

The Auditor General herself placed the blame directly on the industry minister, who did not sufficiently monitor the contracts that were being given out. The minister was going further than that. He was actively covering up the existence of these shady deals.

Where he failed, this side of the House attempted to deliver some form of accountability for taxpayer money. Before adjourning for the summer, the House adopted a motion calling for documents related to SDTC to be turned over to the RCMP for review. At no point in the motion did it say that the instructions were optional. At no point did it instruct the government to redact information. As we know, the House enjoys the absolute and unbound power to order the production of documents, period.

The Speaker found that the government's refusal to properly comply with the House order constituted a breach of privilege. That is our government. This was not a simple mistake by the NDP-Liberal government. It was a calculated manoeuvre to avoid the discovery of any potential criminal activity that may have occurred under the government's watch.

The SDTC whistle-blower had suggested as much. They admitted that the Auditor General's investigation only scraped the surface and that if her investigation was focused on the real intent of those transactions, “of course they would find” criminal activity.

Let us thank goodness for the breaking news yesterday: The RCMP has announced that it will be investigating. Of course, it has full authority to substantiate any criminal activities that occurred within this organization. The fact that the NDP-Liberals have tried to cover them up and prevent Parliament from shining a light on these transactions is a serious indictment of their disdain for our democratic system.

For the sake of our country and our reputation around the world, I wish the green slush fund was the only case of corruption and disrespect for Parliament. It has now been two Speakers who have ordered the government to produce documents requested by the House, by this Parliament, and on both occasions, the Liberals have failed to do so.

The former Speaker found that the Liberals breached parliamentary privilege when they refused to produce House-ordered documents regarding the transfer of the Ebola and Henipah viruses from the Winnipeg lab to the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the subsequent revocation of security clearances of two Chinese nationals. The Conservatives wanted to know why two scientists with deep connections to the Chinese military were even able to obtain high-level Canadian security clearances and conduct work with dangerous viruses. What was the government's reaction? It thumbed its nose at Parliament. The Conservatives ensured that the president of the Public Health Agency was called to the bar of the House of Commons to be reprimanded by the Speaker, something that Parliament had not done in over 100 years.

● (1315)

Also, in relation to the pandemic, the Prime Minister decided to use the pandemic for his own partisan gain. Canadians did not want an election in 2021, but he decided to call one anyway based on differences of opinion between the Liberals and Conservatives on how the pandemic should be managed. He thought he could wedge Canadians. For the Prime Minister, it was his way or the highway. The Prime Minister rolled the dice and Canadians said “no way”.

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He failed to get a majority but destroyed many people's lives in the process. He verbally abused and wrongfully accused, and he denied culpability for the physical, mental and financial harms inflicted on Canadians. He also realized that he could not make COVID vaccines his supposed ticket to a majority government if our Canadian Armed Forces members were not fully vaccinated, so he ordered our serving members to be put through a horrific process of mandates, restrictions and punishment, which left our ranks depleted, our men and women in uniform demoralized and many seriously injured. The ramifications of his decisions will be felt in our armed forces for years to come.

Like a mantra, the Liberals continually said on that side of the floor that every decision they were making throughout the pandemic was rooted in science and that they depended on medical professionals because they themselves were not. However, here, too, the Liberals went over the heads of all parliamentarians, over the head of the Speaker and even over the head of the professional House of Commons nurse by denying members of the House the ability to do their jobs in this place on behalf of their constituents.

When it came to vaccination status and precinct access, the Liberals pushed aside the medical professional, the nurse. The Speaker ruled that she was the only one with the professional medical authority to make public health decisions for members of Parliament and House of Commons staff. The Speaker also ruled that the Board of Internal Economy had overstepped its mandate in its vaccine requirements in this place. That is when the Prime Minister, for overt personal political purposes, blatantly overrode the scientifically supported public health decisions of the House medical professional and took his own Liberal Speaker to court for daring to do his job without partisan, political interference.

Then there was a time I will never forget: the first debate I participated in, which sought to remove the government's accountability to this House. It was in regard to an environmental framework. That bill sought to give sweeping power to the minister and accountability to an advisory board. Today, with the green slush fund, we are certainly hearing how well it works out for us when one minister thinks a bit too much of himself.

Somewhat alarmed over this, I questioned the freshly minted member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country about this board. What was it going to look like? How many people would be on it? Where were they going to come from and what would their credentials be to give Canadians confidence? What would their mandate be? How long would they serve? I asked questions like that, while the member could not wait to rise and say that the board had already been chosen. With debate barely initiated in this House, the deed was already done.

From the green slush fund to the government's management of the pandemic to the obsession with appointing oversight bodies with little or no accountability to Parliament, the Liberals have a very unhealthy tendency to take more and more rights and responsibilities away from opposition parties in the House and give more and more power to ministers and outside governing bodies that are not accountable to this place.

● (1320)

Within his very first year of winning the incredible honour and privilege of being first servant to Canadians, Prime Minister, the Prime Minister said, "There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada," and he concluded that he sees Canada as "the first postnational state." This was at the beginning of serving this place and serving Canadians. I do not think he went to Canadians on that.

These are all ideologies, behaviours and conscious decisions that are made by the government and the Prime Minister to obscure and deny the depth of their political corruption. These are decisions that are made with no regard for what is best for Canada. Parliament is just an inconvenience for the Prime Minister, and it always has been.

Only common-sense Conservatives will end the NDP-Liberal corruption. We will end their attack on Canada's sovereignty, on our institutions, on our way of life, on our democracy and on our rule of law. On behalf of Canadians, the Conservative Party of Canada will also get the answers Canadians deserve. They are asking for answers, and they want them.

The member for Papineau, along with every member of the NDP-Liberal government, has absolutely failed in their duty to be accountable to Canadians, and Canadians have had enough. We keep hearing about how we need to listen to Canadians. Believe me, Madam Speaker, we have. They only have one thing that is absolutely top of mind, and that is to remove the Prime Minister and his corrupt government.

Taxes and costs are way up. Canadians cannot afford the basic things in life, and they are struggling. Crime is up by over 100% in many areas. What they are doing to this country is not progressive; it is regressive. It is destroying our nation, and Canadians are saying that the government's time is up.

The vast majority of Canadians want a carbon tax election, and for them, we will bring it home.

● (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I get it. The member does not like the Prime Minister personally. If we listen to what she is talking about, she is using the issue of so-called corruption, or scandals, as a way to express a great deal of frustration towards the Prime Minister.

However, I will remind the member that, when we talk about scandals, Stephen Harper and the Conservative government take it by a country mile. I referred to this earlier today. We can talk about the anti-terrorism scandal, the Phoenix scandal, the G8 spending scandal, the ETS scandal, the F-35 scandal, the Senate scandal or the multiple election scandals.

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These are all things that her holier-than-thou Conservative Party, with Stephen Harper as its leader, was deeply engaged in. Unfortunately, it was not until the last couple of years that Stephen Harper actually came up with the Ethics Commissioner. He was so pathetic when he was Prime Minister that he had to try to justify himself and show that he did have ethics. That is one of the reasons he brought it into place a couple of years before he actually left office; I should say that he was kicked out.

Stephen Harper drove the economy, in particular our manufacturing industry, into the economy; many other things motivated Canadians to kick Stephen Harper out of office. Does the member have any thoughts in terms of how unethical the Conservative government was?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I am a mom and a grandma.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: It is awesome, is it not? However, Madam Speaker, I can guarantee everyone in the House that, when one of my kids was out of line, I did not let them try to redirect. The current government is in power, and I can assure the member across the floor that every Canadian is hypersensitive to and hyper-aware of the shenanigans of the government.

I know that, in this place, we cannot say people lie. I still think that we will never truly represent Canadians in this place when that is allowed, and to the extent that it happens, it means that debate in the House is not real. What came out of that member's mouth was not accurate. However, what they are doing clearly is because they are before their own Speaker; they are being challenged by the RCMP left and right and being investigated. This is because they are doing things untruthfully.

When we can stand in this place and say those things, I know that it is just reinforcing in the hearts and minds of Canadians that the Liberal government has to go.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, we know that a request has been made to produce documents for the RCMP.

The RCMP, if it wishes, has the ability to obtain a warrant to go out and get information and conduct investigations. In contrast, the only power the House has is granted it through Speaker's rulings or committee recommendations.

The role of the opposition parties is different from that of, say, the RCMP. Our role is to hold the government to account and to let the public know where things stand, and this burden is perhaps different from that of a criminal investigation where the RCMP might get involved.

I would like my colleague to talk about the importance of the role the opposition parties play in the House and the fact that the government is not making it possible for us to carry out that role.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, yes, we have the privilege and the responsibility in this place to call for those docu-

ments, to demand those documents. That is what we are doing here in requiring the government to stop digging in its heels and pretending that it does not have to respond the way every other government has needed to respond in these kinds of circumstances. I am sorry, but there is no way that we should ever let up on requiring the government to do what has been demanded by the House.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, in April 2010, Speaker Peter Milliken ruled on the Afghan detainee documents that the Harper government would not release at that time. We had a series of different interventions from diplomats, other whistle-blowers and so forth. Parliament then had a motion pass, and the Speaker ruled on that in 2010.

If we had actually followed through with the recommendations and the path forward set by the House of Commons, as well as the ruling by Speaker Milliken, we would not be in this situation. We are here, and in what took place on the Conservative benches from when we had the Milliken response and decision to the end of their government record, they did not clean up this fiasco. Therefore, we cannot get the documents that we are seeking today, along with the Conservatives and the Bloc.

To my colleague, why was there not an attempt to correct this behaviour from the Conservative government at that time, under Harper, so we would not have to relive what we are reliving right now?

• (1330)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, that question was already asked, and my fellow colleague who serves as our shadow minister for defence gave a very accurate response. When it comes to our armed forces, members can believe that it is very important in my heart and mind as well. Let us face the facts: An election was run on that issue, and we won.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to put a little more detailed flavour on this so that people watching understand. The chair of SDTC, Annette Verschuren, who was hand-picked by the Prime Minister, was put in place after the previous chair complained about the government. She tried to get \$6.8 million for the Verschuren Centre at Cape Breton University from the slush fund she chaired. The investment committee said it was a conflict. The investment committee also said it would use the employees here to help her get the money elsewhere. The chair actually used the employees of the green slush fund to get a further \$10 million for the Verschuren Centre from Industry Canada and ACOA. That is the least of the corruption, but it is a very specific instance of what the Liberals are trying to cover up with their hand-picked chair.

What does the member think about that and why they are trying to prevent those documents from going to the RCMP?

Privilege

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I apologize to some degree for, perhaps, not focusing as much on the green slush fund as I should have done. It is a story unto itself that just shows the depth of inappropriateness. I do not know the words to use to describe what these people are willing to do to fill their own pockets and the pockets of those who are part of their elite group. It is inappropriate. We need to do what is right in this place.

Canadians are sick and tired of the government not caring about Canadians. As the Prime Minister has said, it is all about him. It is all about their decisions on the future of our country, and they are destroying it with their own criminal activities. It is beyond the pale. There is nowhere to put it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know that some members of the House who were here in 2004 will remember my former mentor and predecessor, member of Parliament John Williams. He was the chair of the public accounts committee during the ad scam scandal. I know everyone will be very sad to hear that, sadly, John passed away this past summer.

However, in our many meetings together, John always told me that one of the things that separate developed, successful countries such as Canada from others is having accountability. “Accountability” was his go-to word. In fact, John founded an organization called Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption so that we could bring accountability across the world to all of those nations where corruption was rampant.

Can the member tell us what happens when we do not have accountability, when parliamentarians do not take a stand and hold governments accountable when they are doing corrupt things?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the comments and the question. The truth of the matter is, if we do not hold these people to account, Canadians will suffer even more than they already are.

• (1335)

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, what a sad state of affairs we have seen this week from the Liberals. Here we are engaging in what should be a serious conversation about a pressing issue, only to hear the members opposite say, “What about them? They did something worse.” It is that old political tactic of whataboutism, the ultimate escape hatch for avoiding accountability. It has become the go-to response by the Liberals during the course of this debate.

Let us step back and look at the big picture. A government gets caught red-handed in a scandal. It is clear and undeniable and the public deserves an explanation. What happens next? We do not get an apology or even a hint of responsibility. Instead, we get a well-rehearsed, “But what about the other party?” They try to change the subject to someone else's wrongdoing, as if two wrongs somehow make a right. Whataboutism is the political equivalent of the schoolyard comeback, “I know you are, but what am I?” How childish.

This attitude of avoiding the tough questions by pointing fingers elsewhere is nothing new. It has been happening for years across all political spectrums, but under the Liberal government, it seems to have sunk to a new low. It is a strategy deployed to muddy the wa-

ters and confuse the public. Why talk about real problems when we can play the blame game instead? Why address policy failures when we can just drag our opponents into the mud with us?

We stand here today once again facing a Liberal government that will do everything humanly possible to avoid transparency. The Liberal government's pattern of withholding crucial documents and hiding from parliamentary scrutiny is not just a betrayal of democracy. It is an outright assault on the accountability that every Canadian citizen deserves.

The present case involving Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or the green slush fund, serves as only the latest example of a long series of manoeuvres by the Liberals to avoid accountability. Here we have a Speaker of the House ruling that the Liberal government violated the powers of the House by refusing to provide documents related to this fund. This blatant refusal to cooperate with Parliament represents an alarming trend of deception. What is the government hiding? What could possibly be so damning in these documents that it would rather violate the very principles of parliamentary oversight than let the truth be seen?

The arrogance of this behaviour cannot be overstated. Time and time again, when faced with tough questions, the Liberals shift the goalposts, stonewall or, when absolutely cornered, throw up their hands and give vague, non-committal responses. They have forgotten that they serve the Canadian people, not their own political interests.

What makes this evasion all the more ridiculous is the government's attempts to put a green spin on it. Sure, it grossly mismanages public funds to shovel money to its friends. Sure, it was involved in corruption. However, at least it was green corruption. That seems to be its argument: At least it was some nice environmentalist who got away with the cash. The absurdity of this argument is lost on no one, yet somehow the Liberals seem to believe that this passes as an acceptable response.

Despite how laughable and immature the Liberals' whataboutism is, they are unrelenting in their use of it. We have seen Liberal speaker after Liberal speaker stand up this week and waste the House's time with history lessons and other distractions that have nothing to do with the issue we are dealing with here and now. Their response has turned this debate into a competition of who did worse rather than who can do better.

• (1340)

Their attitude is not just disappointing; it is dangerous. It promotes a culture of deflection where no one is held accountable because someone else did something bad too. It undermines trust in our leaders and institutions, because it suggests that as long as someone else is doing worse, then nothing needs to change. What a sad state of affairs for the Liberal Party. The party that waltzed into government with fine slogans about sunny ways and running the most transparent government in history now hides and covers behind the excuse that at least the other guys were worse.

What makes that attitude so much sadder is that it is not even true. By any metric we choose, like the taxpayers' dollars wasted, the length of time these schemes were running or the number of ethics violations incurred, any metric we come up with, the level of corruption by the Liberal government is in a shameful class all by itself.

When the government first came to power, one of their slogans was "Canada is back", a slogan that reflects the typical entitled Liberal Party attitude that the nation of Canada and the Liberal Party are the same thing and the Liberal Party is Canada's national governing party. If we go through life with that attitude, it becomes easy to rationalize stealing from the public purse. Why not use taxpayers' money for our own benefit? To put it another way, as far as the Liberals are concerned, taxpayers' money is the Liberals' money.

Nowhere has the Liberal attitude of entitlement been more obvious than in the present issue of the Liberals' green slush fund, so let us take a closer look at this most recent incarnation of Liberal greed, corruption and insider cronyism.

Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, is a program that was supposed to be about protecting our environment, fostering innovation and creating a sustainable future. However, what has it become? It has become the Liberals' green slush fund.

The Auditor General's report, released earlier this year, is a damning indictment of SDTC and the entire Liberal government's mismanagement of public funds. Some \$334 million over 186 cases went to projects in which board members held a conflict of interest, and a staggering \$58 million was handed out to ineligible projects. What were these projects? Some of them did not develop a single new technology. Others made outlandish claims about their environmental benefits that could not stand up to the slightest scrutiny, yet they were funded anyway.

Let us not forget that the Auditor General looked at only a sample of SDTC transactions. She looked at roughly half of the transactions and found that 82% of them were conflicted. We can easily surmise that the remaining cases were just as conflicted and that the sums of money involved were hundreds of millions of dollars more.

This is about more than just paperwork errors or poor oversight. This is about a culture of corruption that has seeped into the highest levels of the Liberal government. This is about a Prime Minister who promised transparency but instead gave us secrecy, a Prime Minister who said that his government would work for all Canadians but instead has set up a system where only his friends and Liberal insiders get ahead. Liberal insiders at the trough is what this program is all about.

How could this happen? How could a program designed to fund innovation and environmental protection be so utterly corrupted? Unravelling those questions starts by looking at the person at the centre of this scandal, Annette Verschuren, the chair of the SDTC board who oversaw much of this disaster, a person who voted to give millions of dollars to her own companies. Why would she not recuse herself? Someone with such a long history of corporate governance must have had at least some glancing knowledge of the concept of conflict of interest.

Privilege

• (1345)

The Ethics Commissioner himself called out this blatant conflict of interest for years, but, unfortunately, it went unpunished. We now know that Verschuren's company NRStor directly benefited from these funds. This is not a one-off event; it is a symptom of a system that has been so utterly compromised by greed and self-interest.

When whistle-blowers tried to bring these issues to light, what did they get? Some of them got fired, some of them got silenced and some of them got a toxic workplace environment where honesty is punished and corruption is rewarded. Let us review some of the whistle-blower testimony from committee, "Just as I was always confident that the Auditor General would confirm the financial mismanagement at SDTC, I remain equally confident that the RCMP will substantiate the criminal activities that occurred within the organization."

In other statements, the whistle-blower said:

The true failure of the situation stands at the feet of our current government, whose decision to protect wrongdoers and cover up their findings over the last 12 months is a serious indictment of how our democratic systems and institutions are being corrupted by political interference. It should never have taken two years for the issues to reach this point. What should have been a straightforward process turned into a bureaucratic nightmare that allowed SDTC to continue wasting millions of dollars and abusing countless employees over the last year.

Finally, the whistle-blower went on to say:

I think the current government is more interested in protecting themselves and protecting the situation from being a public nightmare. They would rather protect wrongdoers and financial mismanagement than have to deal with a situation like SDTC in the public sphere.

Is that not the truth? Is that not exactly what we have seen and heard from Liberal members opposite with their incessant whataboutism? One of the pieces of testimony from the ethics committee from last year that I found quite puzzling came from Doug McConnell, an assistant deputy minister at Innovation, Science and Economic Development, ISED, who saw the handling of the whistle-blower complaints against SDTC.

In a recorded conversation with the whistle-blower, Mr. McConnell stated, "There's a lot of sloppiness and laziness. There is some outright incompetence and, you know, the situation is just kind of untenable at this point." In the recorded conversation, he went on to say, and this comment coming from a senior experienced civil servant was especially relevant, "It was free money. That is almost a sponsorship-scandal level kind of giveaway."

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Then, in committee, after the Liberal bosses had talked to him and provided him with his new talking points, Mr. McConnachie made the following statement that I found both surprising and sad, "I was too transparent, too trusting, and I deeply regret any impact that this has had on the government, SDTC and ISED." He said he was too transparent. Apparently, by the standards set by the Liberal Party, the government should be transparent only to a point. Its attitude seems to be that it will make a bit of a show of being honest and open, but it will not get carried away.

Let us be clear that this is not just an accident. This is not a bureaucratic mistake. This is an apparatus of greed built to serve Liberal insiders, their friends and allies. What about the real innovators? What about the hard-working Canadians who play by the rules and try to get ahead through hard work and good ideas? They are left out in the cold, watching as Liberal friends get their snouts in the government trough.

● (1350)

Since its inception, SDTC received \$2.1 billion in federal funding. Under the present Liberal government, the most recent agreement outlined \$722 million in funding through 2028. However, instead of using the money to build cleaner, greener futures, the Liberals used it to line the pockets of their wealthy friends and business associates. At the end of the day, after all of their carbon taxes, all of their anti-oil and anti-gas policies and all of their environmental rhetoric, the only things greener are the wallets of their friends.

Let us go over the numbers again to try to keep things in perspective; \$58 million that we know about was given to ineligible projects, and \$334 million that we know about was in blatant conflicts of interest. Those are the facts, the shameful, appalling, caught-red-handed, hand-in-the-cookie-jar facts. Nonetheless, we have not even heard a single Liberal member across the aisle offer to the Canadian people anything that even remotely resembles an apology, not so much as a syllable of accountability or regret but just an endless stream of excuses, evasions and whataboutism.

This is the very definition of Liberal insiders at the trough. This is how they operate and think. They take care of their own. They make sure that Liberals get rich while ordinary Canadians struggle to make ends meet. Then, when they get caught, what do they do? Almost like a reflex, they bring up one or two mistakes made by Stephen Harper from 12 or 15 years ago. Canadians deserve better. The Liberals' response has been unacceptable, especially when we are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money thrown away on projects that should never have been funded in the first place.

The green slush fund scandal is about more than just money; it is about integrity. It is about a Liberal government that has lost its way and has forgotten whom it works for. We need real accountability. We need a government that works for the people, not for the insiders, not for the lobbyists and not for the rich and well-connected.

The Liberals will tell us that it is all just a misunderstanding and that the issues are being fixed, but we have heard that before. We heard it after the SNC-Lavalin scandal, after the WE Charity scandal and after the ArriveCan app scandal, and we are hearing it now.

This is a pattern of corruption and greed, a pattern of Liberal insiders at the trough taking whatever they can get and leaving the rest of us to pay the bill.

Canadians have had enough. It is time for a change. It is time for a government that puts Canadians first, that makes Canada work for people who work, and that believes in fairness, transparency and accountability. We cannot allow the culture of corruption to continue. We cannot allow the Liberals to keep putting their friends and insiders ahead of the Canadian people. Let us send a message to the government that enough is enough. Let us take back control of our tax dollars. Let us demand accountability, and let us make sure that the next time there is a program like SDTC, it is working for the people, not for insiders at the trough.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have no idea who wrote the member's speech, but with the numerous false accusations or misinformation and the amount of rhetoric that are in it, they will no doubt get a gold star from the Conservative spin doctors.

I can tell the House that when the issue first came into being, it was the Liberal government that addressed the issue of "arm's-length", which means that it is not the government that runs a fund. The government provides the fund, and an arm's-length group administers the program. When the government found that there were serious allegations in this situation, two internal audits were done.

The Auditor General has also done a report on it. The standing committee has been looking at it. To try to give the impression that it is all about Liberal insiders and corrupt Liberals is a bunch of, and I will let members fill in the blank. I think it does a disservice to the individuals who are actually listening and believing the type of things that the member was saying on the record.

The motion is saying that we should grab everything we have and give it directly to the RCMP, which is very much something new to the House of Commons. We have the power; we can do that, but just because we have the power does not mean we have the right to walk on the charter rights of individuals. Shame on the member.

Privilege

• (1355)

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, I did not quite hear a question in there, so I will just say that the oldest trick in the book is to set up an arm's-length agency and appoint all of one's friends and insiders, who all have conflicts of interest, to the board. That then gives politicians the ability to say, "Well, it was not me. It was all my friends whom I appointed." As for the second part of the hon. member's statement, good people cannot stand idly by and let this corruption and criminal activity go on. When we have honest, hard-working civil servants who come to work every day and do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, and they see all of these corrupt Liberals helping themselves to taxpayers' money, they cannot—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, he is giving a hand gesture and saying "all of these corrupt Liberals". I can tell the member that I am not corrupt, nor do I believe that any of my Liberal colleagues are corrupt.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Let us not start slinging from one side to the other, because that does not arrange the situation. Absolutely, I would advise the hon. member to avoid calling the Liberal benches that.

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that my hand gestures were not directed at him personally. I get a bit animated with my hands sometimes.

Honest people cannot stand by and let criminal activity happen. When there are criminal activities, the police have to be called in.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, members will recall that the Auditor General produced a scathing report in 2005 entitled "Accountability of Foundations". The government even transferred \$9 billion to 15 foundations, including Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC. However, SDTC is only a symptom of a generalized cancer. The federal government is appallingly inefficient. It treats public funds like Monopoly money. That makes no sense.

If you form the government, what are you going to do differently to avoid schemes like that? More importantly, how are you going to guard against the kind of things we are seeing now?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to remind the hon. member to address her comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Regina—Wascana.

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, the problem is indeed serious. The people of this nation have lost confidence in the government and in our democratic institution. It is a serious problem that needs to be fixed. The first step is to change the government. That is why we need a new Conservative government after the next election.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, there are many accusations flying across the floor, and one may forgive me that I do not want to say it is necessarily an epithet. I am trying to figure out if we can find any evidence that Annette Verschuren is in fact tied to Liberals, is a Liberal or was ever a Liberal. I have gone through Wikipedia and everything I can find about her. I am a Cape Bretoner; I will not say a former Cape Bretoner as once a Caper, always a Caper. I know she was really highly regarded as a Cape Breton girl who was the daughter of Dutch immigrants and worked hard on a farm all her life.

I look through her political connections: She was named by Stephen Harper to help in the economic advisory council in the financial crisis of 2008, and she was awarded a place in the Canadian Business Hall of Fame in 2019. She was also an adviser to Brian Mulroney. She seems to have been on all sides of the political fences. She was also on the board of directors of Natural Resources Limited, an oil sands company that also received money from SDTC, and she is currently on the board of the Ontario Energy Association.

She did not seem to understand that she was in flagrant conflict of interest as chair of the board of SDTC, which is clearly mind-boggling for someone with that kind of business career. There is no question about that. I heard it thrown around that her organization received millions. As far as I can see on the record, it got about \$200,000 from SDTC. Of course, it is unacceptable if the organization got a nickel while she was chair of the board. My point is that she is not beyond getting punished in all this; her reputation is in tatters. Still, one wants to know more.

However, this is a case where a board was set up under Jean Chrétien and run under Stephen Harper with the same board structure; I do not see how, suddenly, the entire thing is now condemned as a Liberal slush fund. It certainly was mismanaged. She was chair of the board when flagrant conflict of interest occurred, but I do not see anything that ties her specifically to one party or another.

• (1400)

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, that is all the more reason to hand these documents over to the RCMP so it can do a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of this.

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Someone as experienced as this individual should have known better, should have known there was a conflict of interest and should have recused herself from the situation. If she did not want to, there should have been oversight in place to make sure that happened. It is so frustrating when a program like this, which was by all accounts set up with good intentions many years ago to promote research and development in new technologies and environmental solutions, with all of that goodwill, gets thrown out the window and turns into a slush fund for Liberal insiders.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, speaking about board members, one board member's company, Cycle Capital, received a quarter of a billion dollars in contracts. The Liberal Minister of Environment and Climate Change was a lobbyist for it and met with the government 25 times the year before he was elected in 2019. This is of concern to us. I wonder if the member could make a few comments on that.

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, I do not understand how the environment minister could have possibly thought it was acceptable, given his connections in the past to these people and organizations, for there to be such a lack of oversight and high degree of complacency among the individuals involved. Again, that is all the more reason to hand over the documents to the RCMP and all the more reason for there to be a complete and thorough investigation. Then the people who did wrong will be held to account and the people who did nothing wrong will be cleared of any wrongdoing. We cannot have that happen as long as there continues to be stonewalling and a refusal to co-operate with the RCMP.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with everything the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said.

Is the member aware that the person at the centre of this issue is a Conservative Party donor?

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, the short answer is no. I have not looked into the past donations of these particular individuals. However, I do not feel I should have to. I feel that the House should hand the matter over to the RCMP and let it get to the bottom of it, as should have been done quite a few days ago.

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, as we know, on June 10, the House voted on a motion ordering the government, Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, and the Auditor General of Canada to each table documents with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, within 14 days following the adoption of the order, and for those documents to be turned over to the RCMP.

The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that the documents not being produced as requested is a breach of privilege. I would remind members that, on Thursday, September 26, the Speaker ruled that this is a prima facie case of privilege.

We have been debating the motion to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs since last Friday, which has changed the House's agenda since privilege motions take priority. Since last Friday, the work of the House has been monopolized by this question and there is no legislation on the orders of the day.

Let us go back to the genesis of this foundation. SDTC is a foundation that was designed to lose control of public funds. Sustainable Development Technology Canada is condemned to inefficiency and waste because it has a design flaw. Let us go back to its creation to understand what is happening today.

When the 1995 referendum happened, Ottawa got spooked. After realizing that it was essentially absent from Quebecers' lives, the federal government began a major government restructuring that would benefit the federal government at Quebec's expense. At the time, Paul Martin was the finance minister, and the president of the Treasury Board was Marcel Massé, who was also a former clerk of the Privy Council. He used his expertise on the machinery of government to make some major changes that would make it so that Quebec would be stretched to the limit, while Ottawa would have plenty of financial leeway.

By doing so, he thought Quebecers would begin to see the federal government as their government, the one they could turn to to meet their needs and to help them get things done. Perhaps they would change their allegiance. Perhaps Quebecers would become Canadians.

Marcel Massé made no secret of what he was doing. He said, "When Bouchard", referring to Lucien Bouchard, then premier of Quebec, "has to make cuts, those of us in Ottawa will be able to demonstrate that we have the means to preserve the future of social programs." That says a lot.

He succeeded in part. Deep cuts to health and social services transfers—a 40% reduction in transfers over three years—forced the Quebec government to make cuts of its own. Everyone remembers nurses retiring en masse. The health care network never fully recovered. The Parti Québécois and the independence movement lost their progressive sparkle and were at death's door as a result.

Ottawa began running large surpluses, surpluses so indecent in a time of austerity that they had to be covered up and camouflaged. That is how Marcel Massé came up with the idea of creating a series of foundations. By pouring large sums into these foundations, he emptied the federal coffers, shrank its surplus on paper and was able to then continue refusing to increase transfers that would have kept services afloat for the people under Quebec's jurisdiction.

However, to ensure that the money paid to the foundations was taken out of the books, the government could not have direct control over it. The loss of control over public funds is no accident. It was necessary for the scheme to work.

In 2005, former auditor general of Canada Sheila Fraser published a scathing report, one chapter of which was entitled "Accountability of Foundations". She found that the federal government had transferred \$9 billion to 15 foundations from 1998 to 2002 alone. Those \$9 billion are equivalent to \$17 billion today. She also found that the government had no control over \$7 billion of that \$9 billion.

These foundations provided scholarships, through the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation; supported research, through the Canada Foundation for Innovation and Genome Canada; supported public infrastructure, through the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund, which dealt directly with the municipalities in order to circumvent Quebec City's control; and fostered industrial innovation. The message was clear: The future is in Ottawa.

Created in 2001, Sustainable Development Technology Canada was one of the 15 foundations that were mentioned by the auditor general of Canada in 2005 and that were operating with practically no government oversight.

• (1410)

The loss of control over public funds at Sustainable Development Technology Canada is no accident. The foundation was created with that goal in mind.

Nineteen years after the former auditor general published her report in 2005, including ten years of the Harper government, SDTC still exists, and the loss of control over public funds has not been resolved. The same goes for the other foundations.

This brings us to the scandal and the issue that we have been debating for the past week. The Conservatives would like to turn this into a Liberal scandal, but the problem runs deeper than that and it transcends party lines. The situation at SDTC points to a widespread problem within the federal level. This foundation is only a symptom of a generalized cancer. The federal government is appallingly inefficient and treats public funds like Monopoly money.

While we are here discussing federal waste in Ottawa, Quebec is struggling to fulfill its responsibilities, which include almost all public services. As the Parliamentary Budget Officer reiterates every year in his fiscal sustainability report, the cost of Quebec's and the provinces' responsibilities is rising faster than their revenues, and Ottawa is taking in more money than it needs to fulfill the responsibilities that are strictly its own.

The consequences of this fiscal imbalance are manifold. The Quebec government is stretched to the limit. Once it has paid for the most essential services, there is not enough money left over to enable Quebecers to make societal choices and shape their own social, economic and cultural development.

The federal government has no such constraints. It has so much money left over that it can afford to meddle in affairs that are none of its business, and it feels no need to manage its programs efficiently.

The waste in the current federal system is a natural result of the fiscal imbalance, and it extends to all areas of government activity. Let me give just a few examples. It costs Ottawa two and a half times more to process an EI claim than it costs Quebec to process a social assistance claim. It costs the federal government four times more to issue a passport than it costs the Quebec government to issue a driver's licence. Lastly, before the Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue veterans' hospital was transferred to Quebec, each procedure performed there cost two and a half times more than a similar procedure performed in a Quebec-run long-term care home. If Ottawa

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were in charge of health care, we would not be able to afford medicare. Even if every penny of the government's revenues went into the health care system, it would still not be enough.

We cannot say it enough. It is not just a Liberal scandal. Waste and interference are inherent to the federal system, no matter which party is in power.

Speaking of which, in 2014, the Government of Quebec released an expert panel's report on federal intervention in the health and social services sector from 2002 to 2013. The Harper government was in power for nearly all of that period.

The report identified 37 federal programs that interfered in health care under the Conservatives. The transfers in question were not very generous in terms of dollar amounts, but the interference was very significant and very costly to manage, and the public did not get its money's worth. In fact, the expert panel calculated that the amount it cost the Government of Quebec to deal with this interference exceeded the amount of the transfers, leading the panel to conclude that it would be more cost-effective to just turn down the money.

In other words, many federal programs are a complete waste of taxpayers' money. There is \$1 billion being spent here and \$10 billion being spent there, with no oversight and no obligation to produce results. Even though Ottawa does not provide any direct services to the public—except to indigenous peoples and veterans, and we all know how that is working out—it found a way to hire an additional 109,000 public servants since 2015. Imagine what those 109,000 people could have accomplished if Quebec and the provinces had hired them to care for the sick, teach children or even repair roads.

Once again, let us come back to SDTC. This time, let us consider the recent report of the Office of the Auditor General. On June 4, the Auditor General published her performance audit report on SDTC. She analyzed the organization's activities between April 1, 2017, and December 31, 2023.

In short, the Auditor General's report indicates that there were serious governance issues with the fund. The main problems were mismanagement of conflicts of interest and a lack of clarity surrounding the criteria for awarding grants.

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• (1415)

The Auditor General determined that the foundation's management of conflicts of interest was flawed. As a result, the board of directors was not informed of conflicts of interest in a timely manner. According to the report, some directors voted on or participated in discussions about certain items even after declaring a conflict of interest. The Auditor General found that the board of directors relied on members to declare conflicts rather than maintaining a register of conflicts of interest. The foundation set up a register in 2022, but there were inconsistencies between the meeting minutes and the register. The Auditor General identified 90 cases, involving \$76 million, where the conflict of interest policy was not followed. According to the directors, the inconsistencies identified by the Auditor General were not policy violations, but errors in the minutes. However, the Auditor General pointed out that the board of directors is responsible for correcting the minutes when they are approved.

In the case of COVID-19 payments, the Auditor General found that some members apparently voted in violation of the policy. The directors argued that they had obtained legal advice to the contrary. Lastly, the Auditor General noted that the policy lacked specific guidance to address potential cases of perceived conflicts of interest. She identified five cases where directors' business or personal relationships gave the appearance of a conflict of interest.

As for the criteria for awarding funding, the Auditor General found that, since the eligibility criteria for projects were vague, some projects were approved even though they did not meet the goal and objectives of the fund. This also led to situations where the external consultants in charge of providing advice on project selection contradicted the fund employees, since the instructions that had been sent were vague. SDTC disputes some of the Auditor General's findings, claiming that the documentation she analyzed did not reflect SDTC's extensive analysis of the projects. SDTC says it did its due diligence on each of the projects and that the comments from the external consultants were incorporated into its analysis. Who are we to believe?

Now let us talk about whistle-blowers. As we know, whistle-blowers reported concerns in 2022 about SDTC's management of public funds and human resources. Let me provide an overview of the chronology of events. According to the information reported by the media, in November 2022, whistle-blowers initially approached the Office of the Auditor General to raise concerns about the management of public funds and human resources within SDTC. The OAG suggested that they send their complaint to the Privy Council Office. The Privy Council Office received a 300-page document from the whistle-blower group containing allegations dating back to February 2022. Shortly after, senior officials at Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, or ISED, took charge of the file.

On November 1, 2023, the media reported that the whistle-blowers had sent them recordings of conversations with senior departmental officials, in an attempt to force the government to change the way it was handling the allegations about the foundation's governance and management of contributions. On the same day, the Office of the Auditor General announced that it was going to con-

duct an audit on how SDTC was financing sustainable development technologies within the department's portfolio.

The next day, Andrew Hayes, the deputy auditor general, appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts and said that his office was still in the process of determining the full scope of the audit. He said he expected that the audit would be completed before Parliament rose for the summer in June 2024.

Four days later, on November 6, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to discuss allegations regarding the governance and management of contributions by SDTC. Among other things, he said that his department had requested that the foundation "take the necessary steps to conduct an in-depth review of the allegations regarding its management of human resources." That review was to be directed by an independent law firm, which would subsequently inform the minister of its findings.

Two days later, on November 8, SDTC officials including Leah Lawrence, president and CEO; Sheryl Urie, vice president of finance; and Annette Verschuren, chair of the board, appeared before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

• (1420)

During this appearance, Ms. Verschuren admitted, for one, to having proposed a motion to the SDTC board of directors that led to \$217,000 in additional funding during the COVID-19 pandemic for NRStor, a company she has run since 2012. She also confirmed to the committee that she receives an annual salary of \$120,000 from that company. Ms. Verschuren said she proposed the motion after the board sought and received legal advice that there was no need to re-declare previously declared conflicts of interest regarding ongoing projects, and that the additional funding was for all existing projects, not individual ones. She also asserted that all SDTC-funded organizations received the same treatment and the same amount of money.

On November 10, Ms. Lawrence resigned from her position at SDTC. Media outlets reported that she wrote the following in her resignation letter: "Given recent media reports, House of Commons committee testimony, and the surrounding controversy, it is clear there has been a sustained and malicious campaign to undermine my leadership."

A week later, on November 17, the media reported that Konrad von Finckenstein, the interim Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, decided to review the issues raised by the decisions made by Ms. Verschuren in connection with NRStor. Three days later, on November 20, Ms. Verschuren stepped down from her position at SDTC. In a statement thanking Ms. Verschuren, SDTC said, "The Board of Directors will meet this week to review the response to the Management Response and Action Plan put forward by Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED), with the objective of submitting the response to ISED on December 1 and getting new funding flowing to Canadian entrepreneurs as soon as possible."

It seems clear that SDTC did not always manage public funds according to the terms and conditions of the contribution agreements and of its legislative mandate. As I said earlier, this is baked in its very structure, and that has been the case since its creation. It is also clear that the oversight by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada did not guarantee that the public funds were administered according to the terms and conditions of the contribution agreements and the applicable government policies.

That is how the saga played out. I would like to remind members that, last June, the House voted in favour of a motion compelling the government to produce documents by a certain deadline, which was not met. The government is refusing to provide the documents. However, Parliament's power to compel the production of government documents has been clearly established. The only limit to the House's ability to demand whatever information it deems necessary from the government is the good judgment of the House, not the goodwill of the government. Otherwise, the very principle of responsible government is meaningless.

On June 10, the House made its position clear. It ordered the government to hand over a series of documents to the law clerk of the House so that he could forward them to law enforcement. The government failed to comply, thereby breaching the privilege of the House. There may be a good reason for this, but it does not change anything. As I was saying, the only limit to the House's ability to demand information is the House's good judgment, not the government's goodwill.

I will stop there so that I have time to answer my colleagues' questions.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for providing this important timeline of the case.

I am part of the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology, and we have had the opportunity to hear testimony from the chair of the board, Ms. Verschuren, three times. She came to explain that she had not acted in bad faith and that she had sought legal advice from a lawyer, but it turned out that it was bad advice. That being said, I still think there was a serious problem.

I am certain my colleague has served on a board of directors at some point and would know enough to readily acknowledge it if he found himself in a conflict of interest situation. Legal advice is not required.

Privilege

Can he tell us if he believes that these people were in a conflict of interest with nearly every decision they made?

• (1425)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, which relates to the speech that he gave on this subject last Friday.

This is a matter of ethics. We are talking about people who were appointed to a board of directors and who voted to give money to their own companies, companies that pay them a salary. That makes no sense at all. The bare minimum that is expected of anyone who represents a foundation or another organization on a board of directors is that they must not put themselves in a conflict of interest like that. It does not make any sense.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind members of the important role played by the whistle-blowers who informed the media, Parliament and the government of this situation.

I deplore the fact that the government did not introduce any legislation to properly protect whistle-blowers. Why did this sort of bill have to come from the Bloc Québécois? A Bloc member introduced a bill in the House to tell the government that enough is enough and that whistle-blowers play an important role. They are the ones who inform us of wrongdoing and scandals, and the least we can do is protect them.

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member stated that the arm's-length bodies, 15 foundations, as he mentioned, were created and funded by the federal government. He said there was a loss of control over the funding that goes to organizations like SDTC. However, in the later part of his speech, he referred extensively to the Auditor General's report, and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's report on the issue related to SDTC. Is it not contradictory?

In fact, Parliament has control over the funding that goes to these foundations, to other organizations, Crown corporations, and we have the mechanism to see that it is administered properly. When it is not, as in this case, there is a mechanism that kicks into process and that is what we are dealing with.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nepean for his excellent question. I thank him for raising these issues.

What we are saying is that the goal was to reduce transfers to the provinces and keep more money for the federal government, but to conceal it using the mechanism of foundations. That is what former Treasury Board president Marcel Massé said himself. In order to make the money vanish from the federal government's balance sheet, it could not be under the government's direct control. That was the fundamental problem, the same problem that Sheila Fraser raised in 2005. It was very serious and very important. That was a time of budget cuts and forced austerity, when fewer services were being provided to the public. Times were hard.

Privilege

There may be indirect validation mechanisms after the fact, which is what we are talking about here. For the Bloc Québécois, however, this is clearly insufficient. These foundations manage money generated from taxes and taxpayers' income tax. It is managed not by the government or by the elected members of the House, who are accountable, but rather by foundations.

The fact that there are then validation mechanisms, after all the foolish mischief is done, is clearly insufficient. This is not how taxpayers' money should be managed. That is why we are calling for these foundations, the mechanism conceived by Marcel Massé, to be abolished.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, my question for my colleague is going to be simple. We have been debating this question of privilege that was raised here in the House for a long time, a week or two. This situation is a result of the government's stubborn refusal to hand over the documents. If the government had allowed the documents to be tabled in the House, Parliament would not be paralyzed like this.

I have been asking myself the following question, and perhaps my colleague can answer it. Why is the government willing to set aside its entire legislative agenda to prevent these documents from being produced?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question. What is the reason for that? There are several hypotheses.

However, what it boils down to is that an order was made. The House asked the government to produce documents, and the government did not do so.

Does it really bother the government that it cannot introduce any bills? Clearly, this government is tired and has run out of ideas. It does not have any more ideas for bills. Perhaps, the government is actually happy not to have to come up with anything new.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Since the time provided for debate has expired for today, the House will resume consideration of the privilege motion on Monday, October 7, at 11 a.m.

The hon. member for Joliette will have four minutes remaining for questions and comments.

● (1430)

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 94, I wish to inform hon. members that Private Members' Business will be suspended on that day.

[*Translation*]

It being 2:30 p.m. the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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