



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 071 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, June 13, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 13, 2016

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

CANADIAN ORGAN DONOR REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed from April 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-223, An Act to establish the Canadian Organ Donor Registry and to coordinate and promote organ donation throughout Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to talk about the legislation. I must start off by commending the member in terms of the initiative that he has taken upon himself. I believe that the bill raises the very important issue of organ and tissue donation, something which is top of mind for a number of Canadians in all regions of our country. One only needs to visit a hospital to get a very good sense as to how serious an issue this really is.

Whether it is provincial, national, or here in Ottawa, governments are generally concerned about the issue of organ and tissue donation and what role we might be able to play in that. I would ultimately argue that all governments of all political stripes encourage Canadians, as a population, to do what they can by listing on donor cards their willingness to have their organs used if their life is terminated in some fashion or another, especially if it happens prematurely through a vehicle accident or something of that nature.

I say this because if we read through Bill C-223 it sets out some fairly decent objectives. In reading it, one would easily ask why we would not vote in favour of the legislation. I have had the opportunity to have a number of discussions over the years with respect to what the bill is attempting to do. At first blush, one would think that this is something that we as legislators should be acting upon.

As much as I appreciate the bill that we have before us, I believe it is not necessary. My understanding is that the government will not be voting or recommending that we vote in favour of the bill for good reason. No member of the House should interpret this in any

fashion to mean that the Government of Canada is not sincere or genuine in wanting to play a strong leadership role on this very important issue. As I said, as much as possible we encourage Canadians to get engaged in this issue in one form or another, ideally, as I made reference to, in terms of considering the donation of their organs and tissue if their end comes in a premature fashion.

If I may, I would like to expand as to why it is that we are taking this position. It is important that we recognize that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments are committed to investing in improving organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Since 2008, all provincial and territorial governments, with the exception of the Province of Quebec, in collaboration with the federal government, have given Canadian Blood Services the mandate, and over \$64 million in funding, for a nationally coordinated system.

It is important we recognize the jurisdictional responsibilities of what the bill is looking for. If we put the statement I just gave into proper context, one gets a better understanding as to why the bill is not necessary at this stage, as important as the issue is.

When we look at what Canadian Blood Services does with respect to the system I just referred to, it can be best explained in four points. First, it is responsible for developing and implementing a national strategic plan, including the mandate, and the roles and responsibilities in the nationally coordinated system. Second, it establishes leading practices, professional education, knowledge translation, and public education and awareness campaigns. Third, it enhances system performance reporting, including public reporting. Fourth, it develops and maintains the Canadian transplant registry and a national donor registry with three interprovincial organ-sharing programs.

Like many others no doubt, I can tell stories of constituents I have represented where the need was high. I think of a gentleman, Hank Horner, who has been a long-time advocate for organ donation. I have had numerous discussions with him. I am sure if he saw the legislation before us, he too would be tempted to support it.

However, I like to think that if we look at the bigger picture and at working with the provinces and territories, where there is jurisdictional responsibility, we here in Ottawa would do best, in terms of serving individuals like Hank, by working in collaboration with these different levels of government to make sure Canada establishes a world-class system that Canadians can truly believe in.

Private Members' Business

What Hank often argued for was that, as much as it was important to have a registry, the most important issue for him personally, and the individuals he had advocated on behalf of, was education. We need to be able to make Canadians aware of the importance of organ donation, and how not only does it save lives but it improves quality of life for recipients who have had the good fortune of receiving a transplant.

I have witnessed first-hand, as I am sure others have, recipients who have been gifted an organ. They had the operation necessary and the medications that followed. They will espouse how profoundly it has changed their lives. This gift has taken them off of machines. They no longer have to go into health care institutions, often on more than a weekly basis. It gives them that sense of independence. Therefore, I believe it is critically important for us to do what we can as legislators, as parliamentarians, to try to deliver those quality health care services.

What Hank would ultimately argue when he looked at a Manitoba driver's licence, for example, is that we have a driver's licence in which it is an optional issue. If one wanted to donate one's organs, one would tick off a particular box. I know that he, and others, were looking at the possibility of having a negative option where it is assumed that people would be prepared to donate organs, as opposed to having to tick off the box to voluntarily donate. I can appreciate the arguments for that.

I had encouraged Hank and others to work with the provincial government to look at creative ways in which they could improve the number of people who are prepared to donate organs, and the driver's licence is but one example. Another thing we often talked about was the issue of education and going into high schools. I know that Hank and others have done just that. They try to educate through our high school system, radio interviews and programs, community clubs, and outreach programs, which can really make a difference.

In essence, I commend the member for bringing the legislation forward. However, I would advise the member that there are already things in place to ensure that we are accomplishing what the member is hoping to accomplish with the legislation. Therefore, I will not be able to vote in favour of his private member's bill.

• (1110)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise with pleasure to address an important bill before the House, Bill C-223, an act which would establish the Canadian organ donor registry and coordinate and promote organ donation throughout Canada.

The bill proposes to establish a Canadian organ donor registry to centrally compile information on organ donors and potential transplantation recipients across the provinces and territories. The purpose of the registry would be to increase efficiencies associated with patient assessment and organ allocation to improve patient wait-times, hopefully to reduce them, for transplantation and reduce the number of lost transplant opportunities.

For years New Democrats have supported better national collaboration in organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Specifically, New Democrats have supported the creation of a national registry to achieve this objective, so we are glad to support this initiative put forward by my hon. colleague.

Let me give the House some key figures. Every year, 1,600 Canadians will be added to organ donor waiting lists. Over 80% of Canadians say they would donate their organs; however, fewer than 20% have made arrangements to donate. At any given time, approximately 5,000 Canadians are waiting for an organ or tissue transplant.

Canada's deceased donation rate is relatively low compared to other comparable countries. According to 2009 data from the International Registry of Organ Donation and Transplantation, Canada placed below countries such as Spain, Uruguay, U.S.A., Cuba, and the U.K. in donation rates. Canada's donation rate is less than half that of leading countries. One-third of Canadians who need a transplant will never receive one, according to Canadian Blood Services. We can and must do better.

New Democrats have been working hard in recent years to establish a national organ donor registry to save and improve the lives of Canadians in desperate need of transplants. Canada can do a better job managing the organ transplant system and the establishment of a national registry is a critical first step.

This is the latest in a series of similar private member's bills on a national organ donor registry that have been introduced over the past 15 years. The last two variations were introduced by New Democrat member of Parliament Malcolm Allen in the 40th and 41st Parliaments. A bill proposing a national organ donor registry has never been voted on at second reading.

The sponsor of the legislation, the member of Parliament for Edmonton Manning, has a son who was born with a rare liver disease and has required three life-saving transplantations over the course of his lifetime. The legislation is a combination of personal experience fused with public policy and I would like to congratulate the member for bringing it forward.

In 2011, Canada's organ and tissue donation transplant communities in collaboration with Canadian Blood Services produced a document entitled "Call to Action", which formally recommended the establishment of an integrated, interprovincial organ donation and transplantation system. The "Call to Action" document recommended the establishment of this interprovincial system by 2017. The authors of the document believe that a nationwide coordination would allow Canada to better reach our potential in organ and tissue transplant donation. They called for the creation of a system that would be consistent across the country, easily accessible, available online, and used to legally authorize donations based on the wishes of the donor.

A national registry would not only improve the availability of organs to patients in need but could also reduce provincial health care costs on those on waiting lists as they are treated more quickly. It would also address the disparities in wait-times across regions and provinces by increasing the efficiency and the supply of donor organs and tissues.

New Democrats support sending the bill to committee to permit an in-depth study of its provisions and perhaps to see if any improvements could be made.

Private Members' Business

Due to the important life-saving potential of the bill, it is vitally important that Parliament get the details right. For example, we believe that the special status of Quebec must be addressed within the legislation.

•(1115)

Bill C-223 lacks some of the implementation details included in Mr. Allen's former national registry bill, including the right of Quebec to operate a parallel registry as they do today with blood and tissue collection.

In addition, the bill gives substantial power and responsibility to the health minister rather than delegating responsibility for the administration of the registry to the registrar, as did the former bill. This should be studied, as well, to determine the best approach.

Finally, in Bill C-223, both reporting mechanisms to Parliament and the process for provincial affiliation to the national registry are not detailed when compared to the former bill. These details require closer study.

Parliament should also study the experience of other jurisdictions that have implemented presumptive organ and tissue donation, that is, a system where people are deemed to agree to be a donor unless they explicitly opt out, as a means of dramatically increasing potential donations to save lives. This is not in the bill currently, but it is an idea that is well worth exploring to ensure that every single Canadian man, woman, and child, has access to necessary organs and tissues if they need them to save their lives.

In 2014, the NDP also supported removing the ban on certain organ and tissue donations made by men who have sex with men. Efforts to create a national registry should go hand in hand with efforts to remove this unscientific discrimination and replace it with a science-based behavioural screening process.

It is particularly appropriate to reflect today on this item, and to express my shock and revulsion at the hate crime committed this weekend in Orlando, Florida, where approximately 50 people were targeted and murdered for their sexual orientation. I think I speak for everyone in the House in expressing our solidarity, our prayers, our comfort, and our expression to stand with the LGBTQ community, not only in Orlando but in North America and across the world. This kind of hate crime has to be denounced firmly by everyone.

The bill is timely in a number of ways, but particularly in terms of urging the government to take immediate measures to end the current discriminatory policy governing blood and organ donations in the gay men community. That would be a good first step to start building the kind of science-based policy, the understanding and smart policy, that makes everyone feel included in our country.

New Democrats will continue to work positively and across party lines with our Conservative and Liberal colleagues to build a better health care system for everyone in our country.

•(1120)

I believe that the Liberal government will not be supporting the bill. I would urge Liberals to reconsider that position. Second reading is an opportunity for every member in the House to express our agreement or not with the spirit of the bill. Notwithstanding that we may have some concerns about particular details, we should be

able to discuss those details at committee. Therefore, I urge all members of the House to stand together and support this important bill, to support it in spirit and in principle. Any concept or policy that helps organ and tissue donation become more available to Canadian men, women, and children in our country is something we should be giving every opportunity to debate and to put into law.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that there have been some missed opportunities in this regard. The former government had a full four-year term to take action on establishing a national registry, particularly after the release of the April 2011 "Call to Action" report, and the subsequent election of the previous Conservative government, just a month later, in May 2011.

It is unfortunate that four years have been allowed to pass. However, as my father used to say, "Wisdom comes so seldom that it ought not to be rejected simply because it comes late." I am happy to see that a member of the Conservative caucus, the member for Edmonton Manning, has put forward the bill.

I urge all members of the House to give the bill the study it requires, to support it at second reading. Let us see if we cannot make the improvements we need to make at committee to get everyone's vote in favour of the bill and implement it as soon as we can, for the health of all Canadians.

•(1125)

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise to speak in support of Bill C-223, an act to establish a Canadian organ donor registry and to coordinate and promote organ donation in Canada.

First I would like to thank my colleague from Edmonton Manning for bringing forward this private member's bill and recognizing the importance of organ donation. I listened intently to the member's speech at second reading back in April, and it was a very passionate and moving speech.

What you did for your son Tyler was incredible. You as a living donor, I consider a hero.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that he is to address his comments to the Chair and not to individual members in the House.

Mr. Len Webber: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased that Tyler is doing well today.

To the member for Kitchener—Conestoga, thank you for sharing your emotional experience—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Once again, I would ask the member to please address his comments to the Chair.

Mr. Len Webber: Madam Speaker, through you, I thank and praise the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga for sharing his emotional experience resulting from a tragedy which occurred on May 2, 2011 in which he lost his wife Betty, and for supporting Betty's wishes to allow her organs to be donated after her neurological death because she wanted to give them in order to save the lives of others. It was a selfless and incredible gift.

Private Members' Business

Three years ago, I had the privilege to also bring forward a private member's bill on organ donation, as a member of the Alberta legislature.

The intention of the bill was to create a provincial organ and tissue donation agency. The bill progressed, was adopted into a government bill, and eventually passed unanimously by all members of the House.

The bill incorporated four key pillars, four components, to its content.

The first pillar was to implement an awareness campaign strategy to have advertising, billboards, literature, and bus benches. It was to encourage people to talk to their families to discuss their wishes in the event of a tragedy where their families may have to choose whether or not to donate their organs.

The second pillar was to implement an electronic donor registry.

The third pillar was to implement the training of health care staff throughout the province of Alberta, so that every hospital would have trained staff, ready on a moment's notice, to take advantage of an opportunity that may exist to procure organs in order to save lives.

The fourth and final pillar was to implement the intent to donate on a driver's licence. At the time, in order for people to indicate their wishes to donate organs, they had to sign on the back of their health care card. I found that unacceptable in today's world. The key to making a registry successful is to make the decision easy to make and easy to execute.

I strongly support the idea of getting one's consent to donate organs when someone obtains or renews a driver's licence or a health care card. However, we could even go further and ask it as part of a passport process or other formal registration process. Imagine if we could get the option to declare that a person is a willing organ donor on their income tax return form?

Today Alberta has over 250,000 people registered in its newly implemented organ donation electronic registry, and the numbers continue to grow.

Recently a team of experts at the University of Alberta's Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute made history by completing a record 31 organ transplants in just 10 days, indicating the progress that we have made in Alberta. However, there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

I have visited the University of Alberta Hospital transplant ward, and I have seen the results. I have met numerous people who have received the gift of life. What a moving experience it was. The emotions, the tears, the gratitude that these people had upon awakening, knowing that they had received a gift. It is something that I will never forget.

I have seen the need for a coordinated organ donation strategy first-hand, but I have also seen the results of a unified government that puts aside political stripes to support a positive cause.

This is not about partisan politics; it is about saving lives. I can only imagine the positive outcome of what a coordinated national effort could accomplish.

I, along with other members in this House, currently sit on the Standing Committee on Health. Our team is currently studying the issue of national pharmacare. This initiative is not about overstepping the boundaries of our provincial and territorial counterparts. It is about leveraging our strengths as a country to improve the system of pharmacare for all Canadians. Why can we not do the same thing with our organ and tissue donation procurement system in Canada?

Our Standing Committee on Health has already agreed to look into the issue of organ and tissue donation in Canada. It is only appropriate that we send the bill we are currently debating here in this House, Bill C-223, to that committee, to form part of the study and discussion.

● (1130)

It is not just our constituents and some politicians asking for this, but it is also experts in the field of transplantation right here in Canada, experts such as Dr. Lori West, director of the Canadian National Transplant Research Program. This is a national research network funded by the Government of Canada, dedicated entirely to increasing access of Canadians to transplantation and improving transplant outcomes. She is also the director of the Alberta Transplant Institute and chair of Canada research in cardiac transplantation.

Dr. West wrote all of us in this House just last week and said:

We believe that we have the opportunity to use this bill as the beginning of a national conversation toward improving organ donation in Canada. We strongly encourage your government to send this bill to the Standing Committee on Health (HESA) where we can work together with patients, researchers, health charities and government agencies to create a framework that will improve the national system to increase and support donation and transplantation.

In April of this year, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health said, right here in this House:

...our government recognizes the need for improvement in the organ and tissue donation and transplantation system in Canada. Collaboration, consultation and engagement with the provinces and territories as well as key stakeholders are necessary to address the complexity of the changes that are required in the system.

She says it is necessary to collaborate, consult, and engage with the provinces and territories, and key stakeholders. Why do we not send this bill to the health committee?

The hon. member and the hon. parliamentary secretary should talk to their caucus, talk to their colleagues, talk to the Minister of Health, and encourage support for this bill to go to committee so it can form a critical part of that deliberation.

In closing, rather than continuing to work in silos, our provinces and territories must work together under a national umbrella in order to improve organ donation in this country. We know registries work for organ and tissue donation. We also know that the larger the pool of donors, the better. It only makes sense that we combine our efforts and truly develop a national database that will help achieve our goal to save lives. Even if we are able to save only one life from our efforts, it will have been worth it.

Private Members' Business

I implore my colleagues here in this House to vote to send this Bill C-223 to the Standing Committee on Health, where the committee has already agreed to study this issue.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, thanks to the member for Calgary Confederation's contributions at the provincial legislature in Alberta, the province has an electronic organ and tissue donor registry of which I am a donor. I subscribed myself thanks to that new system that he introduced. He is also one of the very few members of the legislative assembly when he served there who actually passed two private members' bills. I hope that fortune and that ability passes on to the member for Edmonton Manning who is pushing for a very wise bill on organ and tissue donor registry.

I have a Yiddish proverb to share with the House: "He who looks for light work goes very tired to bed." I view the government's response to this private member's bill as a search for that light work. Personal stories on organ donor registries and about specific issues of public policy seem to have a higher impact on the backbench members of the government who might be allowed a free vote on this.

Let me share my personal story. I have three kids. My two oldest kids, Maximilian and Jolie, will both need some day the donation of a kidney to continue living. It is inevitable. There is no cure for the condition that they have called Alport syndrome and they were born with it. For a parent who has to experience that, it is profound and changes one's outlook on life. That is why I became a donor. That is why I became involved in the Kidney Foundation of Canada as a board member for the southern Alberta chapter as well.

Through that involvement I met lots of people on the Kidney March, a three-day 100-kilometre walk through beautiful Kananaskis country. I shared tents with organ donors and experienced people doing dialysis in the camp at night. They would do a 25-kilometre walk and then do dialysis in the camp, and then start completely fresh the next day because the dialysis cleaned out all the by-products in the body that come from exercise. They literally could walk another 30 kilometres the next day and they were not as tired.

I met incredible people with incredible stories of perseverance and strength. They want something like this bill. They need something like this. I met a gentleman who lost both of his kidneys on a trip to Morocco with his friends. He had an emergency flight back to Canada and they were able to save his life, but he is on a second kidney donation now. He does marathons across North America. He is literally the first one to finish the 100-kilometre walk. I tried to keep up with him and I am able-bodied and younger, but I had a tough time keeping up with him. On the second day it is a 38-kilometre walk and he finished first. It is incredible what people can achieve.

I am thinking of my kids and what they went through from the moment of diagnosis and the doctors explaining what would happen to them. An organ and tissue donor registry is the first step. We are not talking about creating an entirely new registry, we are talking about coordinating the actions being done in the different provinces. I know we already have three of these and they coordinate different facets of this. That is why I think this private member's bill goes

beyond that and talks about an actual strategy on organ donation and lays out nine further points for a national strategy.

Most strategists talk about simply ideas, a principle, a thought that, although important, does not have what the member for Edmonton Manning has included here, which is nine specific areas that we could look at. I have met with specialists in this field across Canada. They are surgeons responsible for explaining to family members that their loved one is deceased or they are the ones doing the organ donation procedures. All of them say that these nine areas are an improvement that we can lend to the system, so why not legislate on it because that is what we are here to do, to pass good laws and make sure bad ones do not pass.

When I read the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health's argument, I found three excuses I want to highlight and explain why they are not good excuses.

● (1135)

The duplicating of existing initiatives was one excuse. This does not duplicate. We can simply repurpose current work to meet the demands of this legislation. To say they would duplicate would indicate that work is already being done, but national organ and tissue donation rates are nothing to be proud of. They have barely improved over time. Real improvements would be to go after the structural issues and bottlenecks in the system.

Furthermore, this is probably the absolute weakest argument that can be made, because if we are already doing the work, then why not seek the path of least resistance, agree with the legislation, and simply pass it so it can be studied at committee. To say that there are existing initiatives basically says this legislation simply encapsulates what already exists, which is fine, but let us move on to the next point.

The other one the parliamentary secretary mentioned was the shift in responsibilities. She mentioned consent, confidentiality, health policies, and procedures that they are, indeed, mostly within provincial jurisdictions. My issue with that is this. Is there not a better way to coordinate it, perhaps by doing it formally, maybe in a voluntary system, which the member for Edmonton Manning included in his private member's bill? Section 5 of the law creates a voluntary opt-in, so it is optional for the provinces to participate in this. Success will breed a willingness to participate as well, so that as these different parts begin to do their work, as donation rates improve and there is success, more provinces will want to participate. Although it is within their jurisdiction, there is a voluntary component.

Private Members' Business

Provinces can voluntarily coordinate with the federal government and other provinces in order to improve the system. I will give the example of pensions. Pensions are a provincial jurisdiction, not federal. The Canada pension plan is coordinated across all provinces in Canada. Why can we not do the same thing? The same principle applies. It is not a shifting of responsibility to the federal government, saying we want a national pension plan that is transferrable from province to province; it is simply the coordination of work.

When I worked at the provincial legislature and orders in council were passed, it was basically with the consent of the different provinces and consultation with the federal government about the coordination of the pension plan, to make sure that the provincial laws and regulations that were passed were consistent across the board so that Canadians who moved across the country would have the same pension plan system, wherever they went. Why can we not have that for organ and tissue donation systems? It makes sense and I do not understand where the problem is. I do not understand why this would have been brought up as an issue.

The third point that the parliamentary secretary made was about the privacy of persons due to the collection of related personal health information. I have run into this a few times now. This was probably the most bizarre reasoning at committee. In clause by clause on Bill C-14, I wanted to introduce an amendment on written consent before the procedure, and I was told that this would impede the privacy of the person involved.

Privacy should never be used as a bottleneck or a pit trap for public policy improvements, especially when people can voluntarily surrender their privacy for the sake of a public policy goal that they agree with. We are not going after people who do not want to donate, we are trying to make it easier for people who do want to donate, to be connected with individuals who need organ or tissue donations because their lives are in danger or they have medical conditions that require organ donations.

Of course, this is voluntary and privacy should not be used in this way as an excuse not to do something, especially when the individuals involved want to help. I meet countless living donors who are so happy to have contributed to and extended someone else's life. The connection between donors and the people they have donated to is very deep. I have seen this countless times. I saw this at the Kidney March as well.

Those in need of organ or tissue donations will not stand for this type of bureaucratic logjamming. I find it is straight out of *Yes, Minister*. It is like we have seen this all before. It is worthy of Sir Humphrey Appleby saying that policy administration is different from the administration of the policy, and we cannot encapsulate this in the legislation. If it is being done already, let us put in the legislation. If we can coordinate better, let us do it through legislation.

Again, I do not see a reason why we cannot do this. None of the parliamentary secretary's objections, to me, stand up to scrutiny. I would urge the backbench government MPs, where I sometimes find kindred spirits, to support this bill. Let us take it to committee. If there are amendments to be made, we can do it there.

● (1140)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to address this very important bill proposed by my colleague from Edmonton Manning. I want to commend him at the outset. This is a great initiative, the kind of substantive initiative we would hope to see coming forward in private member's bills. The member is drawing from his own experience and knowledge of a particular area but is also bringing forward a proposal that is meaningful and that would have a positive impact for many Canadians.

This bill would create a national organ donation registry. When we look at the solution, it is important to start with what the problem is we are trying to solve. Some of the speeches that have been made on this bill have suggested that everything is fine. We have a current system in place, so let us just leave the current system in place. However, that is not good enough, because in 2014, almost 300 Canadians—278, to be precise—died waiting for organ transplants. Almost 300 families were affected by someone dying in their families simply because they were waiting for organ transplants. Perhaps not enough people had signed their donor cards, or perhaps there was not an effective system in place to ensure that they got the organs they needed. In 2013, the year before that, 246 people died.

Canada ranks relatively poorly when it comes to this area. In 2012, Canada ranked 20th in deceased organ donor rates. Many countries that are, generally speaking, similar to us, including Spain, the U.S., France, and the U.K., do better than Canada does in this respect. This is not because Canadians are less generous or less concerned about the health and well-being of themselves, their families, or their neighbours.

We need to recognize that we have a problem here. We are under-performing when it comes to supporting those who need to receive organ donations. Let us recognize that problem. I hope this bill will move forward as part of that solution and will also stimulate further discussion about how we can move forward and make this decision better. Maybe, as well, this debate will stimulate awareness among Canadians about the importance of being an organ donor.

The solution my colleague from Edmonton Manning has proposed is to have a national organ donation registry. As much as health care is predominantly a provincial jurisdiction, the bill proposes that there could be more effective national coordination. We could work together as a country to make sure that we are implementing best practices and getting the best use of organs and the best donations we could. This is a great initiative. This is the kind of area on which we should be working together as a country.

Private Members' Business

As a Conservative, I believe deeply in the principle of subsidiarity, that we should allow provinces and municipalities to operate in their own areas of jurisdiction without undue influence. However, this bill would create a mechanism for collaboration between different jurisdictions. It is an area where collaboration makes sense, where the sharing of information and working together, such that different regions help meet needs in other regions, is just transparently better for everyone. It is the kind of initiative that other levels of government would respond to very well.

It is a simple solution, one that would not tread on anyone's toes, so to speak. It would confront this very real problem, which is that people in Canada are dying because they are not getting access to the organs they need. Perhaps those people could get them under a better developed, better worked out, and better constructed system, as my colleague is proposing.

I hope that members will take their responsibilities seriously as they study this bill and consider how they vote. We have heard from the parliamentary secretary an indication that the members of the government will not be supporting this bill. However, I encourage all members, whatever party they are part of, to reflect on the potential of this initiative to save the lives of many Canadians and the potential to make an actual, substantial difference. That is our job here, after all. It is not to line up along party lines but to think about how an initiative like this could have a positive impact and really matter for people who are suffering and need the help.

● (1145)

My colleague from Calgary, who spoke before me, did an excellent job outlining this.

The objections we have heard are just not substantive. Yes, this is something new. There is a sense that there are existing initiatives and that we should just leave them in place.

Sometimes there is a tendency in government to want to just leave things the way they are. The old way may not be perfect, but we should just leave it the way it is. However, when there is a real need to move forward, because there is a definable negative impact from the current system and there are improvements needed that could and should be made, I think it behooves us to look for those solutions and not just say that we have an old system that is working and that we should just stick with it. I think we should be prepared to do more than we are doing.

There was some discussion about the issue of jurisdiction. This is one of those areas where, while respecting provincial jurisdiction, we should be open to the idea of national leadership and national coordination and co-operation. When there are clear economies of scale, because everyone has the same organs, whether they are in B.C., Quebec, or the Maritimes, there is no reason not to work together to achieve the kind of positive outcomes we can.

I would add that there is an opportunity to see the bill not as the end of a discussion but as the start of an important discussion. I think there are many other options we should explore, building on the leadership of the member for Edmonton Manning, to say how we could do more to encourage organ donations.

We could build on this through enhanced public education, working with provinces on education in schools so that young

people growing up are aware of the impact of organ donation and what it can do to help the quality of life of those in their communities. We could be looking at other kinds of programs that have been tried. One option might be a reverse-onus type of program where instead of people opting in as organ donors, people who do not want to be organ donors have to opt out. There would be a presumption of being opted in until an individual opts out.

These are models that have been explored and tried in other places. They are not part of the bill, but recognizing the challenge we face, which the member has brought forward, I think there is an opportunity for us to explore that conversation.

I would emphasize again, for the government and for all members as they think about how they vote on the legislation before us, that the current system is not good enough. When we have a large number of Canadians dying because of a lack of access to organs, and we have Canada under-performing compared to other countries, there is a problem and there is a need to respond in some way.

We are one country, and we can and should work together. We should not hide behind jurisdictional arguments to say that there should not be some kind of national coordination. Yes, of course we have to be respectful of provincial jurisdiction in this area, but that does not mean there cannot be collaboration across the board.

Yes, this is something new. This is a new idea that is different from the system we are using right now. However, that is not sufficient reason not to move forward.

If members have doubts about the bill, this is a vote at second reading that would allow it to go to committee. It would create an opportunity for further study, for Canadians who have been affected by this issue to come forward and tell their stories and for experts, legal and others, to propose modifications and improvements to the bill.

Let us not end it now. Let us move the bill forward to second reading. If members have doubts about it, I encourage them to vote for it at this stage, at least, because it will make a difference. It will make a difference to Canadians who are affected by this issue. It will make a difference as we start a conversation about how we can build on this to save more lives and have a positive impact on the health and well-being of Canadians.

I will be voting for the bill. I am pleased to do so, and I encourage all other members to do so as well.

● (1150)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to deeply thank my colleagues, the hon. members for Vancouver Kingsway, Calgary Confederation, Calgary Shepard, and Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, for their eloquent speeches, their efforts, and their support.

Business of Supply

Before I begin my speech, I would like to comment on the parliamentary secretary's speech this morning in which he stated that this bill is unnecessary. Almost 300 Canadians are dying needlessly every year. This bill tries to do something about it by trying to put forward an act that would help reduce that number or perhaps wipe it out completely. It is unfortunate that the parliamentary secretary is taking such a political position on something that would be touching Canadian lives and Canadians' health and future every day.

We in this House have an opportunity to do good or ill for Canada. I am asking all hon. members to make a choice to do good and support Bill C-223.

Health professionals and transplant advocacy organizations are calling for an improved organ donation system in Canada. Working together, we have the power to benefit all Canadians. We need a national organ donor registry.

We have also heard from some today who have concerns about the proposed registry. I appreciate their opinions. However, I urge all members not to allow the naysayers to influence their vote. I am asking members to carefully consider this issue and this bill and to do the right thing. If members feel that this bill has flaws, then they should make suggestions as to what needs to be done to improve it. It should be sent to committee, as all the members on this side and the NDP said earlier today. There, witnesses from across the country can talk about organ donation, transplantation, and the need for improvements in the system we now use.

This is not some abstract theory we are debating. For many Canadians, this literally is a matter of life and death. I have mentioned before that I am an organ donor and that my son is a three-time transplant recipient. Without those operations, he would have died.

In 2014, there were 2,356 organ transplant surgeries performed in Canada. At the end of the year, more than 4,500 Canadians were still waiting for the call that an organ was available for them. I deeply understand how they feel. In 2014, 278 Canadians died waiting for organ transplants, and 246 died the year before. In 2012, Canada ranked 20th out of 75 countries for deceased organ donor rates. Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom are among the countries that are doing much better than we are.

This is not a partisan issue. This is not an area in which we should be playing politics. This is not something that should be subject to bureaucrats protecting their turf and saying that this bill should be rejected because it does not conform to their vision of the way things should work. The system needs to be improved, and this bill would do that.

When we first spoke about Bill C-223, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health told us "the bill would duplicate existing initiatives between the federal government, provinces, territories, and the Canadian Blood Services." That is not the case. The bill gives the Minister of Health the legislative authority to determine how the registry is set up. It does not duplicate existing initiatives. However, it does provide a national vision.

Those in transplant advocacy groups are asking for this legislation. They say that what is in place is a good start but is not good enough.

Medical professionals and patient organizations have been telling me that Canada does not have a true organ donation registry and that we must have one.

The parliamentary secretary also said that another reason the bill will not be supported—

• (1155)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but the hon. member's time is up.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 15, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DECriminalIZATION OF MARIJUANA POSSESSION

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP) moved:

That the House: (a) recognize the contradiction of continuing to give Canadian criminal records for simple possession of marijuana after the government has stated that it should not be a crime; (b) recognize that this situation is unacceptable to Canadians, municipalities and law enforcement agencies; (c) recognize that a growing number of voices, including that of a former Liberal prime minister, are calling for decriminalization to address this gap; and (d) call upon the government to immediately decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana for personal use.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today on this important opposition day motion, dealing with the interim measure, the preparatory step to the legalization promised by the current government in its election campaign, namely, addressing the decriminalization of the possession of small quantities of marijuana.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Salaberry—Suroît. Madam Speaker.

Business of Supply

We are faced with an injustice. We are faced with a situation that is difficult to explain to the parents of young adults when I am called by a mother in tears who says her child has just been convicted of the possession of small quantities of marijuana. That young adult will not be able to get a job because he or she adult will have a record and will be at the bottom of the pile when it comes to job applicants. He or she will no doubt be unable to travel to the United States and will face heavy consequences, including perhaps finding a place to rent when it is disclosed on his or her application.

Meanwhile, the government is saying that within a short period of time it will bring in measures, amendments presumably to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, that would put together a regime to regulate and permit adults to consume marijuana.

We already have medical marijuana available, thanks to the courts of the land, and legislation and regulations in response to that. However, we are talking about young people in particular, and all Canadians, who wish to consume a substance that will be legal.

Therefore, what is the problem? The problem is it may take two years for the government to implement the regime it promised in the October election. When the Minister of Health spoke in New York at the United Nations she said, "... it is impossible to arrest our way out of this problem." Of course she is right.

However, the Liberals will continue to arrest their way out of the problem, likely until 2018. If she promised there would be legislation introduced in the spring of 2017, given the requirements of debate and committee work in both the House and the other place, it would not be implemented with the signature of the Governor General until perhaps 2018. In that circumstance, should it take two years, something perhaps approaching 100,000 Canadians would find themselves with a record for possession of small quantities of marijuana.

Statistics Canada reports that something approaching 60,000 Canadians a year will be convicted for that offence, because it currently is an offence. The government would say that the law is the law. Of course, it is right on that. However, what it does not tell us is that it has the ability under the law to address this injustice. That ability can be found in any number of ways.

I am not here to suggest the best way, but I will speak to one way.

If the government wishes to address this as a preparatory step on the road to regulation and permitting the use of marijuana for recreational purposes, it has the ability, under the Director of Public Prosecutions Act, for the Attorney General, the Minister of Justice, to issue a directive to the director of public prosecutions to the effect that it is no longer in the public interest for small quantities of marijuana to be the subject of prosecutions.

We are fortunate because that is quite readily done. Marijuana is not regulated under the Criminal Code, which would engage all the attorneys general and crown counsels across the land, at every provincial level. It is dealt with under the Department of Justice, through the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. Therefore, it would federal employees, crown counsel, who would be given that directive. In that way we could ensure that what I fear is a patchwork across the country would be dealt with as well.

When I say a patchwork, the situation at present is chaotic at best. I live in Victoria. The police have better things to do than prosecute people for simple possession of marijuana in most circumstances.

• (1205)

However, in the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, prosecution occurs much more readily. In the city of Kelowna, it occurs much more readily. We have a completely different regime in Canada, depending on where one is, to address the possession of marijuana. As a Canadian, I find that offensive. We live in one country. Why is the law so radically different in the real world depending on where one happens to be? That seems wrong.

That injustice can be dealt with quite readily should the government wish to do so. I have suggested one technique by which it could be achieved, but there no doubt are other techniques open to the government. The government can no longer simply hide behind the veil of it being against the law, the law is the law until it is changed. It has an interim way in which to change that law. Preparatory steps along the way would deal with the injustices.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have criminal records for the possession of marijuana, often going back 20 years. That is wrong. The government could, as a consequential amendment, deal with that, and I hope it does. In the meantime, the lives of people are being affected by an injustice that could be addressed by the government should it wish to do so.

It is important to recognize that we are not advocating that marijuana be made available to young people any more than the government is. We want and respect the government's efforts to achieve a robust regulatory regime that keeps marijuana out of the hands of young people, children, and so forth. However, we also want a regime where the injustices that are occurring now are addressed before we have to wait perhaps a year and a half or two years to address it. That is the reason for my motion today.

I think Canadians expect clarity from their government. The New Democrats believe it is irresponsible to allow valuable resources of police and courts to be wasted while a new criminal record is created for something that will be perfectly legal.

I asked the Minister of Justice to talk about this issue when she appeared before the justice committee.

It was reported by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada that the government planned to spend \$3 million to \$4 million each year prosecuting simple possession of marijuana. That money could be spent doing things that Canadians want to have addressed in an urgent way. Two or three per cent of its whole budget, which includes terrorism, prosecution of drugs, and the Criminal Code, is being used for this purpose according to the director of public prosecutions. That is his evidence.

Let me read to the House something that Justice Selkirk of the Ontario Court of Justice said in the case *Regina v. Racine*. He refused to accept a guilty plea for possession of marijuana. I would like to read what the hon. justice said in court that day:

Business of Supply

I recall distinctly the Prime Minister in the House of Commons saying it's going to be legalized. I'm not going to be the last judge in this country to convict somebody of simple possession of marijuana.... You can't have the Prime Minister announcing it's going to be legalized and then stand up and prosecute it. It just can't happen. It's a ludicrous situation, ludicrous.

I asked the minister, given those costs, would the government consider doing anything different, and the answer was vague to nonexistent.

From a financial point of view, from the heavy hardship we are imposing particularly on our younger population, and the member for Salaberry—Suroît will speak to that in greater detail, there is every reason to address this gap. The excuses given by the government for not doing so simply do not hold water. Changes could be made in the interim.

I want to end by saying something I said at the outset. The New Democratic Party agrees, like former Prime Minister Chrétien, that the time has come for decriminalization. There is every ability to fix this problem. It is a question of political will and sound public policy. To hide behind the status quo and do nothing, which is the government's particular option, until it finally has a law enacted is not right and it creates a continuing injustice in our country, which is felt in different parts of the country in different ways. It is time to fix that problem now.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to our justice critic's speech. I would like to lean on his expertise and ask a question to broaden the scope of our discussion.

Before embarking on a political career, which can end who knows when, I spent 25 years as a high school teacher. As we all know, teenagers experience so many different things, some of them only once. It is awful to be saddled with a criminal record at 14 or 15 for succumbing to peer pressure and trying an illegal substance. That can haunt a person for a long time.

In my colleague's view, is it true that it is getting harder and harder to obtain a pardon in Canada, never mind the costs associated with obtaining one?

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for his experience and expertise that he brings to bear on this important debate.

It is heartbreaking to receive letters from parents saying their child was dragged into a group setting, experimented with this substance, which, oh by the way will be a legal in a couple of years' time, and his or her life is destroyed, at least in the short term, until a pardon may or may not be granted. As the hon. member pointed out, getting a pardon is increasingly difficult. Reforms made by the former government have made that even more expensive and difficult than in the past.

Why, in that circumstance, will the government not understand that it is simply hiding behind the words "the law is the law until we change it", when it has techniques that it could bring to bear to fix it now? It is truly beyond my understanding.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member for Victoria made reference to a particular court case, and I believe it was heard by Justice Selkirk. He quoted some remarks by Justice Selkirk.

There were other relevant remarks, and I want to ask him about that. Justice Selkirk, in response to his remarks, was advised by the crown attorney that the federal crown's position was that the possession of marijuana was still illegal to possess and therefore still the law, to which the court said okay and it reset a trial date. Subsequently, in sentencing the accused in that matter, the judge issued an order that the accused was not to possess or consume any unlawful drugs or substances except with a valid prescription.

I am curious if the member opposite was aware of all of the facts of that particular case or only the small portion that he quoted.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, the remark I read was indeed a quote from the court transcript, brought to our attention by the director of public prosecutions.

What happened subsequently in that case was indeed other charges and sentencing for other matters. Nevertheless, the remarks that were made are very much reflective of what I hear from judges across this land. As justice critic for the opposition, I frequently hear from judges, mostly at the provincial court level, who are dealing with these issues in my province, and they are as frustrated as other Canadians with the status quo.

• (1215)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question relates to presumptions.

The hon. member has already spoken about the fact that there is a lot of confusion in the land for the pending legalization of marijuana that the Liberal government has talked about, although we are all aware that it is not legal at this point.

With regard to the presumption of allowing it to be decriminalized, would this not create just as much confusion in the absence of legislation for police and law enforcement going forward?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, the hon. member made a point about confusion, and that is a very fair point.

The question is on how one drafts the actual directive. That could be done by quantity, saying how many grams would be affected, and the circumstances could be laid out. All of that could be done as a matter of public policy by careful drafting.

The point about confusion is absolutely right. We live in a very confused state of the law, where something is essentially illegal in one province and wide open in another. It is time to fix that confusion once and for all.

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Victoria for his very enlightening and rational speech.

We have been waiting a long time for the Liberals to move forward with decriminalization because we want to know how the government plans to do a better job of regulating cannabis. It is important to me to stand in the House today to talk about this motion on marijuana decriminalization, which is in response to the Minister of Justice's announcement about legalizing it in the spring of 2017.

During the election campaign, the Liberals made this one of the major planks in their platform. They went on and on about it, but ever since being elected, they have been all over the map. They make announcements, backpedal, then make more announcements with precious few details. We sort of have a deadline. What is the Liberal government's actual, specific plan for legalizing marijuana? We are still in the dark and floundering around.

They have announced that the drug will be legalized in about a year, but they have not said anything about how they are going to make that happen. Why is that? We know that it could take up to two years before the legalization process is implemented and really applied. We need a consistent approach. The legal process surrounding cannabis must be logical and applied consistently in every province. Right now, the process is not the same from province to province. The law is not being applied in a fair and equitable way. People are not being treated fairly right now.

Here are some statistics. A Canadian community health survey took a closer look at the use of marijuana in Canada. In 2012, approximately 12% or three million Canadians had used marijuana in the past year and 43% of Canadians had tried marijuana. However, there is a slight decline in the use of the drug.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice have said on several occasions that the current laws governing this drug are inadequate, and I completely agree with them. In that case, why not decriminalize it immediately? We all know that the current system is not working, and, what is worse, it is a drain on the justice system and police resources, as my colleague from Victoria pointed out. Approximately \$4 million is spent every year on arrests and legal action.

That \$4 million could be spent on education, awareness, and prevention, rather than on cracking down on the drug, as my colleague from Trois-Rivières said. I am also trained as a teacher and I taught young people. My riding is near the United States border, where the trafficking of a number of drugs, including marijuana, occurs. Young people are able to access this drug very easily and they use it without really knowing the consequences. I will talk more about that a little bit later, but many young adults were arrested and still have criminal records. A criminal record has very serious consequences. Right now, people with criminal records have to wait 10 years before they can apply for a pardon. They have to wait 10 years.

An 18-year-old who is arrested for simple possession of marijuana often has to wait 10 years before he or she can get a job. No one wants to hire these youth, because they have a criminal record. It is

very hard for them to find housing, and it is impossible for them to cross the border into the U.S., even though many states, including Vermont, New York, and Maine, have already decriminalized marijuana. It is even legal in some states.

Why has Canada not yet brought in any measures to do the same? Why are our young people still being prosecuted? Why should our young people have to face roadblocks for 10 years and maybe the rest of their lives? A criminal record can have a lifelong impact. This is a very serious matter, and it is especially absurd given that we know that the Liberals plan to legalize cannabis. There is absolutely no reason whatsoever that it cannot be decriminalized.

● (1220)

A third of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 reported using marijuana in 2011, and more than half have tried it at least once. Two-thirds, 67%, of offences committed by young adults are linked to marijuana possession. That amounts to thousands of cases every year. Every year in Canada, nearly 57,000 arrests are related to simple possession of marijuana.

If we have to wait two years for the Liberal government to finalize the legislation, nearly 120,000 people will be arrested for this. It makes no sense to waste so many resources to arrest people for an offence related to something that is about to become legal. What will happen to those who are left with a criminal record? Will it disappear? What will the Liberals do about those cases?

A criminal record also prevents people from getting involved in charities. Some people who would like to help out in their communities are unable to do so. Community groups often ask people who want to volunteer for their organization to demonstrate that they do not have a criminal record, because the organizations need to protect themselves, and rightly so. Many communities organizations work with young people or people with mental health issues. This means that young people who have been arrested for simple possession of cannabis cannot get involved in their community because they have a criminal record.

People with a criminal record must disclose this fact for 10 years to their bank if they want to apply for a loan or to an insurer if they want to purchase home or car insurance. Even if they manage to find work, they may not even be able to purchase car insurance. They will therefore not be able to drive to work. This ultimately jeopardizes their careers and job searches. They will not be able to cross the border to visit friends or family members, either.

By refusing to move forward with decriminalizing marijuana, the government is making it even harder for young people to enter the job market and start their lives.

My office contacted organizations in my riding of Salaberry—Suroît, and these organizations are unanimous in their stance on implementing legalization directly and too quickly. We need an interim process, which would be decriminalization. This is a crucial step to help young people be healthy and to focus on prevention.

Business of Supply

According to Claude Théorêt, the CEO of PACTE de rue and a member of the Association des travailleurs et travailleuses de rue du Québec, we need to be proactive about awareness and education, to help young people, especially those under 18, understand the legal implications of the legalization of marijuana.

He says that people who work with youth mainly worry that they are not aware, which could promote illegal behaviour. Young marijuana users believe that the potential legalization of marijuana, which the Liberals announced during the election campaign, effectively gives them permission to use in public.

He is not the only one who says so. The two other people I will quote said it was problematic that the government announced the legalization of marijuana without announcing other measures.

Young people now think that they have the right to consume marijuana because the Prime Minister said it would be legal. This is not true, but they do not realize it. If these young people are not made aware of the restrictions that could come with the legalization of marijuana, they could engage in illegal social behaviour, which could result in needless criminal records for these young offenders. This is what Claude Théorêt believes.

Alexandra Laliberté, the director of Le Tournant, an alternative resource that works with people with mental health challenges, says that most people who contact her service have their first psychotic episodes when they use drugs and that they are not equipped to use the drugs safely.

She also says that young adults frequently abuse drugs and end up in panic mode. According to her, front-line services are having a hard time meeting current demand. Front-line intervention groups need to be part of the government's consultations on legalizing marijuana. They say that they are not being consulted by the government on this type of public policy that will be put on the table.

• (1225)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but it is now time for questions and comments. The hon. member can say more during questions and comments.

[English]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I want to thank the member opposite for her fine speech. All the facts that she quoted in her speech, with respect to the levels of charges and the numbers of charges being laid, I believe originated from 2012 and therefore are quite dated. I wonder if she has any more up-to-date information.

I can advise the House that, at least anecdotally, from speaking to law enforcement officials across the country, I understand the number of possession charges has been reduced very substantially from coast to coast. Certainly in the cities whose officials I have spoken to, those numbers are a small fraction of what they were in 2012.

I wonder if the member opposite has any more up-to-date information.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, I have the numbers from Statistics Canada for 2014. These numbers indicate that in 2014, there were 57,314 marijuana possession offences. That is not so long ago. I am not sure what numbers the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest has, but he could quote them to show how much that number has gone down.

In any case, this does not change the fact that the government specifically said that it was going to legalize marijuana. If it wants to legalize it, then it should do so. Even the Prime Minister said that the use or possession of marijuana should not lead to a criminal record. The Prime Minister admitted that he used marijuana and did not get a criminal record. He was lucky.

Currently young people, two-thirds of young people between 18 and 24, are the most affected. They are the ones who end up with a criminal record, which has very serious consequences for their work, housing, and the rest of their lives because their record will follow them for the rest of their lives.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have now heard two hon. members from the NDP speak about this issue. The reality is that it is still illegal in this land to possess marijuana, yet in both of the speeches, we have heard references to young people. Marijuana is illegal for everybody in this land.

Just to get away from any confusion that might exist in the absence of legislation, because we have no legislation at this point, although the Liberals are proposing it, what is the definition of “young people” in the context of what we have heard this morning in the speeches?

• (1230)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, we are talking about young adults, people who are 18 and older. What the government is currently saying is that it is illegal for everyone at present. However, the people most affected, those who are arrested most often, and who have the most criminal records are young people between the ages of 18 and 24. We are talking about these young people because they will be affected for the rest of their lives.

It makes no sense because the Liberals want to decriminalize marijuana. If they want to do it within two years, it means that they want to get rid of criminal records. In the meantime, out on the street, people continue to be arrested. Police officers think this situation is hazy and confusing. They no longer know whether to charge people, or if they should continue to prosecute young people and anyone arrested for possession of marijuana.

I would like to remind the Conservatives that they voted for decriminalization at their last convention. They should listen to their delegates.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question. We are not hearing a very firm deadline from the Liberal benches. During the election campaign, they said it would happen rather quickly. Then they said it would take a few months, perhaps it would be in the spring, and some are saying that it might not even happen during this parliament.

Business of Supply

If marijuana is to be legalized, there must be an agreement with the provinces on the distribution network. Therefore, is decriminalization not the only way to move forward?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Madam Speaker, at present it is a federal law. People are arrested for possession of cannabis and prosecuted under federal law, if they are prosecuted. However, enforcement is not consistent from province to province. Therefore, we have a problem.

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion proposed by the hon. member for Victoria for the decriminalization of the offence of possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Southwest.

The government has been very clear with its platform commitment and in its statement to Canadians and through this Parliament of its intention to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to marijuana.

Our government's objectives in doing so are to protect young Canadians by keeping marijuana out of the hands of children and youth. We also want to keep profits out of the hands of criminals, particularly organized crime. Through this process we want to ensure that Canadians are well informed through sustained and appropriate public health campaigns, for youth in particular, to ensure the risks are understood.

Let me be clear. The law with respect to marijuana is not in limbo. It is still in effect. Marijuana is currently a scheduled drug under schedule II of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The law is in force and it should be obeyed. The police have been enforcing this legislation and have the legal authority to do so until the law is changed.

As we are all well aware, marijuana is not always a benign substance. While many believe this substance to be harmless, its use presents a significant risk to certain segments of the Canadian population, notably children. Therefore, our first public interest priority is the protection of children.

Canada currently has the highest rates of marijuana usage of any developed country in the world, especially among youth. There is a significant body of scientific evidence that marijuana poses a significant health risk to the developing brain. Accordingly, we need to do a better job of protecting our youth. We also have to consider other public health and safety risks, such as the need to prevent drug-impaired driving and the need to promote safe and responsible production and distribution of marijuana.

In Canada, organized crime profits in the billions of dollars from the illegal trafficking of drugs generally and from marijuana in particular. Therefore, another very important public policy objective for our government, through the legalization and regulation of marijuana, is to take those profits away from organized crime, away from street gangs, and away from those who would victimize, and through violence, threaten so many of our communities.

The violence and victimization that takes place in communities as a direct result of the illegal activity around marijuana takes a terrible toll. We believe that a strictly controlled regulatory regime that is based on a public health model will better protect our communities and especially our children.

We believe that a public health approach will assure all Canadians that marijuana can be made available legally and safely to responsible adults. Our government will develop a regulatory scheme that will ensure that the production, distribution, retail sale, and consumption of marijuana will be controlled by regulation so as to ensure that we can achieve both our public safety aims and our public health aims.

The motion proposes that the government immediately decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana. While the motion does not define what is meant by "decriminalize", one thing is certain: if decriminalization were to occur, it would mean that marijuana would remain an illegal substance and that it would continue to be grown and distributed by organized crime networks. Canadians, both adults and youth, would continue to purchase a product of unknown potency and quality, while fuelling the profits of organized crime.

Simply removing the criminal penalties for the possession of marijuana would do nothing to make it harder for young people to access it. In fact, decriminalization may actually make it easier to acquire. Decriminalization would also not ensure that the quality of the marijuana would be safe for consumption. Black market marijuana is often contaminated with pesticides, herbicides, and mould. Decriminalization would not improve this situation. Moreover, it would not address illegal trafficking, nor prevent criminal organizations from deriving enormous profits.

● (1235)

Decriminalizing possession of marijuana without ensuring the appropriate controls are in place for its safe production, distribution, and access would be giving a green light to dealers and criminal organizations to continue to sell unregulated and unsafe marijuana to Canadians, especially children and youth. The government believes that there is a better approach to control the production, distribution, and consumption of marijuana than is currently the case under existing law. Improving on the present situation is a complex task. It will take a great deal of work. There are important questions that need to be answered.

With these as our objectives, the government has undertaken to establish a task force on marijuana legalization and regulation. The task force will engage with provincial and territorial governments, indigenous governments and national organizations, youth, and experts in public health, substance abuse, policing and law enforcement, justice, and economics. Crucially, it will also provide opportunities for individual Canadians to provide input and share their views. The aim of this consultation is to develop a comprehensive and properly functioning regime for controlling the safe production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis products across Canada. This task force will be set up very shortly and will have an ambitious timeline so that it can inform the government on its progress and complete its review in a timely and responsible way.

Business of Supply

As members are no doubt aware, my colleague, the Minister of Health, announced this past April at the United Nations General Assembly special session on the world drug problem, that the government would propose a new legislative framework for the legalization and strict regulation of marijuana in the spring of 2017. As members can see, it will take time to develop legislation and regulations to protect all Canadians. Rushing into an interim period of decriminalization, which would inject more unsafe and criminally grown and distributed drugs onto our streets and into our schools, is not in the best interests of Canadians, especially our youth. A properly designed and regulated system for the legal and safe production, sale, and possession of marijuana is the best answer to the concerns we all have about the current law.

We are confident that when the government bill is brought forward, members will appreciate why it is important to take the time needed to engage with experts and all Canadians in order to develop this important but complex legislative framework.

I appreciate being given the opportunity to speak to the motion. While I understand the good intentions of the proposed motion, I cannot support it. Decriminalization as the hon. member proposes would only deal with the demand side of marijuana and would not address its supply. It would leave the drug and its profits under the control of organized crime and do nothing to prevent young people from accessing it. The harms it would cause outweigh any possible benefits.

• (1240)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of my colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Earlier this afternoon, the minister's parliamentary secretary suggested that the Statistics Canada data that we cited about the number of simple possession charges in the country were somehow no longer reflecting current reality. Can the minister advise the House on how many thousands of Canadians have been given criminal records since the Liberals were elected in October 2015?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, I do not have the exact number to answer the question. However, I am happy to endeavour to find that answer and bring it back to my hon. colleague.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the minister for her speech. Basically, I was back in my riding and one of these illegal dispensaries had popped up in Oshawa. I had a former teacher come up and talk to me about some of the edibles being diverted to kids.

The reason the Liberals brought this forward was that they said it was going to keep the profits out of organized crime and keep it safe for our kids. Unfortunately, because the Liberals have not thought this through and they put no money in budget 2016 for proper inspection and enforcement, the exact opposite is true. We are getting more of these kid-friendly products in kids' hands. As for the money in these dispensaries, I wonder where the minister actually thinks the marijuana is coming from.

I want to ask the minister this. If they are currently illegal, why are the Liberals not cracking down on the illegal dispensaries, and why

was there no money put into the budget for this program that they are bringing forward?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for a question that addresses many different issues that we want to move forward.

As I mentioned in my remarks, we are moving forward and we will announce very shortly a task force that will look into and engage many experts in the area of health, in the area of law enforcement and justice, among other issues, to actually have conversations about products that are available. Our objective, as I have stated, is to keep harmful products out of the hands of children.

As the member quite rightly states, shops that are operating right now outside of the marijuana for medical purposes regulation are operating illegally, and we respect the role of local law enforcement agencies to do their job.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a 17-year-old daughter, like many people in Whitby, which is a bedroom community with a lot of families.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Justice what impact decriminalization would have on our young people in school. Alternatively, what is the impact of taking the cautious steps that she has outlined and waiting until it is legalized?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, as I have stated, the ultimate objectives of our government in terms of the legalization of marijuana are to keep it out of the hands of children and keep the profits out of the hands of organized crime.

We want to proceed on this highly complex matter in terms of legalization in a cautious and orderly manner so we can ensure that we restrict access and we strictly regulate marijuana. We want to be mindful and have regard to the opinions of experts and to the contributions of Canadians when we engage in a task force, so we ensure that their voices are heard and we ensure that we achieve our ultimate objectives after we engage in a task force and after we put forward legislation that will achieve those objectives.

• (1245)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to rise this morning in response to the motion from the hon. member for Victoria.

I will begin my remarks by talking about some of the evidence that we have available to us about cannabis control and draw some conclusions from that.

Certainly, an examination of the evidence tells us that cannabis use carries significant health risks, especially for people who frequently use it or begin to use it at a very early age. The evidence also indicates that a public health approach focused on high-risk users and practices, similar to the approach favoured with alcohol and tobacco in Canada, allows for more control over the risk factors associated with cannabis-related harm. From this evidence, we can draw the conclusion that legalization, combined with strict health-focused regulation, would provide an opportunity to reduce the harms associated with cannabis use.

Business of Supply

I do not want to repeat what the Minister of Justice has spoken about, the government's plans, because I think she has covered that more than adequately. However, I do want to take this opportunity to try to differentiate between our government's approach and what is proposed in the motion.

For example, on the issue of decriminalization, models of cannabis decriminalization vary greatly, but they generally involve removing possession of small amounts of cannabis from the sphere of criminal law. Prohibition remains the rule, but sanctions for possession and use of cannabis instead become civil violations, punishable by a small fine.

Unfortunately, this model fails to address several of the harms associated with the prohibition of cannabis use. Under decriminalization, cannabis remains unregulated and this means that users know little or nothing about the potency or the quality of what they are purchasing. Far too often, the source of production in this country has been organized crime, which is reckless in the extreme of the safety and health impacts it can have for Canadians.

As long as cannabis use is illegal, it is difficult for health care or educational professionals to effectively address and prevent problematic use. The law enforcement focus on prohibition drives cannabis users away from prevention, risk reduction, and treatment services.

Decriminalization may even encourage commercialization of cannabis production and distribution, creating a world of opportunity for organized crime without giving government any additional regulatory tools. These activities would remain under the control of criminal elements, and for the most part, users would still obtain cannabis in the illicit market where they are exposed to other drugs and criminal activity.

In addition, under the decriminalization model where the police are given the opportunity to issue tickets instead of proceeding with criminal charges, what we have seen in many other jurisdictions where such a practice has been followed is that there is a net widening and a far greater likelihood of people getting caught up in the enforcement net. In addition, fines have proven to be a regressive penalty in the sense that they place a disproportionate burden on low-income individuals.

In 2012, the hon. member for Outremont, the leader of the member's opposite party, was asked specifically if he would decriminalize marijuana. I will share with members his response. He said, "...No. I think that would be a mistake because the information that we have right now is that the marijuana that's on the market is extremely potent and can actually cause mental illness." He went on to suggest that we should get the best medical experts, the best legal experts, and the best law enforcement experts around the table to see what is realistic. This sounds remarkably like our plan to bring forward a task force to speak to the experts in science, health, justice, and law enforcement to get the best evidence and information from experts across the country to inform the government's development of a regulatory framework for the regulation and control of marijuana.

The member for Outremont said that to decide in advance that it should simply be open would be "a serious mistake", and I agree with him.

Legalization removes the social harms and cost of prohibition. Removing criminal and civil penalties for possession of cannabis would eliminate the more than \$1 billion Canada spends annually to enforce and prosecute marijuana possession laws. In a jurisdiction where Canada's production and distribution are legal and properly regulated, criminal involvement in these activities should shrink significantly and potentially disappear.

It is important to recognize that legalization alone does not reduce the health risks and the harms of cannabis. However, it presents governments with an opportunity to regulate cannabis to mitigate those risks, something that cannot effectively be done under prohibition or decriminalization.

● (1250)

We have also looked at the experience in other jurisdictions. A number of states in the United States have gone through the process of the legalization of recreation and medical markets, and they have shared some lessons with us that I would like to share with the House.

First, the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse did an analysis of lessons learned in Colorado and Washington state and its first recommendation in its report was as follows: "Take the time required to develop an effective framework for implementation and to prepare for a successful launch". The interim measure that is proposed in this motion does none of those things.

The report urges us to do the following:

Develop the capacity to administer the regulatory framework, recognizing that a significant investment in staff and administration is required to process licenses, conduct comprehensive inspections and address violations;...

Invest proactively in a public health approach that builds capacity in prevention, education and treatment before implementation to minimize negative health and social impacts associated with cannabis use;...

Invest in research to establish the evidence base...; and

Conduct rigorous, ongoing data collection...

That is the Government of Canada's plan. Our plan is to develop a strict regulatory framework based on a public health approach that would mitigate the health and social harms of marijuana use. We are committed to taking the time to do this right. We are committed to bring forward evidence-based policy, based on the best evidence available to us in the fields of science, health, justice, and law enforcement. We are committed to consult across this country to bring that evidence before the House and ensure that the work we do in bringing forth a regulatory framework achieves our public policy aims.

Our public policy aims are clear. We intend to make Canada a safer place for our kids by protecting them from the harms that marijuana can have on the developing adolescent brain; to protect our communities from the damage, violence, and victimization brought about by organized crime through its involvement in the illegal drug trade, in particular the illegal marijuana trade; and to protect the health of Canadians by ensuring a strict regulatory framework for the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis that works for the health and safety of all Canadians.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the member, as the representative of the Minister of Justice, what I think is a very simple question.

Business of Supply

As we know, federal prosecutors enforce marijuana possession laws from coast to coast. Apparently, in Kelowna, there are 251 charges per 100,000 people for marijuana possession, whereas in St. John's, Newfoundland, there are 11 per 100,000.

My question for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada is this. Does this discrepancy seem just?

Mr. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, we recognize that there is a disparity in the enforcement of these laws. Quite frankly, in the absence of other supportive evidence, it is difficult to determine whether that is a result of a different approach either by the police in the laying of charges or by the prosecutors in exercising their discretion—and I know that there are different approaches in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion in both British Columbia and Newfoundland—or whether that disparity reflects a different pattern of use in those two jurisdictions.

In the absence of evidence, it is difficult to quantify, but we recognize that there is disparity in the enforcement of these regulations. It is one of the reasons we are committed to the legalization of marijuana, not merely to reduce that particular social harm but to also show health harms. This is an opportunity, as I have said, to bring in a strict and effective comprehensive regulatory framework that would enable us to address all of the harms associated with cannabis use.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member, as well as the Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister. We have heard them all state that legalization is going to take it out of the hands of organized crime and keep our children safe. As we know, drug dealers are not interested in keeping any drugs out of the hands of our kids and continue to diversify.

My question would be this. The premise is that legalizing marijuana would keep kids safe, take drugs out of the hands of organized crime, and everything is going to be great. Extrapolating that, is there is an intention to also legalize street fentanyl, OxyContin, W-18, W series drugs, ecstasy and cocaine, which are on the rise and have been on the rise for quite some time?

• (1255)

Mr. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, our commitment has been very clear and precise. Our intention is to legalize, regulate, and restrict marijuana in Canada, and we have not made any other comments.

This government is pursuing a public health approach with respect to all of our policies because of our commitment to keeping our communities safe and our citizens healthy. However, our commitment has been very clear. We are going to legalize, regulate, and restrict marijuana.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that ran on a platform to legalize and regulate marijuana. As any expert will tell us, prohibition causes more problems than it proposes to solve. The answer is a regulatory framework based on evidence.

We are not moving toward legalization now. Rather, we are moving toward legalization a year from now. My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. We will be facing prohibition over

this next year. Therefore, is decriminalization not a fair option, as a matter of scarce judicial resources and to not negatively affect the lives of young people for no reason at all when we are legalizing it within one year?

Mr. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, let me be very clear. There are significant social and health harms associated with cannabis use. Currently, control of cannabis is exercised through an existing legislative framework that has been in place for over a century in this country. Through the best advice of experts from across the fields of science, health, justice, and law enforcement, we are proposing to bring forward a proper, effective, and comprehensive regulatory framework to replace the existing system of control.

In the interim, it would be reckless in the extreme, and perhaps create much greater risk for our communities, to remove all control of cannabis. It would create opportunities for organized crime and put our children at risk.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Durham.

I want to start by thanking the NDP for bringing this motion forward today. It is indeed an important issue that the Liberals are refusing to deal with. The Liberals continue to state that their plan to legalize marijuana is to “keep marijuana out of the hands of children, and the profits out of the hands of criminals”, but the exact opposite is true.

I have numerous concerns and questions about the lack of marijuana policy by the Liberals. I know that many Canadians across the country do as well. The Liberals are providing no direction, and they continue to avoid answering important questions when it comes to their inconsistent drug policies. For example, who is monitoring these illegal marijuana dispensaries that are popping up across the country by the hundreds? How do we know where these illegal dispensaries are getting their marijuana from? Who is ensuring that these illegal marijuana dispensaries are not producing laced marijuana?

How can we be sure that these dispensaries are not selling or diverting marijuana to children and that they are not targeting children by promoting kid-friendly edibles? How much marijuana will an individual be able to possess without consequences? If legalized or immediately decriminalized, will dispensaries be allowed to sell edibles, which are known to be harder to monitor for THC levels? Will they be allowed to advertise these kid-friendly edibles?

I could go on and on, which is why I believe that decriminalizing marijuana immediately is not the solution. As of right now, the distribution of marijuana is illegal unless a licence by Health Canada has been issued and the producer complies with the marijuana for medical purposes regulations.

Business of Supply

Recently at the Standing Committee on Health, we learned from Health Canada officials that the Liberals have allocated no money, zero dollars, for the inspection of these illegal marijuana dispensaries. In my riding of Oshawa, an illegal marijuana dispensary has recently popped up. The issue is that it is illegal. Law enforcement agencies are unclear as to whether or not they should allow these dispensaries to continue to operate because the Liberals have announced an apparent plan to eventually legalize marijuana.

The fact of the matter is that the Liberals have been contradicting most of their campaign promises since forming government. They have said they were going to legalize marijuana, but they also said they would run modest \$10-billion deficits. They said they would run an open and competitive process to replace the CF-18s. They said that they would lower the small business tax rate. They also promised \$3 billion of an investment into palliative care, and that was nowhere to be found in the Liberals' budget.

Clearly, Liberal campaign promises are cheap. We do not even know if marijuana is going to become legal, so why would decriminalizing it immediately be the solution? At this time, the only responsible solution is to enforce the law.

On our side, our top priority needs to be the safety of all Canadians, especially our youth. The Liberals are doing a lot of talking, saying that marijuana is illegal until the Criminal Code is changed, yet they are doing absolutely nothing about the abundance of illegal marijuana dispensaries that are producing marijuana with zero oversight. This raises more questions that Canadians deserve to have answers to.

How are municipalities and law enforcement agencies across this country supposed to operate without any guidance from the Liberal government? Are the profits from these illegal marijuana dispensaries going to organized crime? We do not know because the Liberals do not seem to really care. They have failed to provide a responsible thought-out plan, and that is what is unacceptable about this current situation.

As elected officials, it is our job to represent our constituents as well as making sure that all Canadians are safe. Immediately decriminalizing marijuana does not solve the issue of illegal marijuana dispensaries. It does not ensure that Canadians will be responsible while using marijuana.

It is easy for former politicians to advocate for the decriminalization of marijuana when they have no responsibility to represent the good of their constituents. As an elected member of Parliament, I have a responsibility to ensure that my constituents are safe. Now that one of these illegal dispensaries is in my riding of Oshawa, I am concerned that it is operating illegally and that there are no inspections on what is being sold and to whom. I worry that marijuana products such as brownies and cookies might end up in the hands of Canadian kids.

● (1300)

I know that my constituents will have questions, and because of the lack of information from the Liberals, I will not have very many answers for them. This is why the immediate action that the Liberals must take is enforcing the law.

In my opinion, immediately decriminalizing the simple possession of marijuana for personal use does not take into consideration the implications this may have, one, for traffic and workplace safety; two, the health of Canadians, especially our adolescents and our youth; three, international treaty obligations; and, four, Canada's marijuana for medical purpose regime.

We realize that this issue is on the minds of Canadians. Recently at the Conservative Party convention, the following resolution was passed:

In order to expand the means which law enforcement authorities have at their disposal to combat drugs and their negative impacts, particularly among young people, and to reduce the volume of judicial proceedings, we recommend that peace officers be enabled to issue tickets for simple possession of small quantities of marijuana.

While there is so much in the NDP motion that the Conservatives could support, the motion calls to immediately decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana. As members can see, there are far too many unanswered questions by the Liberals, and for that reason I will not be able to support the motion. Just because the Liberals made an irresponsible campaign promise without considering the consequences does not justify the House approving an irresponsible solution.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems pretty clear in the debate we are having today that Liberals and Conservatives favour continuing to arrest Canadians for simple possession of pot.

Last year, Canadians were asked whether simple pot possession for individual use should be decriminalized. What is interesting is that 68% of Canadians said that they agree with the NDP motion and they believe in decriminalization. What I think is even more impressive for the member is that 70% of folks in Ontario also believe that simple possession of marijuana should be decriminalized, and 51% of folks who voted Conservative actually agree with the NDP motion and want to decriminalize marijuana.

Given that 68% of Canadians and 51% of Conservatives agree with us, why is the member voting the other way?

● (1305)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, this really is a big difference between the Conservatives and the NDP. In the motion, the NDP is asking to decriminalize immediately. As I said at the beginning, our focus, always, is the health and safety of Canadians. Even when the Liberals brought it forward, they said to keep the proceeds out of the hands of criminals and to keep our kids safe.

What Canadians expect us to do, even if they are supportive of an action, is to make sure that we have all the things in place to ensure that Canadians will maintain their safety. I mentioned so many things that are wrong with the current situation. I am in full agreement with the NDP that the Liberals have made a disaster out of this. I was very saddened to hear that they did not put any money aside for inspecting these illegal dispensaries. Most important, nobody wants kids to be able to eat these gummy bears, cookies, and brownies, or bring them to their schools.

These are things that we have to address before moving forward with anything.

Business of Supply

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was very interested to hear my friend speaking about the recent Conservative convention and this issue of giving tickets to individuals who are picked up for small possession.

My question for the member is this. Does he know that that answer is in fact decriminalization?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, again, there was a motion passed at the convention, and the reality is that no matter what motion is passed anywhere, what Canadians expect is a government to be responsible.

I am disappointed that the Liberal members are not moving forward in trying to get their ministers to pay attention to what is actually happening on the ground. In Vancouver, for example, there are more of these illegal marijuana dispensaries than Starbucks. What is the Liberal government doing? It is totally ignoring it, and it is downloading the enforcement on to local municipalities.

With respect to any movement forward on this file, what Canadians expect is that a government takes responsibility and has a responsible approach, not the irresponsible approach that has been advocated for today and also by the Liberal Party, which is doing absolutely nothing to address the questions coming from our municipalities and ordinary Canadians.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is important to underline that the motion passed at the Conservative convention was not a decriminalization motion. It was one that I was pleased to speak in favour of, in fact. The motion did not remove criminal penalties, but did give police a ticketing option. It expanded the range of available options.

We are dealing with this debate in a particular context, the context in which unfortunately many young Canadians just do not understand the risks associated with marijuana. The Prime Minister admitted to smoking marijuana while being an elected member of Parliament with nary an apology.

Could the member comment specifically on what information we can get to young people to help them understand the real risks associated with marijuana use?

Mr. Colin Carrie: The science is clear, Madam Speaker. For our youth, especially those under the age of 25, there are serious mental health considerations, a more likelihood of schizophrenia. This is what really concerns me right now with these illegal dispensaries. They are putting out kid-friendly products such as cookies, brownies, gummy bears, jujubes, and this is proliferating around communities that have never had this issue before. It is exploding.

I would like to see the Liberals take some responsibility for this. They should not wait a year. They should start putting things in place right now so this stops immediately because it is affecting our kids.

• (1310)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in debate on the opposition day motion brought forward by the NDP. In many ways, having listened to speakers from the government side, particularly the member for Scarborough Southwest, it has me thinking it is Wednesday on the Hill, not Monday. His speech seemed more like yoga on the Hill, where he twisted and contorted himself into different positions,

trying to claim that the Liberal track record was on the side of evidence, yet not getting there. It was an interesting speech, and I will address what that hon. member said.

The one thing my friend from Victoria and the NDP bring forward, which makes sense with this motion, is the contradiction facing the government. The motion begins with trying to recognize the contradiction. It is my position, and I think that of my colleagues in the Conservative caucus, that we do not fill a bad policy vacuum with more bad policy. The end state of the opposition day motion is to immediately decriminalize marijuana. I do not think any responsible advocate would say that would be the approach to a wild west situation.

However, I understand the frustration of the New Democrats, because there is a degree of wild west out there right now. My friend from Oshawa talked about the new dispensary that opened in his community. We have seen this in Vancouver and Toronto, and a lot of parts of the country because of the vacuum created by an irresponsible, ill thought-out promise by the Prime Minister when he was third party leader.

There were a number of reasons for his bold policy statement, but one of them was to cover up his own use of marijuana while he was a member of Parliament. However, we do not create public policy based on our own situation or in response to what we feel would be the political debate. We actually do consult the experts. We listen. My friend from Winnipeg speaks more in the House than anyone, but seems to listen very little. I hope he would change that too.

The Liberals talk about evidence in science. The evidence is before us on the scientific front. Marijuana significantly harms the developing brain. Therefore, the motion today that would quickly decriminalize a drug is irresponsible. So is the approach of the vacuum created by the government as it lumbers toward fully legalizing and in some ways legitimizing marijuana.

The evidence is crystal clear. I did not hear the member for Scarborough Southwest say much about that when he talked about evidence. I did hear the member, the former chief of police from Toronto, quote at length the member of Parliament for Outremont. He seemed to revel in that quote, so I will quote the member for Scarborough Southwest. Years ago in the *Scarborough Mirror*, a paper that serves the riding he represents, he said while chief of police:

We do not support the decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana...that sends an appalling and inappropriate message and is not going to do anything to reduce the harm in our communities...

That is an interesting quote. We did not hear those words from him today. As a politician now, he is the one charged with filling this vacuum about which all communities are concerned. He seems to have changed his position and given no reason for it.

He did refer to evidence of scientists and law enforcement. Let us look at the evidence from law enforcement.

Business of Supply

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which that member used to belong to, has looked at the public policy ramifications of legalization and decriminalization. It came up with a policy that most recently the Conservative convention in Vancouver endorsed. In fact, my friend from Beaches—East York should do a little more research. It is not decriminalization. It is ensuring that there is not a direct route for small amounts straight to the Controlled Drugs and Substance Act, the criminal route. It is called “discretion for law enforcement in ticketing”.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police passed resolution 3 in Winnipeg in 2013. The member for Scarborough Southwest, the now parliamentary secretary charged with leaving this vacuum on marijuana, was part of the conference. With respect to marijuana, it said that because of “a negative impact on public safety and the health of young persons” and because it impaired cognitive function, there needed to be a hybrid solution that allowed law enforcement and society to keep control through criminalization of this drug, but to give discretion to law enforcement.

● (1315)

I think none of us wants to see the scenario of a young person whose career or travel opportunities are cut short by personal use. We have evolved as a society. In fact, since 2013, when the member was a member of the Canadian Chiefs of Police Association, as a member of Parliament, I was taking that position, which at the time was contrary to my own party's position. Why was that? It was because my old colleague, and our friend David Wilks, a lifelong RCMP officer, brought forward the proposal, in conjunction with the chiefs of police, and made a public policy rationale and argument for it. He worked diligently, and I salute David. He lost in the last election and that is too bad. His policy work as an independent MP has been more profound and substantive than the entire government.

The member for Scarborough Southwest says that the government is taking an evidence-based approach, but then he disregards the evidence from the group to which he belonged, the chiefs of police, and from the medical profession, and allows this lawlessness to exist.

That is where I agree with my friends in the NDP, recognizing the contradiction when the Prime Minister said that this product would be legal if people voted for him. Now we are waiting. There is indecision, and mental and physical yoga in trying to justify its delays and positions.

When the Liberals made that promise, they knew Canada would be in violation of international treaties. They knew science supported the fact that chronic use of marijuana could lead to cognitive impairment on the developing brain. They knew the risks to public safety. They knew there would be a wild west approach to these street front retail locations that hoped to be the stores when the member for Scarborough Southwest finally unveiled his plan. This is like the gold rush. They are all staking their claim.

When I was veterans affairs minister, groups suggested to veterans that medical marijuana would cure their PTSD. That bothered me to no end because the science did not support that. In fact, the chair of research for the Canadian Psychiatric Association was the first witness at public safety committee. He said that there was no clinical support for PTSD assistance through medical marijuana. In fact,

reports suggest the contrary. Groups also trying to get storefronts are in some cases trying to sign up more and more people, not always concerned whether that is the right treatment option for them.

What I would like to see from the government, particularly from that member, is a more succinct discussion on the harms of the substance. I took a position contrary to my party. I said that we could not have the criminal ramifications for young people for personal use that did not cause any harm. However, no man is an island, as the old expression goes. We cannot permit a drug to be decriminalized with one vote in the House without an approach to ensure there are controls and criminal sanction when warranted.

What I like about the NDP's opposition motion is that it is at least bringing up the issue. The Liberals ran very hard on it. We all remember the drives they did on university and college campuses. Now we have this indecision being filled by operators, and there is no suggestion the federal government is going to take a leadership role to stop that. We saw Mayor Tory in Toronto crack down, and we applaud him for that. However, the government, which ran on this, is avoiding responsibility to have a serious discussion on it, much like the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police did in 2013, to not only talk about the harms, but also how we can reduce the criminal sanction and the impact for someone who has not caused harm to others.

I hope the debate today starts off a process of the government becoming responsible for the vacuum it has created and the uncertainty and criminal activity that surrounds it. I hope it comes up with a solution before the House rises.

● (1320)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was certainly intrigued that at the Conservative convention just a few weeks ago a resolution was passed to allow for the ticketing of those who possessed small personal amounts of marijuana. Therefore, there is movement happening here.

In that light, I am interested in the member's comments with respect to my and the New Democrats' hope of what might be the benefits of freeing up the police and taxpayer financial resources, which right now are consumed with ticketing individuals, and young adults in particular, for personal possession of marijuana, to focus on the true aspects of drug crime.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for delving into what I talked about. I appreciate the fact that she was listening intently.

Business of Supply

My rhetorical passion got the better of me and I did not get into the full details of what the chiefs of police said and the position I support, which is that the simple possession of 30 grams of cannabis or one gram of cannabis resin would be exempt from the criminalized route at the discretion of law enforcement officials. They are the experts who we should be listening to on the public safety ramifications. Therefore, officers could look at the situation and issue a ticket. If someone kept repeating the violation or was near a school or there were other factors combining it with other illegal activity, which is often the case, officers would have the discretion to lay the charge and keep that criminal sanction intact. It is a responsible approach that was advanced for many years by our colleague David Wilks, and is supported by the chiefs of police and by many Canadians.

I would suggest to the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest, whom I respect a great deal, to push this solution on the Prime Minister rather than his radical and not well-thought-out legalization plan.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague this morning for his impassioned speech. I actually think there is some common ground in his remarks this morning. On both sides of the aisle, we agree there are some harms that are associated with marijuana that we need to protect against.

I think we would also agree that the status quo is not working. As the hon. Minister of Health said recently before the United Nations, we cannot arrest ourselves out of this situation. As someone who has worked in law enforcement, I think that she speaks with great credibility when she makes that statement.

The member also said that he does not believe that there should be criminal sanctions on a go-forward basis. However, when one listens closely to his remarks this morning one has trouble finding how there is any clarity with respect to a solution to ensure that youth will not continue to be charged and that we will not reduce the harm principle, because there is nothing in his remarks that I heard this morning that addresses the supply side of the issue. Most importantly, there was nothing in his remarks that provided a clear solution when it comes to choking off the resources and the proceeds of crime, which will continue to be fed to organized crime.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, my friend from Eglinton—Lawrence did not quite hear my speech, because I did talk about harm reduction. I actually used a quote from his colleague, the member for Scarborough Southwest, who said that decriminalizing small amounts writ large would not be a way to reduce harm in the community, and he is now charged with coming up with a solution. Therefore, I did mention it.

Since 2013, I have been advocating for a change to the status quo. I have been quite clear here that I am not suggesting legalizing, opening up, or that there is no harm to this product, which is the impression the legalization vacuum of the Prime Minister has created, as well as the lawlessness on the street fronts and in the shops. Rather, what we should have is a sound policy discussion, working with the chiefs of police, and an approach that gives them the tools they need to sanction criminal behaviour.

As I said, no one wants to see a young person, a professional, or a Liberal MP criminalized for simple possession. I have been saying that even when I was at odds with some of the folks in my own party. However, I was doing so alongside people like David Wilks and others by talking about this in a balanced way in terms of how we can reduce criminal sanction where it is not needed and control and provide that criminal sanction where it is, and talk about the risks to health and public safety. We have heard none of that in a responsible way from the government.

• (1325)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for the great riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam.

It is a great honour to be rising to speak to the motion that was brought forward by my friend from Victoria because it is a motion the House really needs to debate. Furthermore, it shines some much-needed sunlight on the absolute confusion and contradictions of the current Liberal government when it comes to marijuana policy. It is a discussion the House needs to have, and more important, it is a discussion that Canadians need to hear.

We are debating a motion that would recognize the contradiction of continuing to give Canadians criminal records for simple possession of marijuana, after the government has clearly and explicitly stated that it should not be a crime. That is a glaring contradiction and is completely unfair.

We have heard in the House before, and I am sure many Canadians have heard, that the definition of insanity is to do things over and over again expecting that, even when it brings about the same result, it will bring a different result. That is simply what we are doing in this case with our marijuana laws and it is time we take a closer look at them.

Cannabis prohibition in Canada has a history that goes back to the 1920s when it was first added to the narcotics drug act as an amendment after a very late night session in April 1923. Its prohibition, going to the United States as well, has also been linked with some of the racial policies as it was seen as an effective tool of controlling Mexican immigrant labour. There is a very clouded history with marijuana prohibition and not all of it was based on completely clear science.

Legalizing marijuana was the big campaign item of the Liberal plan. However, since the Liberals have taken office, not very much has been done. It has already been a big change from the Liberal position. In 2009, the Liberals voted with the Conservatives to introduce mandatory minimum sentences for cannabis-related offences, not a sign of a very progressive party back then. We even have former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien calling for the decriminalization of marijuana. We see even within the Liberal Party itself there are a few different splits, and the official policy of the government is off base with a lot of those members.

Business of Supply

It is the height of hypocrisy that we have a Liberal government that openly and loudly campaigned on the promise to legalize and regulate marijuana and is now refusing to do anything for Canadians who are found guilty of that possession. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Justice continues to repeat that the law is the law is the law, and that he hopes that all Canadians will respect the law. He has made mention of the fact that he is of the opinion that decriminalization would not do anything to protect our children or to remove the profits from criminal activity.

While I respect the parliamentary secretary's many years as a police officer, his statements are somewhat misleading to the House and to the Canadian public. Let me make this perfectly clear for everyone listening right now. Under our current marijuana laws, the black market is worth \$6 billion in British Columbia alone. Criminal sanctions up to this date have completely failed to make a dent in this trade. As for children, let me also inform members of this fact. Under our current prohibition laws, one can go to pretty much any major city in Canada to the nearest street corner, and marijuana will be easier to obtain than either alcohol or tobacco, two products that are strictly regulated by the provincial governments.

I applaud the fact that the Liberals will be moving ahead with legalization and regulation sometime in the future. However, what we are talking about is the here and now and the continued unfairness of our current regime. Provincial governments regulate alcohol, tobacco, and gambling, and they make millions of dollars off all three. It can be argued quite clearly and with lots of evidence that all three do much more harm to our society than does marijuana, yet look at the laws we have; they are completely unbalanced.

I of course agree that we must do everything to reduce harm to our children. I am a father of young children and I expect it is a conversation I will have to have with them at some point in the future. However, using the argument that decriminalization would do nothing toward preventing children from using the drug or that it would do nothing against criminal profits is a logical fallacy of the highest degree, especially when the current regime is quite clearly failing in both of these regards right now.

• (1330)

The time has come to talk about what decriminalization will do.

Under our current Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, under subsection 4(4) and subsection 4(5), marijuana possession of 30 grams or less can result in up to a \$1,000 fine and/or six months in jail, and yes, it comes to the discretion of the police officer. However, our problem on the NDP side of the House is that the law is applied haphazardly depending on which jurisdiction in Canada a person is in. I do not feel that it is right to base a person's future on the simple discretion of a police officer. We need to have current laws that apply equally in every part of this country.

This can have profound consequences on a person's life, and not many of our young people are aware of those consequences. As we continue with the prohibition of marijuana, they might not get criminal sanctions. They might not even get a charge, but they will always have it on their record that a police officer stopped them for that, and it can haunt them for years to come.

In 2014, there were 161 marijuana possession charges per 100,000 Canadians, and that is a total of about 57,314 Canadians in 2014 alone. Possession of cannabis is responsible for 54% of all police-reported drug crime.

The Minister of Health has been quoted a few times saying that it is impossible to arrest our way out of this problem. Yet by not supporting decriminalization efforts, that is precisely what the Liberal government is doing. We are continuing to arrest our way out of this problem, which I want to make perfectly clear. Canadians should not have to wait for another year and a half for the current Liberal government to get its act together on a promise it made to Canadians. It is completely morally unjustifiable.

When we have a Prime Minister who, on the campaign trail, made an explicit promise to Canadians that the marijuana laws were going to be reformed and that legalization was going to be brought in, and then that party forms government, we can understand the confusion. I have constituents who thought that marijuana was suddenly okay to possess the day after the Liberals got elected. I have had police officers tell me that they do not know whether to apply the law equally or not, because they simply do not know what the government's intentions are.

My friend, the member of Parliament for Victoria, has already quoted a few justices who said that they do not want to be the last judge to hand out a marijuana sentence because of the intent of the government. It is complete chaos and confusion, especially on the west coast of British Columbia, an area I am so fortunate to represent as a member of Parliament.

The promise that the Liberals made has evaporated into nothing, because that is what we have now. We have nothing. We have no action. We have the status quo. Canadians did not vote for the status quo. They did not vote to continue with indefensible punishments of possession of marijuana while we wait for the government to get its act together and introduce laws sometime next year.

Canadians will continue to be arrested. They will continue to receive criminal records. They will continue to be listed in police databases and continue to suffer from those records long into the future. It is another year or more under our Liberal government of needless arrests and wasteful trials, tying up our police resources and the courts. The Department of Justice has confirmed that this will cost taxpayers as much as \$4 million a year, a complete waste of taxpayer resources.

These are not the actions of a progressive government on marijuana laws. If anyone needed further evidence that the word "progressive" was used as a convenient bumper sticker by the Liberal Party for electoral purposes, they need look no further than the blatant and completely unfair stance of the current government on marijuana. Shame on them for continuing this failed policy. Shame on them for not standing up for what is right. Shame on them for breaking a clear promise.

Business of Supply

I am proud to be a part of a party that has stood strong on the decriminalization of marijuana since the 1970s. Liberal members can continue to quote the member for Outremont on what he said in an interview in 2012, but the history is clear. The NDP has been on the right side of this issue for decades now. We will continue to lead the right charge and we will continue to stand up for what is right.

The Prime Minister's father once famously said, "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation". The time has now come for the state to get out of people's personal choices with respect to marijuana possession and use, especially if there is no harm or violence being committed.

• (1335)

I call on the government to immediately move to decriminalize marijuana, take the right action, and be on the right side of history.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to clarify a few points.

The member commented on the issue of decriminalization and suggested that our policy was motivated by anything other than the evidence.

I just wanted to inquire if the member was familiar with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, CAMH, located in Toronto. I quoted liberally from its report of October 2014 earlier today. It has offered a number of significant evidence-based conclusions about cannabis and measures aimed at reducing harm.

In that report it was quite specific that decriminalization was a half-measure and that it failed to address the harms associated with the prohibition against cannabis use. It strongly recommended our government's proposed approach of legalization accompanied by a strict public health regulatory framework.

Has the member had the opportunity to read that evidence, which is quite compelling and would help clarify for him some of the concerns he has expressed today?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I have not read that particular report, but this issue has gone on much longer than that report.

In 1969, a royal commission began an inquiry into the use of cannabis. Its recommendations included the need to repeal the prohibition against simple possession of marijuana and cultivation for personal use.

If we are going to talk about harm reduction, let me say this to the member. The reason for this statement was that the commission concluded that the criminalization of cannabis had no scientific basis, and the "costs to a significant number of individuals, the majority of whom are young people, and to society generally, of a policy of prohibition of simple possession are not justified by the potential for harm" that comes from criminal sanctions. That was continued again in a Senate report in 2002.

If we are talking about harm reduction, let us stop sending people to jail.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is good to see that the hon. members from that party are quickly

coming to the realization that it is the Liberals who are failing on many campaign promises and are in fact much worse in that regard than the Conservative Party.

I want to talk about this particular motion and the fact that under the current regime, there is a lot of confusion in this land, confusion among people, which the hon. member spoke to, and confusion among police agencies on enforcement, given the fact that the Liberals have announced that they are suspending legislation.

Would the motion the NDP is proposing today not create more confusion, not just for police agencies but for others as well?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I would argue the exact opposite. Right now, police are caught between a government's intentions and what the law actually is.

I attended the recent police convention, the reception in Ottawa. I had the chance to speak to many police officers from both the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. They understand that the law is the law. However, when that is contrasted with a sitting government's intent to change the law, it leads to nothing but confusion.

We are simply trying to make the law clear. It is a stop-gap measure while we get to the government's intentions. Let us stop harming people with criminal records. The police have much bigger things to do. They could go after drug traffickers. People who possess marijuana are not a threat to society. This is outdated science and outdated moral values. It is time to move on.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, Marie-Josée Dumas, executive director of Liberté de choisir, an addiction prevention organization in my riding, said that the Prime Minister's promise has already had a negative effect on the ground because young Canadians now think that the possession and use of marijuana is already allowed. If legalization is not necessarily preceded by decriminalization, many users will be caught in the trap and will end up with a criminal record. They will not be able to work, and it will be hard for them to find housing and insurance, among other things, for 10 years following a conviction.

What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Speaker, I could not agree with my friend more.

This is about looking to the future, about stopping criminal records for young people. That is who it affects. It is completely unjustifiable and immoral that we are saddling these young people with these records far into the future and are putting the onus on them to clear their records.

It is time to move on. Our police have better things to do.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for his speech and his reasonable suggestions and evidence points. I will add to this important motion.

Business of Supply

I rise today to support the motion by my good friend and colleague, the member for Victoria. Action from the government to decriminalize marijuana possession is long overdue. Certainly Liberals must understand the hypocrisy of their current position. Arresting, detaining, and otherwise abridging the civil rights of Canadians for a practice they plan to make legal is unacceptable.

If we asked Canadians what they thought was the most prominent promise made by the Liberals in the last election, ending the marijuana prohibition would be at the top of their list. The Liberals made lofty promises to swiftly legalize cannabis so that it could be controlled, like alcohol. Now they claim that it is more complicated than they thought, so they will not be introducing legislation until the spring of next year.

The only concrete action they have taken is to appoint the member for Scarborough Southwest to look into the matter. The sensible thing to do would be to stop charging people today until we can get the reformed regime in place.

The reality is that about 60,000 Canadians will be arrested for simple possession of marijuana, and 22,000 will end up with criminal records this year alone. This lack of action will cripple many young people, who will have criminal records for the rest of their lives because the Prime Minister did not respect his promise to legalize marijuana as soon as the Liberals took office. A criminal record can be a serious impediment to employment and travel opportunities that disproportionately affects youth in our communities.

Maintaining the status quo is a massive waste of the time, effort, and energy of our entire criminal justice system. Currently the federal government spends about \$4 million a year trying simple possession cases, and that does not include the cost of enforcement and court resources. Police and our courts should not have to misspend resources because the government refuses to make this simple regulatory change.

While we continue to wait for legislation to legalize the cultivation and sale of marijuana, the government should remove cannabis from the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The current legal limbo for cannabis is creating unnecessary confusion in our legal system and is creating disorder for municipal governments across the country that are dealing with the rapid expansion of marijuana storefronts in our communities.

This year, B.C.'s chief health officer declared a public health emergency due to opioid overdose deaths. This state of emergency is thanks to the rise of serious drugs like fentanyl. In B.C., 308 residents died from illicit drug overdoses in the first four months of 2016. That is up 75% from the 176 deaths in the same period last year.

I am by no means advocating a police-only approach to drug use. However, being able to task more police to go after major drug traffickers should be our top priority. Let us get on with decriminalizing cannabis so that we can free up more resources to tackle the real problems facing Lower Mainland communities.

I will add that as a former city councillor in the city of Coquitlam, I know that we worked closely with the RCMP to provide the tools and resources needed to go after the real crimes and offences

happening in our community. I know that is not only in Coquitlam. It happens in Port Moody, where we have had gang violence in the past, and I know that other communities right across the country are dealing with serious crime. This needs to be the focus of our police.

● (1345)

Canadians know that the status quo is unacceptable. More and more prominent Canadians and organizations are speaking out and are calling on the government to take action on decriminalization now.

An April report from the C.D. Howe Institute argues that pardoning Canadians convicted of simple possession, throwing out any outstanding charges, and not charging any more people with marijuana possession would free up substantial financial resources, which could mitigate some of the costs of legalization.

Former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has recently said, “What is completely unacceptable, in my judgment, is a young man smoking marijuana will have a criminal record for the rest of his life, [and] he can't cross the border”. The new Liberal government should heed his advice.

Even the Conservative Party of Canada has modernized its approach to marijuana laws, calling on the government to remove possession from the Criminal Code. Considering the Conservatives' past inflammatory rhetoric and draconian criminal justice record, this shift is truly monumental.

Marijuana possession is running out of opponents, and the Liberal government is running out of excuses.

In my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam, hundreds of people have contacted my office calling for the decriminalization of marijuana. Many are confused as to what the current law is, given the government's position on legalization. For many, the ambiguity leads to a false sense of security. These otherwise law-abiding citizens could find themselves convicted of a crime, which could be readily prevented. Others have contacted my office to express frustration about how the lack of sensible regulation has created problems for their strata boards and for the proper function of local businesses.

Marijuana legalization must be carefully considered and must take best practices from other jurisdictions that have already successfully implemented regulatory regimes. We can look south of the border for some of those best practices.

Business of Supply

At the same time, we cannot continue with the status quo of punishing people for a practice the government plans to make legal in the very near future. Decriminalization makes sense, would save money, and would save Canadians from further injustice. I hope the government will end its hypocrisy and support the motion before more people become victim to government inaction.

I would like to mention that a recent poll done by EKOS is indicative of where Canadians now stand. Seventy-three per cent of British Columbians agree with the decriminalization of marijuana. Seventy-five per cent in Atlantic Canada agree. In Manitoba, 69% of those surveyed agree. In Ontario, 70% agree. We can see the trend. Over two-thirds to three-quarters of those surveyed feel that this move makes sense, that it is a move in the right direction, and that it needs to happen. Very few are opposed to such a move.

We implore the government to consider this move. That is why we put forward this opposition day motion. We hope the government will consider it. We hope enough members on that side will consider this as a strong move in the right direction. We are not saying that this is the only thing the government needs to do. We are saying that this is the right thing for it to do. The government needs to take action on this now as it moves forward on this important topic.

● (1350)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are just a couple of things I want to clarify for the member.

First, the government's promise in its throne speech was to legalize, regulate, and restrict the use of marijuana. The member only spoke to the first third of that, which is legalization. He neglected, unfortunately, to talk about the importance of regulation and restriction for cannabis control.

The member opposite made reference to the importance of learning lessons from other jurisdictions. In November 2015, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse submitted a report on cannabis regulation entitled "Lessons Learned in Colorado and Washington State", which said that it is essential to "[t]ake the time required to develop an effective framework for implementation and to prepare for a successful launch;... [d]evelop the capacity to administer the regulatory framework;... [and] invest proactively in a public health approach that builds capacity in prevention, education and treatment".

I am just wondering if the member opposite has had the opportunity to read that important report. I know he values the lessons learned from other jurisdictions. Those lessons are available to him if he cares to read them.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, as parliamentary secretary, the member has done and is doing his homework on this, and I appreciate that. Obviously, I have not read all of the reports that he is citing. However, as to the thrust of what he is talking about, there is no restriction now. This is the issue. That is why what New Democrats are proposing makes sense.

The government has taken no action in terms of this important topic. It has been over half a year, there has been no action, and we will not see any action until the spring of next year. Decriminaliza-

tion is needed now. Canadians are calling for it. Let us make that happen.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I again want to thank the NDP for bringing this up, because it really highlights what a disaster this legalization program is that the Liberals want to bring in.

I want to ask the member a very important question. Anything that is done has to be done responsibly, and I want to ask him about the tools that are in the tool box today. We see dispensaries popping up all over the place with edibles. The Liberals put absolutely no money in for inspections, so we do not even know if the marijuana used to bake these edibles is laced with anything, like angel dust. Where are the profits going? They are going to organized crime.

Most importantly, he mentioned the Colorado experiment. There are no tools in the tool box for police to check for impaired driving. In Colorado there was an increase in death and disability due to impaired driving and an increase in the hospitalization of kids due to edibles. The NDP motion today is calling for immediate decriminalization.

Could the member please say what he is aware of and what tools are in the tool box today? I am not aware of any tools in the tool box that would alleviate the issues that I have just brought forward in my question.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, the member's question is important. I know the police and RCMP across the country have effective tools. What New Democrats are saying is that there needs to be action on decriminalization right now so that we can move forward on simple possession of marijuana. That would allow the police to put the emphasis where it is needed: tackling organized crime and the hard or illicit drugs that the member referenced. That is where we need the resources.

We need to look at best practices, whether from the United States or across this country. We need to be putting those best practices in place, but we need to provide the resources and tools necessary now and not wait for another year and create the kind of chaos and confusion that exists currently. That is the problem. That is why the step of decriminalization is so very much needed and important.

● (1355)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Victoria for his motion.

We are very happy to have this opportunity to reiterate our government's promise to Canadians about the legalization and strict regulation of marijuana and the government's responsible, methodical approach to keeping that promise. As members know, that promise was part of an election platform that received broad support from Canadians all across the country in the last election.

That promise was and remains to legalize, regulate, and restrict access to marijuana to ensure that we keep marijuana out of the hands of children and profits out of the hands of criminals. We will punish more severely those who provide it to minors, those who operate a motor vehicle while under its influence, and those who sell it outside of the new regulatory framework.

The Prime Minister has clearly stated on numerous occasions that our government will meet that commitment. That commitment was included in the mandate letters issued to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, recognizing the need to do more than simply change a few words in the law. We need to move forward in a way that allows us to address a good number of priorities. We need to focus on things like public safety, prevention, treatment, and public awareness campaigns. We need to ensure that questions related to law enforcement, public safety, and criminal justice are fully addressed.

A simple quick fix to decriminalize possession of small quantities of marijuana for personal use, as the member for Victoria is proposing, would be an imprudent course of action, with all due respect to the hon. member. Canadians support legalization, but they want reassurance that the important issues are fully addressed, and safety is just one of those issues.

[English]

Canadians want to know the police have the right tools and training to address drug-impaired driving. They want to know that appropriate measures are in place to keep marijuana out of the hands of their children and that criminals will not profit from legalization.

Immediate decriminalization would address none of these issues. That is why our government is taking a responsible, ordered approach to fulfilling this commitment.

However, that does not mean we are not moving forward. Our goal continues to be to introduce the appropriate legislation in the spring of next year. As we work toward that goal, we are also mindful that this must be a collaborative effort. We cannot advance without engaging our provincial and territorial partners. We are striking a task force to consult with provincial and territorial governments; with experts in public health, substance abuse, law enforcement, criminal justice, and economics; with indigenous and youth groups; and with other stakeholders and Canadians.

This process is in motion. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Health wrote to their provincial and territorial counterparts in March, inviting them to provide recommendations on the names of experts to be considered as members of the task force that will be launched in the very near future.

In addition, a secretariat has been established at Health Canada to support the work of the task force. This secretariat, which is already in place, will also play an important role in relation to the federal-provincial-territorial working group on marijuana legalization and regulation.

The working group met for the first time last month and will continue to meet regularly going forward to ensure an ongoing dialogue about the approach and strategies for better coordination, including common communication materials.

Statements by Members

As members might imagine, our provincial and territorial partners need clarity on the nature of their role under a new regime, such as whether marijuana will be federally or provincially regulated and distributed.

Our partners are asking us to take the time necessary to ensure they are able to implement any legislative or operational changes that may be required on their part to support a new regime.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, after my speech, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Brampton West.

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member for Brampton West will have five minutes to speak to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are all appalled by the unspeakable violence of Saturday's events in Orlando.

First, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to express my sincere condolences to the victims' loved ones and my best wishes for a speedy recovery to the far too many injured.

We are gutted by this dark, barbaric hatred that struck Pulse. It was the darkest ignorance that claimed 49 lives and injured more than 50 other innocent people. By attacking the LGBT community on Saturday, the coward used his weapons to attack our social fabric, openness, and freedom.

Let us respond to this violence by drawing closer together. Let us make the right choice between anger and solidarity. As pride festivities are being organized everywhere and with just two months to go before Montreal's great pride parade, let us stand united, strong, indivisible, and proud in the face of all these fanatics—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek.

* * *

[English]

WEST FINCH BAKERY

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Joseph and Maria Montinaro, long-time residents and business owners in Humber River—Black Creek. Joseph and Maria own West Finch Bakery, a local institution specializing in quality bread, cakes, pastries, gelato, and chocolates of all kinds. While these products are both stunning and delectable, it is the friendly nature of the place that keeps the locals coming back.

Statements by Members

Joseph's father started West Finch Bakery in the 1960s, while Joseph spent his formative years apprenticing. Following in his father's footsteps was never his plan. However, as happens with life, Joe found himself down a winding path to where he needed to be.

Today, West Finch Bakery is a place that showcases local talent with a flavour profile that satisfies even the most discerning palate. Congratulations to Joseph and Maria, and thanks for all they do to make our communities great places to live, work, and play.

* * *

CANADA DAY CELEBRATIONS

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, each year on July 1 communities across this great nation come together to celebrate Canada Day. Canada Day has been celebrated every year since Confederation, and it has always been the spirit of local communities all celebrating with their unique flair that makes the holiday so truly special. Canada Day is an opportunity to celebrate the values and traditions that make Canada the best place in the world to call home.

Our local organizations have been hard at work on preparations to herald another proud anniversary of our country. The towns of Bowden, Sundre, Carstairs, Delburne, Elnora, Spruce View, Penhold, Innisfail, Didsbury, and Olds as well as the city of Red Deer are all hosting celebrations for Canada Day, including music, food, games, parades, and fireworks. It is an honour to represent an area that proudly demonstrates such strong community and Canadian spirit.

I encourage everyone to come together with their families and neighbours at one of their local community events to celebrate the birth of our nation.

* * *

ITALIAN CONTEMPORARY FILM FESTIVAL

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *la dolce vita* has arrived. On Thursday, June 9, the fifth annual Italian Contemporary Film Festival kicked off at the TIFF Lightbox in Toronto. This 10-day event runs in six cities and is one of the top 10 film festivals in North America. With nearly 30,000 attendees, the ICFF brings audiences together with internationally acclaimed filmmakers, producers, and actors through movies, talks, and panel discussions.

A part of Italian heritage month, the ICFF mission is to bring the Italian lifestyle, *la dolce vita*, to Canada. In addition to the cultural contributions the festival brings to Toronto, Hamilton, Niagara, Montreal, Quebec City, and the city of Vaughan, it also provides real economic and lasting benefits to Canadian businesses.

Please join me in applauding the co-founders of the Italian Contemporary Film Festival, Cristiano de Florentis and Maurizio Magnifico, and Canada's vibrant Italian Canadian community.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN SEA CADET CORPS 348

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I attended the annual review of the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps 348 on beautiful Manitoulin

Island. As a mother whose daughter was a sea cadet, I know the amount of work that goes into running cadet programs and how much it means to these young people.

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

This dedication and this attention empower our young people. They grow up learning to improve skills that they will master throughout their lives.

[*English*]

These are young people who have learned how to pull together to get things done, who have challenged themselves to break through barriers and past any fears they might carry. The commitment to communities from volunteers who keep programs running in places like Blind River, Hearst, Elliot Lake, Manitoulin Island, Espanola, and Kapuskasing is well worth it. Young sea, army and air cadets become confident leaders who, in turn, give back to their communities.

I am sure all members will join me to thank those who give their time and energy to ensure cadet programs remain a strong and vibrant part of our communities. We wish them all the best as they head to summer camp.

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INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, soon after being elected last October, I came to learn of the plight of many Canadian families who had adopted children from the Democratic Republic of Congo but faced obstacles that prevented the families from uniting.

By the end of March of this year, Rachelle and Marie, ages eight and four, were the only two Canadian children left in the Democratic Republic of Congo without exit permits in place. These sisters faced extraordinary challenges in their efforts to join their parents in Canada.

I am pleased to inform this House that due to the relentless work of our government, Rachelle and Marie are now united with their new parents, and living safely and happily in my riding of Cloverdale—Langley City.

I would like to thank the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, their parliamentary secretaries, departmental officials, and especially Senator Mobina Jaffer and Ambassador Ginette Martin, for their dedication to the successful completion of this file.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to Canada, Rachelle and Marie.

*Statements by Members**[English]***PONOKA STAMPEDE**

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in just a few short weeks, people from all over Canada and the world will be descending on Ponoka, Alberta. From June 25 to July 3, this usually quiet town of 6,800 people will play host to over 60,000 hootin' and hollerin' guests at the 80th annual Ponoka Stampede.

Since 1936, the Ponoka Stampede has honoured our western heritage by showcasing world-class competitors in world-class events. The best cowboys and cowgirls will be thrilling fans in events like team roping, saddle bronc, bareback, bull riding, steer wrestling, barrel racing, and, of course, the ever exciting chuckwagon races. With a mile-long parade and a fantastic midway, there is something for everyone at the Ponoka Stampede.

After 80 years, it is only right to acknowledge a few of the legacy families: George McKeddie, Harry Vold, Cliff Vold, Ralph Vold, Shorty Jones, Frank Mickey, Tom Butterfield, and their families.

We thank them for their vision and inspiration, which has carried on for generations. My continued thanks to the current board members of the Ponoka Stampede, the loyal sponsors, and the countless volunteers who work tirelessly year after year to make the Ponoka Stampede Canada's best rodeo.

* * *

LUMINATO FESTIVAL

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend marked the beginning of the Luminato Festival. This year, it celebrates its 10th anniversary in Toronto Danforth's port lands.

[Translation]

Luminato celebrates Canadian and world culture. It is held at the Hearn Generating Station, a decommissioned plant. This industrial space has been transformed into a cultural centre for the next few weeks. It is also a gathering place for the city.

Luminato entertains and informs at the same time. This new use for the power plant also allows us to see the future of the port lands in a new light.

[English]

Most importantly, Luminato is a community gathering. On Wednesday night, the festival is hosting an iftar at the Hearn to break the daily Ramadan fast with families and friends from Canada's newcomer Syrian families. It shows the important role that our cultural institutions play in our lives.

Please join me in celebrating Luminato.

* * *

LIVERPOOL INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary group of volunteers for their work to make the Liverpool International Theatre Festival a great success.

This festival was started 26 years ago. It is well known throughout the theatre world, and has hosted groups from Japan, Belgium, Peru, Nepal, Ireland, and Russia, to name a few. This year's festival was once again superb, proving that great theatre transcends language.

Hundreds of volunteers make this event a huge success, helping with everything from the box office to muffins and coffee, billeting, and transportation. It is truly a community effort.

However, this year's festival was bittersweet, because the long-time artistic director has had her final performance. Eva Moore is retiring after 26 years. Eva's tenacity, expertise, and abilities will be missed by everyone who has had the pleasure to work with her over the past 26 years.

We thank Eva and the volunteers. I cannot wait for 2018.

* * *

● (1410)

*[Translation]***BEAUPORT—CÔTE-DE-BEAUPRÉ—ÎLE D'ORLÉANS—CHARLEVOIX**

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, summer is just around the corner, and it is the perfect opportunity to see the sights, spend time on outdoor patios, and go to festivals. Whether by car, boat, or motorcycle, people are travelling across Quebec in search of new experiences.

Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans—Charlevoix is a great place for everyone to discover something new. Whether it is the reliquary of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, Île d'Orléans and its local products, the Festif de Baie-Saint-Paul, or the drag racing festival in La Malbaie, there is something for everyone.

This year, I hope to see everyone at the seventh edition of the Charlevoix rodeo, which takes place from June 23 to 26. I am proud to be the honorary spokesperson for this event, which offers visitors a one-of-a-kind experience.

I want to take this opportunity to invite everyone to come and discover all of the events that are happening in my riding.

* * *

*[English]***ROBERT HALL**

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House with a heavy heart. As confirmed by the Prime Minister, Robert Hall, a Canadian hostage in the Philippines, was killed by his captors. President Aquino spoke with the Prime Minister and expressed his condolences to all Canadians.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Hall family, who have shown great strength in the face of such a horrific situation. Along with the family of fellow victim John Ridsdel, Canada mourns in light of these tragedies.

Statements by Members

Canada holds the terrorist group fully responsible for this cold-blooded and cowardly murder.

When the Prime Minister was at the G7 summit, he reiterated that terrorist hostage taking only fuels more violence and instability. We are committed to working with international partners to pursue those responsible and to bring them to justice, however long it takes.

Today, we mourn the loss of Mr. Hall to his community and Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN RED CROSS

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to highlight the excellent work of Canadian Red Cross employees and volunteers. Established in 1909 by an act of Parliament, it recently made the headlines because of its role following the Fort McMurray forest fires. I would like to take a moment to recognize the work these people do every day in addition to the assistance they provide when disaster strikes.

[English]

The Red Cross is a global leader in the delivery of life-saving care, especially to women and children. Here at home, volunteers are supporting people's ability to live independently and safely at home, working with over 200 indigenous communities and carrying out hundreds of agreements with municipal and provincial governments to provide social emergency relief, among many other initiatives.

[Translation]

The Red Cross exemplifies humanitarian values such as solidarity, volunteerism, and mutual assistance. For that reason I invite everyone to give generously.

* * *

[English]

WOMEN'S PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise with great news for Canada. Smith Falls, Ontario native, 18-year-old Brooke Henderson, yesterday won the women's professional golf association championship in a sudden-death playoff.

Ranked fourth in the world, Henderson becomes the second-youngest winner of a major championship. She is also the second Canadian woman to win a major championship, following Sandra Post's victory in the 1968 event, and is projected to jump from fourth to second in the world today.

Her first professional victory came last year in Portland, Oregon. Henderson was Canadian Women's Amateur champion in 2013, finished runner-up at the 2014 U.S. Women's Amateur, and while still an amateur, won three events on the Canadian Women's tour, and tied for 10th place in the 2014 women's open at the age of just 16. For 2015, Henderson was named both the Canadian and Ontario female athlete of the year.

On behalf of all Canadians, I salute her success yesterday.

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pride flag flies in good times and in bad, so I proudly wear these colours today in memory of 50 of our Orlando brothers and sisters whose lives were taken because, like us, they were different, special, unique.

From coast to coast to coast, we saw members of the LGBTQ2 community and our allies come together in mourning for those who were lost in this senseless and despicable act of violence and hate.

● (1415)

[Translation]

On June 11, one man's hatred scarred 50 families forever. Lives were taken just because these people were different, loved differently, and self-identified as being different. These acts of hate and terror against a united and proud community will not result in fear and submission. This attack only strengthens our determination to express our right to be who we are.

[English]

Let us remind ourselves in the days and weeks to come that, with time, hate will always be conquered by love.

[Translation]

Love will always win.

* * *

[English]

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday night, 49 people were murdered and 53 others injured during a hatred filled massacre at a gay nightclub in Orlando. They were targeted because of how they lived, who they were, and who they loved. The perpetrator of this act of vile hatred hoped it would sow fear and division, and we will not let that happen.

[Translation]

Today, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims of this terrible attack at a gay club in Orlando. We must work together to build more inclusive communities by combatting homophobia, transphobia, and Islamophobia. Love is love, and love will always be stronger than hate.

[English]

Today, we stand in solidarity with the LGBT community and united in our belief that diversity is our great strength. Let us remember in the face of such violence that love is love, and love will always be stronger than hate.

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my Conservative colleagues and all Canadians in solidarity with our American friends, as they grieve a horrifying tragedy. In the early hours yesterday morning, a deliberate attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando took the lives of 49 innocent men and women, and dozens more were wounded.

It was radical domestic terrorism, a hateful targeting of a specific group of people. It is a terrible reminder that we must remain steadfast, and we must strongly condemn and combat terrorism in all its forms around the world.

We commend the heroic actions of the law enforcement officers who responded to this vicious attack. Our prayers are with the families of the victims today and in the days to come as they try to come to terms with this senseless act. We also send strength to the injured as they recover from this tragedy that will undoubtedly affect them for the rest of their lives.

Canada stands with our American allies and all those who have been impacted by this brutal act of terror.

* * *

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago, we raised the pride flag on Parliament Hill. I saw this as the joyful end of a long human rights journey.

[Translation]

Yesterday, this dream was shattered when 49 gay people were killed in a shooting at a gay club in Orlando.

My first thoughts turned to the victims. A night of community, solidarity, and simple pleasures in a place that was meant to be safe ended in a horrible bloodbath. There are no words to describe my feelings of sadness, grief, and anger.

[English]

My second thoughts were to the Muslim community, again at risk. I am proud to represent tens of thousands of faithful, peaceful, and law-abiding Muslims, who were equally saddened and horrified by this act of terror and homophobia.

Today, we must stand together against violence and terror and trust each other as we combat evil and build peace.

* * *

• (1420)

SHOOTINGS IN ORLANDO

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties in the House, I understand that there is agreement to observe a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the shooting in Orlando, Florida. I now invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, horrifying, barbaric and senseless acts took place in Orlando, and the so-called Islamic State claimed responsibility. This morning, we received the terrible news that Robert Hall was executed by a group linked to this terrorist organization.

We strongly condemn these acts of extreme violence. We extend our condolences and deepest sympathies to the families of the victims.

Can the government tell us how it plans to keep Canadians safe here at home and around the world?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we strongly condemn the hideous attacks in Orlando targeting the LBGTQ community. It was a brutal combination of terrorism and hatred.

Canadians express heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims, to the entire LBGTQ2 community, and to our American friends. I have spoken with U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson yesterday to convey our sympathy and our solidarity, and to offer our full support and co-operation.

To this point, I can inform the House there is no known Canadian connection, but we all need to be absolutely clear. We will not diminish the diversity, the freedoms, and the values that make us who we are.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all offer our condolences to the families, too.

[Translation]

A committee of parliamentarians, regardless of party membership, is but a committee of parliamentarians. It cannot take the place of the Canadian people. However, after reaching an agreement with the NDP behind closed doors, the Liberals and the Prime Minister seem to want to force reform on Canadians. Canadians are realizing that they cannot trust this government.

Will the Prime Minister bring his minister into line and call a referendum to reassure Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that we did listen to Canadians. Over 60% said they wanted electoral reform.

What we offered to the people of this country was an all-party committee, which has now been established, to come together and review the options available to us.

I am counting on the support of all members of the House, in all the ways that they know their constituents and their ridings, to ensure that the committee's work is enhanced by their efforts as well.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that Finance Canada is pushing the idea of a carbon tax. That is the good old Liberal way of finding new ways to tax Canadians without telling them. On this side of the aisle, we know that more tax will kill jobs and raise the Canadian tax burden. Canadians cannot trust the Minister of Finance.

Can the Prime Minister come clean with Canadians and confirm today that there will be a carbon tax, and how much it will cost Canadians?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that reducing emissions will make our economy more competitive, not less.

Governments in Canada and around the world are using carbon-pricing mechanisms to address climate change. Transitioning to a low-carbon economy will stimulate growth, provide access to new markets, and it will create jobs. We are working very actively on a federal, provincial, and territorial basis, looking at how we can enhance work that has been done by the provinces and ensure that Canada plays a role in reducing carbon emissions and driving clean growth.

• (1425)

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's natural resource sector is still reeling from the low cost of oil. Just when there starts to be a glimmer of hope that prices might start to recover, the Liberals are coming along with a plan to tax the sector back into submission. New taxes will kill jobs, not create them.

If the provinces decide that a massive federal cash grab through a carbon tax is a bad idea, will the government allow them to opt out or will the Liberals impose their “Ottawa knows best” approach and dump another new tax on hard-working Canadians?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is actively focused on growing the economy in an environmentally sustainable way.

Counter to the previous 10 years, where the environment was almost ignored, we are focused on ensuring that we grow the economy and manage the environment. We are also working very much on a federal, provincial, and territorial basis to ensure that we work collaboratively with other partners in the federation to come to a conclusion that will be a good conclusion for Canada and a good conclusion for the world.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they are shoving it right down the provinces' throats.

Today we learned why the Minister of Democratic Institutions has been pushing town halls so hard. It is not because she wants to increase participation. It is not because she wants to hear from people who normally do not vote. It is certainly not because she wants input from Canadians.

It is because she wants their cash. The electoral reform town hall the Liberals have planned in Dufferin—Caledon will be charging people to attend, and that money will go straight into the Liberal Party's bank account.

Is the reason the minister is so opposed to holding a referendum because her party cannot make money off one?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to set the record straight. The members of the House are responsible for ensuring that the voices of their constituents are heard and reflected in the report that the committee puts forward. I look forward to all of the creative and innovative ways that members do this. I want to ensure that all members are following all of the rules and regulations put forward by the House to make sure that we carry ourselves with integrity.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MARIJUANA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians thought that the Liberals were going to change the marijuana laws as soon as they came to power. Why did everyone think that? It is because it was clearly stated in their election platform and because the Prime Minister said so himself about 100 times.

Since the campaign, however, the Liberals have encouraged the police to continue arresting Canadians for simple possession of marijuana.

Why would the government rather give tens of thousands of Canadians criminal records instead of decriminalizing marijuana now?

[*English*]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said all along, and we have been consistent, we are committed to legalization, restricting access, and strictly regulating marijuana to achieve the ultimate objective of keeping it out of the hands of kids, and the proceeds out of the hands of criminals. As my friend across the way has indicated in the past, it would be a mistake just to decriminalize because to simply decriminalize would not achieve those objectives.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, actually, decriminalizing would make sure that young people do not drag criminal records with them for the rest of their lives when we are about to legalize.

The government has just created massive confusion in the justice system. Judges are calling the situation absurd. While the government is talking legalization, the courts are being forced to convict. Even the Conservative Party now calls for marijuana possession to be removed from the Criminal Code.

Why will the Liberal government continue to hand out criminal records to tens of thousands of mostly young Canadians instead of decriminalizing marijuana now?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the legalization and strict regulation of marijuana. Simply decriminalizing will not achieve the objectives of keeping it out of the hands of children and keeping the proceeds out of the hands of criminals.

We have committed to introduce legislation in the spring of 2017. In that intervening period, we will engage with experts in the health area, public safety, justice, and law enforcement to ensure that we proceed in an orderly manner that will achieve the objectives we are committed to achieving.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in that intervening time, thousands of mostly young Canadians will have criminal records they will drag with them the rest of their lives. That is the problem.

Canada's big banks are once again making record profits and as a result are lowering bank fees. No, wait. That is not true. That would make too much sense. Actually, they are raising fees for Canadians to have access to their own money. There are tens of billions of dollars in profits for the banks and Canadians are paying the price. What is the government planning to do to reel in these ridiculous increases in bank fees?

• (1430)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we went across the country during our pre-budget consultations, we heard from Canadians and we heard the financial pressure that Canadians are feeling. That is why we reduced taxes for the middle class and we introduced the Canada child benefit.

Let me be clear to the member. We are paying close attention to this issue. As the member knows well, the Government of Canada does not regulate the day-to-day operations of financial institutions. We are committed to financial literacy, and we will continue to invest to make sure that Canadians can make the choices they have to when it comes to financial matters.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals heard from Canadians but they actually have to listen, because I am sure they did not hear a single Canadian say, “Hey, why don't you increase our bank fees?”

[Translation]

Banks are making billions of dollars in profits, but apparently that is not enough and they are colluding to raise their bank fees at the same time. Meanwhile, the Liberals continue to cut taxes for the big banks, while Canadians continue to pay more than their fair share.

How can the Liberals possibly justify their gifts to large corporations while Canadians are being ripped off, to say the least, when they want to access their own money?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member that this is the government that introduced measures for the middle class and for hard-working Canadians. What we will do—

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: In French.

[English]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: If the member would like to listen, I may answer his question.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I asked my question in French. In French.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: I can answer him in French if he likes, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying in my response, we are in favour of improving Canadians' financial literacy. The Financial Consumer Agency offers tools and services to help Canadians make good financial decisions in Canada. We will continue working on improving Canadians' financial literacy.

* * *

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on electoral reform, all the Liberals have done is set up a process made up of politicians, by politicians, and for politicians. Now it turns out that Liberals are even charging Canadians to attend their town halls. What a sham.

At the end of the day, decisions on their democracy should be made directly by Canadians, and not be a fundraising exercise by the Liberals.

Will the Liberals put the politics aside and give Canadians a direct say in a referendum, yes or no?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to be made aware of this development. We will be looking into this matter, but I will remind all members of the House that we are reaching out to Canadians.

The committee is meant to act as a forum for all Canadians. We have a great deal of respect for elected representatives in committees who have done good work on behalf of Canadians for many years, and we look forward to the contributions they will make to the committee's report.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister wants to get to the bottom of it, she does not have to look very far. It is right there on the Liberal website.

Oral Questions

When the Liberals set up a process for electoral reform that is all about politicians and political parties and it leaves the final decision in the hands of the Liberal cabinet, that certainly is not in the best interest of Canadians.

When B.C., Ontario, and P.E.I. looked at electoral reform, all three of them held referendums. Three-quarters of Canadians are demanding one, so will the Liberals hold a referendum, yes or no?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have yet to hear a constructive suggestion from the party opposite on ways to modernize our democratic institutions.

I do wish that the all-party committee will act as a forum for collaborative and co-operative work, and the member opposite will consider contributing meaningfully to that committee's work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will talk about it. This weekend, I spent hours trying to find one debate during the election campaign where the leaders debated the issue of electoral reform. I found nothing. I took out my own personal notes to see whether a single citizen spoke to me about this issue: I had absolutely nothing on this. I called some colleagues, I even spoke to two former Liberal candidates to find out whether constituents spoke to them about this: nothing. The public was never informed about the voting methods that they want to change, and all to the benefit of the Liberal Party.

Can the minister confirm that all Canadians will get to have a say through a referendum?

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member opposite who spent his weekend watching television, I was out talking to my constituents.

My constituents heard from our party, loud and clear, during the longest campaign in modern Canadian history. We had plenty of opportunity to talk about our 32 commitments to a more open and transparent government.

Canadians—

The Speaker: Order, please. I do not think many of us actually know what other members were doing during the weekend, and we probably should not speculate. Let us stick to the focus of the topic. I remind members that questions are often provocative, and they are supposed to be here; that is okay. Most members in all parties are able to hear the responses without reacting, so let us do that.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you are right. I will not lower myself to that type of comment in the House.

In this case, the Liberals seem to be playing poker at a VIP table that Canadians are not allowed to play at. According to the Prime Minister, the rules of the game are too complex, so Canadians should not be involved. The Liberals are using partisan tactics. They are analyzing the situation, passing cards to the NDP, and bluffing to

hide their intentions from Canadians. Most importantly, they are keeping the referendum card hidden in their back pocket.

When will the Liberals drop their poker face and let all Canadians express their opinion through a referendum?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, electoral reform is a serious matter. It is why we built a table made up of all parties in the House. We went above and beyond the traditional rules in this place to ensure all parties had an opportunity to represent the voices of their constituents. It is up to all 338 members of the House to take our responsibility seriously and ensure that our constituents are represented and heard in this process.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): When it comes to electoral reform, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals give a whole new meaning to the phrase, “a penny for your thoughts”.

Here is why a referendum is essential. A paper published last week by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute said that the government's December 1 deadline meant that irrespective of what the committee actually reported, the only electoral reform option that would be on the table happened to be the one the Prime Minister had favoured all along due to the short timeline in which it could be implemented.

Is not the fact that the fix is in the reason why we need to have a referendum on that proposal when it comes to people?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows we have entered this process with an open mind. We are reaching out to Canadians and finding out from them what values and principles they would like reflected in their electoral reform. I urge the member opposite to consider contributing meaningfully to the all-party committee, and look forward to the work of that committee and its report on December 1.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage my open-minded colleague opposite to consider the following.

I am going to quote from that paper, which states, “the only electoral reform that could be implemented in time for the ... election in ... 2019 is [ranked ballots in single-member districts]; quite simply, time has run out on implementing [other alternatives]”. The paper goes on to say, “In a non-coincidental coincidence, the only system that Parliament could adopt in time for 2019 is the very same system that [the] Prime Minister...himself has identified as his own personal preference”.

Therefore, the fix is in. Is that not why we need to have a referendum to decide whether what the Prime Minister prefers is what Canadians want to have?

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate and admire the member opposite's respect for the media, which I share, I believe our responsibility is to reach out to experts and academics to hear from members of our free and independent press, but also to reach out to our communities and to hear from our constituents how they would like to see their democratic institutions modernized. I look forward to that kind of insight and that kind of feedback from the member opposite.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Afghan detainees, the current Prime Minister once said, "We need to get at the truth. [Our] international reputation...is at stake".

Last week, Joe Clark, former ambassadors like Stephen Lewis, former Afghan head of mission, and human rights advocates like Amnesty International called on the Liberals to hold an inquiry into the handling of Afghan detainees.

Liberals can now get at the truth, so will they do the right thing and launch an inquiry?

• (1440)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take our obligations to the Geneva Convention international law very seriously. When it comes to any of our missions that our men and women go on and our current missions that we have, there is a considerable amount of pre-deployment training where we emphasize this and human rights. In addition, we emphasize this while we take part in the training with the Kurdish forces and those who are training as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not say anything about an inquiry in his answer.

When the report on the internal investigation was tabled in 2011, the Liberals said it was incomplete and accused the Conservatives of a lack of leadership. Last week, over 40 Canadians, including former prime minister Joe Clark, human rights advocates, and diplomats, called on the Prime Minister to launch a public inquiry.

Why exactly do the Liberals not want an inquiry now?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, we take our obligations very seriously. Our men and women in uniform, for all our missions, have done extraordinarily well, in particular, in Afghanistan.

In terms of our focus being the current missions and the missions that we will go on, we will always have an emphasis on the Geneva Convention international law and a strong stand on human rights.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Liberals said we should not be guided by emotion and, instead, must arrive at a legal determination before declaring that ISIS had committed genocide. However, here are the facts on the ground. Women are being burned alive for refusing to renounce their faith and for resisting becoming sexual slaves of ISIS. This is not a time for more reviews, more investigations, more fumbling around.

When will the Liberals do the right thing and declare this genocide?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we strongly condemn the atrocities by the so-called Islamic state. Official recognition of genocide is to be done by a credible judicial process, following a proper international investigation, which is exactly what we are doing. It is exactly what our U.K. allies have said, which is that it is not for governments to be the prosecutor, judge, or jury. It is exactly what Secretary of State John Kerry said. We are working in concert with our allies and we are doing all we can in the fight against ISIL.

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals said that other countries have not declared ISIS's actions to be genocide.

However, perhaps my Liberal colleagues do not know that today, the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Kerry, and Hillary Clinton said that the atrocities that are being committed constitute genocide.

Why are the Liberals refusing to acknowledge what our allies clearly understand: that ISIS is committing genocide?

[English]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, forgive me for reading, but I will quote John Kerry who said:

I want to be clear. I am neither judge, nor prosecutor, nor jury with respect to the allegations of genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing by specific persons. Ultimately, the full facts must be brought to light by an independent investigation and through formal legal determination made by a competent court or tribunal.

We could not agree more John Kerry.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Nadia Murad is one of thousands of Yazidi women violated by ISIS. She was enslaved and raped by ISIS fighters for three months. She said, "The fate of most of 3,500 Yazidi women and girls who remain in captivity is known and probably most will face a similar fate if the world does not act now."

Canada has an obligation to prevent genocide and not to turn a blind eye when it is occurring. Will the Prime Minister finally name these crimes for what they are, and that is genocide?

Oral Questions

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about what we are doing to fight ISIL. Our approach is a whole-of-government approach. It is absolutely integrated between military training and intelligence, between humanitarian aid, between intelligence on the ground to document these heinous crimes, and then, of course, to work through the International Criminal Court to bring justice to those innocent people.

• (1445)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting, because the member opposite asked the Leader of the Opposition what responsibility she felt to the International Criminal Court.

A noted human rights lawyer believes that the ICC has the responsibility to Yazidis. In announcing her intent to represent Yazidi women at the ICC, Amal Clooney said, “How can it be that the most serious crimes known to humanity are being carried out before our eyes but are not being prosecuted by the International Criminal Court...”.

Will the government join international consensus, do the right thing, and name these crimes, finally, as genocide?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the party opposite to join with us in our pursuit of justice.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that the diafiltered milk file was being negotiated along with the new softwood lumber agreement.

During an interview, he said that the government would have to choose a less harmful solution for the industry.

Can the Minister of International Trade tell us what is the less harmful solution? Is it closing sawmills and laying off thousands of employees in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, or shutting down dairy farms and laying off thousands of workers in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question. As the question is addressed to me, I will talk about the softwood lumber file.

As I have already said, our government recognizes the importance of the forestry industry for Quebec and for Canada. I met with representatives of the Quebec industry last week in Montreal, and our team is in regular contact with the negotiators of the office of the trade representative.

We are working on negotiating a good agreement for Canada.

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are just five days away from the government's 100-day softwood lumber deadline and the minister still has nothing more than empty talking points. Thousands of Canadian forestry jobs are at stake. According to reports, talks have stalled and court battles are looming. The Prime Minister promised action to protect our forestry sector.

When will the negotiators meet again? When does the minister expect to conclude a new softwood lumber agreement?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely recognizes the importance of the forestry industry to Canada. Our officials are in very regular contact, including this month, in frequent meetings with negotiations from the USTR. I spoke to Ambassador Froman in Paris two weeks ago. I talk to him on this issue regularly.

I would like to quote someone who cares a lot about this issue as well, and that is B.C. Premier Christy Clark, who says about our work that we are “a strong voice for Canada as we seek a new softwood lumber deal.”

This is a problem left for us by the previous government and we are working hard—

The Speaker: The member for Ottawa South.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about air safety. Pilots are reporting an increasing number of drone sightings near airports, including in my riding of Ottawa South. Flying a drone near aircraft without permission is extremely dangerous. Violators could face steep fines and/or jail time.

Could the Minister of Transport please update the House on how the government plans to further address this serious and troubling issue?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with the member for Ottawa South. Air safety is of vital importance and Canada will be a leader in drone safety.

Drones are becoming increasingly popular and of significant economic value, but they must also be safe. Consequently, we are looking at the regulations, the classification of drones, drone identification, and the registration of those who want to operate drones. We will unveil these regulations in the coming months.

*Oral Questions**[English]***PENSIONS**

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, next week the Minister of Finance is going to meet with his counterparts in the provinces and territories to sell them on his CPP scheme which would tax the average worker an extra \$3,000 per year. This new payroll tax would kill 130,000 jobs in our country and it would permanently and significantly lower wages for our young people especially.

How does the Minister of Finance expect Canadian workers to save, start a family, or buy a home when he is increasing their taxes?

• (1450)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian shares the goal of a secure retirement. That is why one of the first things the Minister of Finance did was to meet with his provincial counterparts in December. He is going to meet in the coming days with his financial counterparts to ensure we work collaboratively with our partners in order to enhance the CPP for the benefit of all Canadians.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are rightly concerned. The impact of a fourth CPP expansion is going to be on their wallets.

The Minister of Finance has stated that a CPP expansion would be putting too many eggs in one basket. He also said that increasing the CPP would practically take the private sector out of the pension business.

My question is again for the Minister of Finance. Will he just abandon this ill-conceived scheme because it would unfairly target Canadian workers?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to work collaboratively with our provincial counterparts. That is why we started in December and that is why we are going to continue in the coming weeks. We understand.

As we went across this nation, Canadians told us that they wanted to retire in dignity. That is exactly what we are working on and that is exactly what we are going to deliver for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is precisely our concern. We know that the government plans to work on the pension plan, but the problem is that every time this government touches something, it ends up increasing taxes, creating new taxes, or, even worse, sending the bill to future generations in the form of a deficit.

My question for the government is clear. While the government is tinkering with the pension plan, will it commit to not doing anything that will directly affect our SMEs or make things harder for these creators of jobs and wealth?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. His question was clear, and my answer will be as well.

In December, we started consulting our provincial partners to improve the Canada pension plan. This is what Canadians asked us to do. I am proud to be a member of this government.

The Minister of Finance will meet with his provincial counterparts in the coming days. We will work together with the provinces, as an open, transparent government, to improve the Canada pension plan for the benefit of all Canadians.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another broken Liberal Party promise has to do with fighter jets.

The government promised an open bidding process, but now we know that the dice are loaded and the decision is made. The impact on Canada's economy is huge. It is a loss of \$800 million, and 110 Canadian companies could be negatively affected by this decision.

Will the government come clean with Canadians? Will the government ensure that those jobs are maintained? Why jeopardize hundreds of good jobs in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, our government is committed to making sure that we replace the fighters and we will do so and any procurement that takes place with our fighters will benefit Canada and make sure that our industry benefits as well.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone has a right in Canada to equal access to quality health care regardless of ability to pay, yet Liberals are turning a blind eye to user fees across the country. Saskatchewan just introduced legislation that will allow wealthy people to jump the queue to receive private, for-profit CT scans. This undermines the Canada Health Act and the principle of universal access and is another example in a growing list of infractions.

Will the Minister of Health finally step in and put a stop to these unacceptable violations of the Canada Health Act?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated previously in the House, our government firmly upholds the Canada Health Act. That Canada Health Act indicates the principles by which health care must be delivered in this country, including universality and accessibility. We will uphold the fact that Canadians in this country must have care on the basis of need and not on the basis of their ability to pay.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have submitted applications to privately sponsor at least 100 Syrian refugee families based in northern Iraq. These applications are being held up because Canada has no capacity to process them. If authorized, the UNHCR can step in and get the job done. Now to make matters worse, IRCC is considering Syrian-born refugees who have fled to northern Iraq as Iraqis. This means they will not be part of the Syrian refugee initiative. Just when will the minister quickly process these applications as promised?

• (1455)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would start by saying that I am proud of the fact that we have let in more than 25,000 Syrian refugees, more than four times the number of refugees the previous government let in. We are admitting many refugees. Some parts of the world are more difficult to get to than other parts, but I can assure her that we are aware of that situation and are working on it.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, agriculture is the third-largest contributor to our GDP, and it is under siege. The Liberals have neglected to act on diafiltered milk, spent fowl, PED in Manitoba, and canola dockage in China. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food says he will not intervene and the Minister of International Trade will only consult.

One in five jobs in Canada rely on trade. Now \$375 million of lentil exports to Turkey are at risk due to low-level GMO presence requirements.

Why are Liberals neglecting to protect our agricultural producers in world trade?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague, the former minister of agriculture. As he is fully aware, the diafiltered milk issue was inherited from him and his government. As I have indicated quite clearly in the House, we have consulted farmers, consulted manufacturers, and we will come up with a decision that will make sure that supply management remains stable and stronger than ever in this country.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the agriculture minister caught that, but the question was about lentils and lentil producers want to know when he is going to get the job done for them. I was with the minister in China just last week and I know that the minister had the opportunity to meet with Turkish officials. Now we find out that sources from Turkey are saying that nothing is happening at the ministerial level on this issue.

I wonder when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is going to wake up and recognize that he has to do something to ensure that lentils continue to flow to Turkey.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that this is an agricultural question. Our public servants are continually consulting other countries on many different problems on an ongoing basis. The lentil

issue will be dealt with and we will make sure that Canadian farmers and ranchers prosper more than they are now.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think in order for farmers to prosper, the minister is going to have to do something, not just officials.

On another very important issue, we know that PED has killed over eight million pigs south of the border. We also know that since I last stood in the House to ask a question on this issue, we have had three confirmed cases in Manitoba.

Pig producers want to know when the minister is going to do something on this file to ensure that we do not have an outbreak of PED here in Canada.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that CFIA made a decision that the trucks need to be washed before they enter this country, because we want to make sure that diseases like that do not enter this country.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SCIENCE

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, research and innovation are essential to modern, sustainable economic growth. To truly encourage that growth, we have to listen to the scientific community, make the most of its knowledge, and ensure that institutions and major research projects get the resources they need.

Can the Minister of Science tell the House about the initiatives this government has taken to ensure that investments in scientific research produce the desired results?

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a rich legacy of scientific achievement. In order to protect and build on that legacy, we need to take a fresh look at how government funds federal science, and to do better.

Today our government is launching a comprehensive review of federal support for fundamental science. We have an expert independent panel that is chaired by Dr. David Naylor. We look forward to receiving recommendations in December 2016.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Alberta lost another 24,000 jobs in May, increasing its unemployment rate to 7.9%, the highest it has been in 20 years.

*Oral Questions***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

The vacancy rate in downtown Calgary for commercial office space is 30%, a historic high, higher than it was during the devastating national energy program brought forward by the Liberals in 1980.

While people are losing their jobs, businesses are failing. The Liberal government is delaying critical decisions and is now pushing a job-killing carbon tax.

Why does every decision the current Liberal government makes cost Albertans their jobs?

• (1500)

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, Canadians know that addressing climate change will actually improve the Canadian economy and drive clean growth. I would say that 80% of Canadians actually live in jurisdictions that have moved on carbon pricing, including the Government of Alberta, the Government of B.C., the Government of Ontario, and the Government of Quebec.

I would note that many thoughtful Conservatives, including the Government of Manitoba, the Conservative leader in Ontario, and the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, have talked about the importance of carbon pricing in the context of moving forward. This is an important initiative—

The Speaker: Order please.

The member for Trois-Rivières.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we applaud all the work done by our public servants during this National Public Service Week, the fact is that things are not so rosy.

According to the latest report from the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the government has failed to contract out for services effectively. On top of a lack of accountability in the case of some contracts, many good jobs are being lost, while productivity and morale are diminishing among employees. It is all very discouraging.

Will the Liberals show some respect for the public service and limit its use of outside contractors?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is working very hard to restore a culture of respect towards our public service, and we will continue to do just that during our negotiations.

[English]

On the question of outsourcing, this is a question we are engaged with the public service on. We believe very strongly that we can do more to engage our professional public service to provide better services for Canadians and better value for taxpayers at the same time. We are deeply engaged in this dialogue.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year, Bill S-6 was passed in spite of huge objections by Yukoners and Yukon's first nations.

The Yukon land claim and self-government agreements were negotiated in good faith on a government to government to government relationship over 30 years. To then unilaterally foist four major un-negotiated clauses on a process created by the treaty is a total abandonment of the honour of the crown.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs update the House on the government's efforts to renew this critical relationship?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank the hon. member for Yukon for his hard work on this file.

Bill C-17 is a great example of what can be achieved when governments work and listen in partnership with indigenous people and communities. The bill will pave the way for responsible resource development, increase investment and jobs, and re-establish a true partnership with the Yukon first nations.

I want to commend all of those who worked hard on these amendments, and the member for all of his work as well.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are used to the Liberals breaking election promises, but now it looks like they are misleading Canadians as well.

The member for Winnipeg Centre sent a mail-out to his riding saying the Liberals had restored lifelong pensions for veterans. That is just not true. Why would he say that?

Would the Minister of Veteran Affairs correct the record and admit that the Liberals have not restored veterans benefits in terms of lifelong pensions?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave us a strong mandate to repair the relationship with veterans, with one of the focuses being on financial security for veterans, especially for ill and injured veterans. That is what we are working on. That work will include the development of a lifelong pension.

Veterans told us to get it right, and that is what we are doing. We are making progress on that mandate, and we will be delivering in short order.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on average, the 6,400 members of the Quebec convenience stores association pay \$36,000 each in credit card transaction fees every year. Large retailers like Costco and Walmart no longer want to do business with Visa, whose transaction fees are too high. However, smaller retailers cannot afford to turn their backs on their customers.

When will the minister lower the cap on the credit card transaction fees being charged to merchants, as was done in 28 European countries, where fees are as low as 0.5%?

● (1505)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague for his important question.

As my colleague is well aware, Canada's credit card market is complex. Over the next few months, we plan to observe the results of the voluntary agreement that has been introduced. We are already seeing that the voluntary agreement with merchants in this country that accept credit card payments has reduced fees by 10%. We are monitoring the situation very closely. I want to assure the House that Canadian consumers are our top priority.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, energy east is an economic and environmental disaster.

Last week, the former chief economist at CIBC said that the project was not economically viable. There is no justification for the expansion of one of the most polluting industries in the world. Quebec has resolutely turned toward green energy and has an ambitious plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, Parliament still seems to think that the oil sands are an attractive prospect.

When will the 40 Liberal members from Quebec rise and support their constituents by speaking out against this project, which goes against our values and interests?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the government is committed to energy development that respects the integrity of the environment.

On the question of the energy east issue itself, the proponent has not yet installed the final papers with the regulator, the National Energy Board. When that happens there will be a process that will begin, during which all members of the House will have ample opportunity to give their views on the balance between economic growth and sustainable development.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister may be hiding his position on energy east, but the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government has no such qualms. As recently as Friday, he said, and I quote, "This

government has put a process in place to see future pipelines get done".

When it comes to selling weapons to Saudi Arabia to the detriment of human rights, this government's main concern is Canada's business reputation, but what about the promise it made to the international community in Paris concerning greenhouse gas emissions?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us on this side of the House that our international obligations will be taken seriously, as will our commitment to move our natural resources to market sustainably.

We have installed a new process to make that happen that has confidence in Canadians to make up their own minds, because the process will ask them their views. We will take seriously indigenous leaders because we have a constitutional and a moral obligation to consult with them meaningfully. Unfortunately, that has not been done in the House in a very long time.

* * *

ROBERT HALL

The Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties, I understand that there is agreement to observe a moment of silence in memory of Robert Hall, who was held hostage in the Philippines since September 21, 2015. I now invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of The Honourable Mark Furey, Minister of Business and Minister of Service for the province of Nova Scotia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!.

The Speaker: Canadian Forces Day is an opportunity for Canadians across the country to recognize the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform make on our behalf.

● (1510)

[Translation]

It is with great pleasure that I draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of six members of the Canadian Forces who are taking part in Canadian Forces Day today.

[English]

Captain Robert S. Oikle, Chief Petty Officer 2nd Class Corey A. Lange, Sergeant Joshua K. Collins, Master Corporal Noel J. Martin, Master Corporal Christopher C. J. Wells, and Corporal Howard A. Kack.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: The 11th report, entitled "Report 1, Implementing Gender-Based Analysis, of the Fall 2015 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada".

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

* * *

PETITIONS

OLD GROWTH FORESTS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, for the first time, I have the experience of presenting an e-petition, now that we have innovated in this place to allow electronic petitions. This one has the requisite number of signatures and is on the subject of ancient forests.

Petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to establish an ancient forest preservation act to map out remaining old growth forests across Canada, work with first nations, and determine boundaries to create protection for this class of forest.

• (1515)

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from Vancouver Island residents looking for extended producer responsibility so that products that are manufactured ultimately go back to the manufacturer for recycling to avoid their being placed in solid waste dumps.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, right now a healthy Canadian economy depends on economic and population growth. I have an interesting petition from Yukoners who suggest that it is not sustainable. They want to know what solution we have for this to create prosperity without growth. They consider it doable and what is needed for a sustainable economy.

Business of Supply

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION — DECRIMINALIZATION OF MARIJUANA POSSESSION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Following the speech by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, there will be five minutes left for questions and comments.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question has come up this morning. We have asked repeatedly, given the size and scope—

The Speaker: My apologies. Apparently I am mistaken. There are five minutes remaining in the member's time for speaking, and then we will go on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Montarville.

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, members must be aware, that in addition to law enforcement representation on the task force, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and the member for Scarborough Southwest, who is a former chief of the Toronto Police Service, will work with the task force to engage Canadians on marijuana-related issues.

Further, as part of the consultative process, Public Safety Canada will be hosting a law enforcement round table on marijuana legalization later this month. This event will focus on key issues related to marijuana legalization and regulation, including priority issues such as organized crime, marijuana sales and distribution, and drug-impaired driving.

[Translation]

It is important for everyone to remember that the law is the law. Canadians should expect the police to continue to enforce the law. This includes laws related to storefronts that sell marijuana.

Under the current law, the Marihuana for Medical Purposes Regulations, only persons licensed by Health Canada can produce, provide, or sell marijuana directly to patients with a prescription from a health practitioner to access marijuana.

Business of Supply

Over the past few months, we have heard stories from the provinces and police forces that are dealing with the issue of illegal marijuana dispensaries. I can assure the House that police forces across the country, including the RCMP, have taken and will continue to take measures to enforce the law against these illegal marijuana dispensaries.

In closing, we are making progress. We recognize the motivation behind this motion. However, we intend to keep a pace that follows a consistent time frame, which allows for consultation and the full review of the complex social, legal, and public safety consequences related to legislating, regulating, and limiting access to marijuana.

Moving to decriminalization immediately would not achieve any of these objectives and would betray our commitment to Canadians. They supported this commitment and they expect their government to see it through.

Canadians do not expect the government to act hastily on this very important issue. I invite all hon. members to join me in defeating this motion.

The Speaker: We will now move to questions and comments.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that gave me more time to reflect.

I appreciate the hon. member's comments. However, what we have been asking for repeatedly since this morning is the number of Canadians who have been arrested since this new government came to power.

Members will recall that, in 2014, the last year for which we have these statistics, 57,000 Canadians were arrested for simple possession of marijuana under the former Conservative government. The Liberals are saying that the situation is not as bad as it was under the Conservatives. However, to date, they have not provided any statistics showing that there has been a change since November 1, 2015.

Therefore, I will ask the question once more and I hope to get an answer this time. How many Canadians have been arrested under the new Liberal government for simple possession of marijuana since last November?

• (1520)

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

His question is much more significant and a little troubling, as his aim is to try to determine how many Canadians did not obey the law. To my knowledge, there have been no changes to the legislation. Therefore, the law remains in effect, and we intend to enforce it until the law is changed.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the negative health effects of marijuana. We have heard members of the NDP quote studies and information from the 1970s, seemingly not appreciating the way THC content in marijuana has gone up significantly over the intervening years. I wonder if the member could comment on the

health effects, emerging concerns, and links between schizophrenia and marijuana use, especially in the young, even with relatively occasional use.

Would he agree with me that we need a strong response that recognizes the risks and does not treat this as though it is something simple, small, or not a big deal and acknowledges that it is a very serious issue and a serious health risk when people use marijuana?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

Unfortunately, I am not a doctor. Therefore, I cannot comment on the medical characteristics of the product.

However, it is exactly those types of concerns that we will examine when we create the task force led by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. Experts will be able to provide good advice, good comments, and proper analyses concerning the methods and measures to be implemented in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, over the last 10 years, we have seen a Conservative government that has wanted the status quo, with no changes or anything of that nature. It just wanted to leave it as it is. In a very progressive fashion, we came out with what I believe is a responsible approach. We want to make sure that there is consultation and a framework that includes regulations, with the objective of taking money out of the hands of criminals and looking at youth education, and so forth.

Now we have the opposition motion, which seems to be premature with respect to passing a law and creating a huge vacuum. I wonder if the member might want to provide his comments on that thought.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He highlighted the crucial point of the bill, which is the notion of responsibility. Unfortunately, the comments we heard in the House this morning were only about the interests of users.

We care about the safety of users, but we also consider the entire chain, from production to use. If we did not consider the entire chain, it would not be possible to develop a decent, serious bill.

As a responsible government, it is our duty to consider the entire chain, to ensure that the product is not accessible to minors. The proceeds of crime, the proceeds from the transaction, will not end up in the hands of organized crime. It is a matter of the safety and security of all Canadians.

That is a responsible government.

Business of Supply

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, let me begin by emphasizing what our government has committed to do.

We have committed to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to marijuana. We will do this because it is what we promised Canadians. It is what Canadian elected us to do, and it is the responsible way forward. Our approach will ensure that we keep marijuana out of the hands of our children, and the profits of this illicit trade out of the hands of criminals.

Decriminalization, on the other hand, would provide a legal stream of income to criminal organizations. That approach would do nothing to protect our kids and to mitigate the risk of unrestricted and unregulated access to marijuana. To decriminalize immediately, as the member for Victoria suggests, ignores the fact that marijuana is not a benign substance.

It is important to do this right, and not recklessly rush changes through at the expense of public health and safety. Marijuana is associated with a number of serious harms. The scientific evidence indicates that marijuana use is linked to increased risks to physical and mental health. This is particularly true with use that starts in early adolescence which is regular and that continues over time.

Marijuana use impairs mental functioning in the areas of attention, memory, reaction time, and decision-making. Among vulnerable populations, it can accelerate the onset of psychosis or schizophrenia. Regular marijuana use, especially use that begins early in life, can lead to an increased risk of addiction.

I think we can all agree that this is a very complex policy issue, with important public health and safety considerations. A thoughtfully planned, strictly regulated, and carefully implemented regime is critical to mitigate the risks of harm to Canadians. We know this from the experience and lessons learned from other jurisdictions that have moved forward on legalization.

Our government is committed to evidence-based policy. One key message we have heard loud and clear from Canadians and from experts is that it is important to take the time to get it right.

In relation to that broad message, I would refer to a 2015 report from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, which examined marijuana regulation in Colorado and Washington State. This report articulates a number of important aspects for policy-makers to consider, based on the evidence in these two jurisdictions.

One key lesson that I have already alluded to relates to the need to take the time to develop and implement a comprehensive and effective regulatory system. Another key lesson is to prevent use by our young people, by restricting access and fostering a climate that promotes public awareness of the risks and harms of the use of marijuana.

Our government has repeatedly articulated our commitment to ensuring that Canada's approach is robust. It will include strictly controlled sales and distribution, where the appropriate taxes are applied and where access is restricted.

Another key lesson learned from the experience of other jurisdictions relates to the effects and risks associated with various forms of marijuana products. The evidence and experts tell us that it is important to give serious thought to the control of product formats and dosing or concentration levels. For example, an article in *The Globe and Mail* this past Friday, June 10, reported that some retailers in Colorado indicated that as much as 60% of their revenue comes from marijuana-infused products. Edibles and extracts, which pose particular health and safety risks, were reported to account for up to 30% of the legal U.S. market.

Unregulated access to these types of products, which would happen if the government were to move forward with immediate decriminalization, would increase risks of harm to Canadians and to our children. As our neighbours to the south have found, cannabis ingested in edible form can take hours to take effect. This means that it carries real risks of over-consumption. Following legalization, Colorado experienced a rise in the number of accidental or unintentional, non-fatal overdoses as a result of unrestricted product formats.

In response to this public health issue, the state government decided to amend their regulatory framework to more strictly control potency and dosing to mitigate the negative health impacts of these cannabis products.

The adage that "the dose makes the poison" is really the basis upon which we develop public health standards for an array of products, and cannabis should be no different. Setting dose or concentration standards is important to consider not only for edible products, but also for the actual plants as well. Numerous studies across the world have found that the strength of marijuana has increased steadily and significantly over the past few decades.

● (1525)

As policy-makers, it is critical that we act responsibly and take a comprehensive approach, one that we feel will not happen with simply decriminalization. We should learn from the experience of other jurisdictions. We should engage stakeholders and experts, and we should develop and implement a strict regulatory framework for restricted access.

That is an approach that will mitigate public health and safety risks, including the risk of accidental overdose and increased trips to the emergency room. We should not and will not rush through decriminalization and support criminal profiteering, and we should not and will not blindly push forward to legalize marijuana.

Our government has developed a thoughtful and robust plan of action. Our plan is comprehensive and collaborative.

Reflecting the priority that our government has placed on this issue, the Prime Minister has outlined marijuana legalization and legislation as a key deliverable in the mandate letters of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and the Minister of Health.

Business of Supply

To inform the design of a new system, our government has also committed to creating a federal-provincial-territorial task force. This task force will consult with Canadians and experts in public health, substance abuse, law enforcement, criminal justice, industry, and those groups with expertise on production, sales, and distribution, to examine and to report to ministers on all of the issues related to legalization and regulation. The task force's report will help inform our government's approach. We remain committed to working with the provinces and territories throughout this process, with a view to introducing proposed legislation in Parliament in spring 2017, as recently announced by the Minister of Health.

Let me assure the House that our government will deliver on its commitment. We believe that marijuana legalization, with restricted access and robust regulatory controls, is the best approach to keeping marijuana out of the hands of children and keeping illicit profits away from criminals.

Our approach provides for thoughtful action on an important issue that requires a balance of important public safety, justice, and health considerations. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of this House on this important issue.

● (1530)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health. If the government continues to criminalize the possession of marijuana, some young people who might be looking for information on how marijuana affects their health will not do so because they know that what they are doing is illegal. If we were to at least decriminalize it, they would perhaps not be afraid to ask questions and seek information on how marijuana will affect their health. Decriminalizing marijuana could make it easier to talk more openly and could help warn more young people about how marijuana affects their health.

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, unlike our government's plan to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to marijuana, decriminalization would provide a legal stream of income to criminal organizations.

That approach would do nothing to protect our kids and mitigate the risk of unrestricted and unregulated access to marijuana. To decriminalize immediately ignores the fact that marijuana is a harmful substance, which it is, so we are committed to legalizing, strictly regulating, and restricting access to marijuana.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after listening to my colleague, it is obvious that the Liberals' view toward evidence-based policy is a complete farce, and here is why.

This is one of the few public policy areas where we have a perfect public policy experiment. We have legalized cigarettes. We have all the restrictions in place. We have the packaging, the warning, and cigarettes are put behind cupboards so nobody can see them. They are highly taxed. They are supposed to be kept out of the hands of kids. Has that stopped the criminal production of illegal cigarettes? Absolutely not. In fact, the criminal production and sale of cigarettes has skyrocketed in the face of these restrictions on legal cigarettes.

The exact same thing will happen in the case of marijuana. Once marijuana is legalized, we bring the price up, and we have these so-called restrictions, marijuana is fairly easy to cultivate, so there will be a major stream of illegal marijuana entering the stream of legal marijuana. Criminal profits will increase dramatically, and marijuana will be made even more available to our kids.

There is no restriction in place that the Liberals have talked about, and they have given us no specifics. This simply will not work. Can the member comment on that?

● (1535)

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, our current system of marijuana prohibition just does not work. It does not prevent young people from using marijuana or keep the profits out of the hands of criminals. We know young people have easier access to cannabis now in Canada than in just about any other country in the world. In 2013, a UNICEF study found that in 29 different countries, Canada was number one in underage access to marijuana.

The proceeds from the illegal drug trade support organized crimes and create a greater threat to public safety. There are currently billions upon billions of dollars flowing into the pockets of organized crime, street gangs and gun runners because of the illicit marijuana trade. Legalizing and strictly regulating access to marijuana would help stop funding these criminal activities.

Our government is moving forward with creating a new system to legalize, strictly regulating and restricting access to marijuana. This is the responsible way to do it, and this is exactly what we will do.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her speech.

In my view, the farce is not to trust the professionals and scientists who have the experience to be giving good advice.

How does my colleague think that Health Canada will be able to collaborate on this task force?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, reflecting on the priority our government has placed on this issue, the Prime Minister outlined marijuana legalization as a key deliverable in the mandate letters of the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Health. Our government has developed a thoughtful and robust plan of action, one that is comprehensive and collaborative.

To inform the design of a new system, our government has also committed to creating a federal-provincial-territorial task force. This task force will consult with Canadians and with experts in the public health, substance abuse, law enforcement and criminal justice industries, as well as all other groups with expertise on production, sales and distribution.

Business of Supply

We remain committed to working with the provinces and territories throughout this process with the view of introducing proposed legislation in Parliament in spring 2017.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think the main thing is understanding why it is important to decriminalize marijuana possession now. Over 50,000 people are still charged with simple possession of marijuana every year and end up with criminal records even though the government clearly signalled its intent to legalize marijuana. That is what we have to put an end to.

It is utter nonsense. The Prime Minister himself admitted to using marijuana. At some point that evening, he must have been in simple possession of marijuana. He even admitted to using it while he was an MP. Still, the government keeps telling more than 50,000 Canadians a year that they will have a criminal record and never mind the fact that the Prime Minister himself admitted to doing the same thing they did.

We have to consider the fact that a number of public figures have admitted to doing this at some point in their lives. Luckily for them, they were not caught, but other people get caught every year and suffer the consequences. This is out of whack. Whether or not someone suffers legal consequences is entirely a matter of luck.

We must also remember that this is a frequent occurrence. Many people are exposing themselves to possible legal consequences. In Abitibi—Témiscamingue, according to 2008 statistics, one in eight people or 12% of the population aged 15 and over used cannabis that year. Among those users, one in three had used it less than once a month, and one in four, or barely 3% in the region, had used it between one and three times a month. A majority of users, about six out of 10, used it more than once a week during that 12-month period.

In concrete terms, to paint a clear picture, this means that any time I travel around my riding, considering the number of people I meet along the way, I definitely, although unknowingly, cross paths with someone who is in illegal possession of a controlled substance, because of the government's inaction and failure to change the law. That is a large number of people. It is important that we take action to prevent these people from facing the legal ramifications of having a criminal record.

I also think it is important to stop bogging down the justice system with cases that I think have a lot more to do with health than crime. Marijuana for personal use is much more of a health issue than a crime issue.

We have often heard the government say that decriminalizing possession would keep the money in the hands of criminals. We have heard that argument a lot. I think that argument more or less makes sense when we consider that, as with any business, legal or not, there is the matter of supply and demand and the issue of price. The reason criminal groups grow and sell marijuana is that there is money to be made. Unfortunately, that is the main motivation. As soon as there is less to gain, they will leave the market. The reason they do well is that, since they are assuming risks, they can sell the substance at prices that do not at all reflect the cost of production.

● (1540)

If we decriminalize marijuana, then presumably the people who possess it for personal use will be able to grow the few plants they need for their own consumption.

The spouse of a man who uses marijuana for medical purposes was interviewed in a 2014 news article on medical marijuana. Even though she knows it is illegal, she grows marijuana because her spouse is suffering. She estimates it costs her 5¢ a gram. According to the Sûreté du Québec, the black market price is about \$10 a gram.

If marijuana is decriminalized and the price stays that high, most people will choose to grow their own marijuana. Eventually, the black market will lose its appeal because most people will choose to grow their own depending on the price.

Furthermore, anyone who chooses to grow their own marijuana can control what fertilizer they use, for example. Perhaps THC levels will decrease because people will not be trying to grow the strongest product possible. They will simply want to grow something that meets their needs. For example, because the product is for their own use, people might apply less chemical fertilizer, which unfortunately can be found in plants sold on the black market.

It does not make any sense to say that, by decriminalizing marijuana, we will continue to send money to the criminal world. I believe that most of the people who use marijuana regularly will choose to grow it themselves because they will no longer have to worry about getting a criminal record. Of course, they will have to make sure that their children and others cannot access it. They will no longer have any dealings with organized crime. If there is a significant drop in demand because people are choosing to grow their own marijuana, there will be no more use for the black market. Criminals will slowly move away from smuggling marijuana or at least selling it.

Growing a marijuana plant is nothing like distilling alcohol. In the case of alcohol, a lot of controls are needed because the health risks associated with a bad batch of liquor are very high. The plants that people grow at home will likely have a lower THC concentration. Those plants will therefore be less harmful to health than the marijuana that is currently being sold on the black market. I think that it is completely false to say that decriminalizing marijuana will ensure that money continues to be sent to criminals. Decriminalization would allow people to grow marijuana themselves. That argument does not hold up if people are growing it for their own use.

Business of Supply

Another important thing is that, if marijuana is decriminalized, then people can get the health care they need. Right now, the problem is that people are afraid to say that they use marijuana because they know it is illegal. Adults and people who are a little older, who are over the age of 50, use marijuana for different reasons. Because of the impact it could have on people's work or personal lives if others knew that they used marijuana occasionally, they do not talk about their use of marijuana and do not seek out information on the effects it could have on their health.

• (1545)

If marijuana were decriminalized, young people could seek out information on how marijuana affects their health, without fear of potential consequences if anyone were to find out that they use the drug. Decriminalization would also allow for a more open discussion on the difference between recreational use and problematic use.

It is no secret that marijuana has significant effects on the health of users. It can have some serious consequences, especially on the psychological health and motivation of young people. However, if young people cannot talk about this openly, they cannot get this information, and it is difficult to intervene. People will still avoid disclosing their marijuana use, and we will not have an accurate picture of the situation.

People regularly lie in surveys on marijuana use because they are afraid of what might happen if this information were obtained by a third party. As a result, they do not seek medical assistance. Occasional marijuana use may be acceptable, but when someone uses marijuana every day, that goes beyond recreational use and becomes a health problem. It is important to be able to say that.

What matters to me now is changing the lens through which we see marijuana. This is not a criminal matter; it is a health matter. We should be able to have an intelligent conversation about this. Compare marijuana to alcohol. If people have one or two drinks a week, that is not a problem, but if people feel the need to drink every day or drink incredible amounts of alcohol, that is a problem, and those people need to get help.

We need to be able to talk about responsible use and determine what constitutes a health risk, and decriminalization is key to having that conversation. If not, some people will not talk because they will fear the consequences. As people get older, the consequences for their lives, their work, and their family become more far-reaching, so they are less likely to come forward or to seek out the information or the help they need, depending on their situation.

Decriminalization will enable us to get the answers we do not have right now, such as the long-term health consequences of marijuana use. It will also enable us to figure out how much is too much for driving. How long should a person wait after using marijuana before getting behind the wheel? How much would make it dangerous?

If people cannot even talk about their usage without fearing legal consequences, they will not be able to seek out that information. However, this information is essential if we want to pursue legalization. For one thing, we need to set limits for operating a vehicle so that people can be informed. If we do not have accurate information, we will keep going around in circles.

There is another argument to the effect that decriminalization will not do anything to prevent young people from accessing marijuana. That is not true at all. Right now, if someone is smoking marijuana in a park, for example, a police officer has no choice but to take all of the legal measures: arrest and charge the person, keep evidence, etc. These legal procedures take a long time. There are therefore no immediate consequences associated with using marijuana in an inappropriate place.

If marijuana were decriminalized, municipal bylaws could be put in place to prohibit its use in municipal parks, for example, and violators could be fined. Police sweeps could be used to change behaviour. Since an immediate sanction would be imposed, people would think twice about using marijuana again in an inappropriate place where there are young people.

• (1550)

By decriminalizing marijuana possession, the government can give the provinces and municipalities the latitude to regulate the context in which use is acceptable. It could also make the actions to prevent use more effective.

Right now, legal action must be taken each time. If we consider the fact that 12% of the population is using marijuana or has used it in recent years, it is clear that it is not realistic to take all of those people to court. Between 3.6 million and four million Canadians per year would be going through the court system. That does not make any sense. We cannot do that.

If marijuana were decriminalized, people could be fined for using marijuana in inappropriate locations. It would also allow community workers and parent committees, for example, to target areas where they think such use would be inappropriate, such as schoolyards, parks, or other places where young people go. It would allow the municipalities to ensure that marijuana is only being used in places where there are no young people. That could have a positive impact by reducing access to cannabis, since right now, it is impossible to put in place bylaws on something that is supposed to be illegal.

The problem is that if simple possession continues to be illegal, we cannot put certain regulations or policies in place, because the product is supposed to be illegal.

For instance, if someone is caught in possession of a substance at school, the police must be called and legal proceedings for a young offender must be initiated. However, if a young person is caught in possession of cannabis at school and it has been decriminalized, he or she could be asked, under the school's regulations, to destroy the substance and a lot more effort can be put into social intervention. We could try to understand why that young person is using drugs. There is also a public health approach. If there are underlying health concerns involved, such as mental health, we can intervene accordingly. By continuing to criminalize it, the Liberals are burying their heads in the sand and depriving the authorities of the tools needed to properly intervene.

Business of Supply

It is very important to keep in mind that we absolutely must not trivialize marijuana use. I recognize that this substance has adverse health effects. Regular use creates motivation problems in young people, as well as mental health problems. It affects blood pressure and it changes electroencephalograms. It is important to decriminalize possession immediately in order to address the health risks and the ineffectiveness of prohibition.

This would allow people to talk more openly about their marijuana use and to seek health information. Decriminalizing possession immediately would help us to intervene and to stop criminals from trafficking in this drug. As soon as cannabis possession is decriminalized, people who use it more regularly will find that it is much easier to produce what they consume themselves. This will enable them to gain control over their product and pay less than what criminals are currently charging, since that cost is associated with a risk that would no longer exist with decriminalization.

This is the logical way to proceed. The fact that it would still be illegal to sell cannabis will keep things under control and will very much help the people who consume it regularly anyway. They will benefit because they will have more control over the product they consume and will also be much more open about looking for information on their health.

• (1555)

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is deeply disturbing about decriminalization is this insistence on focusing on the end user and believing that a solution could help one person grow enough marijuana for personal use, which, I repeat, is illegal for the time being. This also does not take into account what is happening in the market, and that is what people are ignoring.

People with ties to organized crime are offering this type of product to children in elementary schoolyards. What really bothers me is that people do not realize just how much marijuana is grown on farmland and that farmers' lives are at risk because they are victims of extortion. People also do not realize the phenomenal amount of money invested in hydroponic greenhouses, which generate profits for organized crime.

What would the member say to those who voted for her to prove that decriminalization is safe?

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I thought I gave a good explanation in my speech.

Once those who consume marijuana on a regular basis are able to produce what they need, and I believe that this will happen with many people who use marijuana regularly, the criminal market will collapse because it is all about supply and demand.

If people start growing marijuana themselves and the criminal market collapses, I believe that people with ties to organized crime will stop visiting schoolyards because the market will collapse. Naturally, they will focus on other substances, which are not quite as popular with young people.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech certainly was interesting. I know that we will have a lot of things to talk about when, finally, the legislation comes.

We are talking about plant physiology and how farmers or how producers are going to have to change things so that they can regulate to find out exactly how much presence of effective chemical there is going to be. Backyard pot growers and people raiding their gardens, all of these other sorts of things are taking place.

However, if we look at the Colorado experience, right now, one of the key things they are looking at is acute marijuana intoxication in children. The key component there is that people are normalizing the use of it and then putting the chemicals into brownies and gummy bears and so on, so that a child does not know what it is that they are getting. By doing this normalization, I see that we are creating so many other issues.

Could the member speak somewhat about how they are going to regulate and protect those families and those children who are going to be subject to these things when all of this is free and normalized?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, decriminalizing marijuana right now would give us some flexibility as we work on legalizing it.

For example, based on Colorado's experience, we can anticipate the negative effects, for example, with respect to products that can be marketed to look like candy for children.

If we decriminalize and do not legalize this product, we can take time to pass a law that takes a common-sense approach to legalization. This product is found on a small scale and not a large scale, for example, in the case of consumers who grow it themselves. Furthermore, if some products, such as candies made with marijuana, need to be restricted, in much the same way as we banned vanilla-flavoured cigarettes because they were enticing to children, we can have some flexibility.

The priority right now is to ensure that people do not suffer legal consequences for using marijuana and can talk about health issues. Decriminalization would help achieve both of those objectives.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if we do not decriminalize simple possession of marijuana immediately, there will be many more arrests and court proceedings in the next year. We are talking about \$4 million a year in costs for the Department of Justice alone.

Can my colleague suggest other uses for this money? For example, it could be put towards combatting substance abuse.

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, yes, that money could be redirected from the justice system to the health system right now for programs related to marijuana use, such as addiction prevention programs. Some people are addicted and need programs to help them quit using.

Business of Supply

The money could also be spent on programs to prevent drug use among young people and campaigns that provide accurate information about the potential health consequences of marijuana use and explain why it is important to be aware of this so people can make responsible health choices. All of that money could be redirected toward health rather than crime and justice. I think it would be win-win all around if we invested that money in health.

[English]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a couple of questions of clarification. My questions come from a report by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and some of the insight and guidance that it has provided through its scientific research and recommendations for a public health policy framework for the legalization and effective and efficient regulation of cannabis.

I would seek the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue's response to this. That report says very clearly that decriminalization is a half measure that does nothing to control the potency or quality of marijuana consumed by Canadians because it remains prohibited under decriminalization. In the member's remarks, I was somewhat confused as to whether she was talking about immediate legalization or decriminalization. Of course, decriminalization and prohibition remains the rule, but law enforcement on prohibition does drive cannabis users away from prevention, risk reduction, and treatment services.

Perhaps most important, I want her response to CAMH, which is, by the way, the leading mental health and addiction research facility in Canada. It said, "Decriminalization...encourage[s] commercialization of cannabis production and distribution – without giving government additional regulatory tools". This is an opportunity of enormous profit for organized crime. I have seen first-hand the ravages of organized crime and the violence and victimization that it perpetuates on our neighbourhoods.

Is this what the member intended?

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that decriminalization is not the end of the story when it comes to marijuana.

This is absolutely just one step. We will continue to move forward, but what I know for sure right now is that decriminalization is less harmful than the prohibition we have now, which drives people into hiding, subjects them to legal consequences, and prevents us from having an intelligent conversation about the direct consequences. I am absolutely sure that decriminalization will work much better than prohibition, which has been the preferred approach for too long. Decriminalization is certainly not an end in and of itself. We need to do a lot more hard work on this issue.

[English]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest for his comments because it is exactly where I want to go with mine. I followed quite closely the hon. colleague's presentation. I find it

farfarcical that decriminalization will lead to better study in the impairment of drivers.

Is my hon. colleague aware of the technology that exists for impaired driving for our police agencies, as well as the training and the time frame for implementing that new technology in order to know whether somebody is impaired and the level of impairment through marijuana?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, with respect to research and information, if something I am doing is illegal, I am certainly not going to talk about it. If people can at least talk about what they are doing, we will be able to get far more crucial information. If an activity is illegal, it is very difficult to get information that will give us a better idea of the limits we need to set. That is what I meant to say. If marijuana is decriminalized, people will at least be able to report how much they are consuming, and that will give an idea of the repercussions this has on their concentration or their skills.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the eloquent and brilliant member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

I am pleased to stand in the House today to address the topic put forward by the member for Victoria.

It is clear that there is no reason to hastily rush into decriminalization, as members opposite suggest. Over the last decade or so, courts have told us that people with a legitimate medical need have a constitutional right to access marijuana for medical purposes. As the result of various court decisions, there is a robust regulatory system in place that provides legal access to marijuana for medical purposes to Canadians who need it.

To be frank, those who want it for recreational purposes can wait until such time as we have a new system that legalizes, strictly regulates, and restricts access to marijuana.

[Translation]

At this time, we have a fully functional system that allows a little over 53,000 Canadians to access medical marijuana.

• (1610)

[English]

The current system has established strict controls over the production and sale of marijuana for medical purposes. These controls protect public health and safety and enable Canadians to access marijuana for medical purposes when authorized by their health care practitioner.

Business of Supply

Let me make it very clear. Our government does not license organizations such as compassion clubs or dispensaries to possess, produce, or distribute marijuana for medical purposes. These activities by these organizations are, and remain, illegal. Instead, through the marijuana for medical purposes regulations, Health Canada has put in place controls to enable the production and distribution of marijuana for medical purposes, while reducing the risk of marijuana being diverted to an illicit market or use.

[Translation]

Health Canada grants licenses to producers so that they can produce and distribute dried marijuana, fresh marijuana, and cannabis oil to people who have received authorization from a health care practitioner. Those Health Canada-approved licensed producers must meet the strictest standards in order to produce and distribute medical marijuana.

[English]

The system was created to help ensure a professional, secure, and ethical industry that would provide reasonable access for Canadians to marijuana for medical purposes. Licensed producers must demonstrate compliance, including quality control standards, record keeping of all activities and inventories of marijuana, and physical security measures to protect against potential diversion. In addition to those stringent requirements, the system also requires that certain key employees, along with directors and officers in the case of a corporation, have a security clearance.

The regulations provide for rigorous oversight to reduce public health, safety, and security risks by setting out an in-depth licence application review process and a strong compliance and enforcement regime. Licensed producers must meet good production practices, including the requirement for analytical testing for contaminants, sanitation requirements for production, and packaging and storage, among other requirements. Licensed producers also have to test marijuana for microbial and chemical contaminants, and must meet legislated quality control requirements.

[Translation]

This means that the marijuana sold is subject to strict quality control and robust oversight in order to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

[English]

For its part, Health Canada plays a compliance and enforcement role to ensure that licensed producers produce marijuana to the high standards set out in the regulations. To this end, the department conducts frequent inspections of all licensed producer facilities.

[Translation]

To date, Health Canada has issued 31 licences to producers located across Canada who conduct their operations according to the quality control measures and appropriate health and safety standards that I have already talked about today.

[English]

We know these producers are selling a wide variety of quality-controlled marijuana in a manner that reduces risk to public health and safety. Moreover, licensed producers are offering marijuana at a range of prices, with some producers offering compassionate pricing.

To be able to access marijuana for medical purposes, Canadians must have the support of a health care practitioner; that is a physician in all provinces and territories or a nurse practitioner in those provinces and territories where it is permitted.

These health care practitioners complete a medical document that includes the daily amount of marijuana required. With that medical document, individuals can register with one of the licensed producers identified on the Health Canada website. To date, nearly 53,000 Canadians have registered to purchase marijuana for medical purposes. From licensed producers, Canadians can obtain dried or fresh marijuana as well as cannabis oil.

[Translation]

What is more, people who are entitled to obtain marijuana for medical purposes and who purchase it from licensed producers can produce and possess marijuana products such as ointments for personal use.

• (1615)

[English]

As part of the regulatory requirements, licensed producers must ensure the safe distribution of marijuana. This means that licensed producers are only permitted to provide marijuana to registered clients and this marijuana must be securely shipped directly to the client or an individual responsible for the client or to the client's health care practitioner.

Let me also add that licensed producers may not operate a storefront.

Licensed producers must package marijuana in a child resistant manner that allows the client to determine whether it has been opened prior to receipt and helps to prevent children from opening it.

[Translation]

Licensed producers must apply a label on the container indicating the name of the client, that of the licensed producer, the contact information of the supplier, and information about the marijuana being shipped.

[English]

The licensed producer is also required to include similar information on a separate document with each shipment of marijuana. These documents are useful should a client be required to demonstrate proof of authorized possession to law enforcement.

[Translation]

All these requirements create a framework that allows people in Canada to access marijuana prescribed by a health practitioner.

[English]

The system is working. I mentioned that there are 53,000 registered clients who are already legally accessing marijuana for medical purposes from 31 licensed producers. These licensed producers have the capacity to absorb new clients. This means that Canadians who require marijuana for medical purposes do not need to go to a dispensary. They can already get it from a legal source if they require it for medical purposes.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

The government is working hard to make changes to the current regulations based on the Federal Court's guidelines.

[English]

While I will not speculate about the specifics of the proposed regulations, they will be crafted to address the issues identified by the court and ensure that authorized individuals have reasonable access to marijuana for medical purposes.

[Translation]

In the meantime, I want to remind the House that licensed producers will continue to carry out their operations as usual and that Canadians needing marijuana for medical purposes can continue to access it through licensed producers.

[English]

It is simply unnecessary to decriminalize marijuana. There is a robust system in place for those who need it for medical purposes. For those who wish to access marijuana for recreational purposes, we would urge them to respect the current laws while we take the time to put in place a responsible regulated system for marijuana for non-medical purposes. That system will keep marijuana out of the hands of youth and keep criminals from profiting from marijuana's illegal trade. Therefore, I cannot support today's motion.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the remarks of the parliamentary secretary, the member for Charlottetown. He spoke a lot about medical marijuana. The purpose of the motion before us today is to address the interim measures or preparatory steps the government could take for those who wish to use marijuana recreationally, not medically.

I wonder if my colleague would agree with me on this. If the latest Statistics Canada information says 57,000 people a year are charged and perhaps in two years' time, before the law is put into place, some 50,000 Canadians will acquire a criminal record for this activity, which will be perfectly legal as soon as the government enacts the legislation it has promised, a great deal of hardship will occur to that many Canadians in the interim.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, allow me to take that logic to another situation.

The drinking age in the province of Quebec is 18. Do we say to all of the 17-year-olds in Quebec that they are going to be legal next year so we will cut them some slack this year? It makes no sense, nor does this.

The idea of decriminalizing, in the absence of any other system of control, will do nothing but enrich organized crime. It is certainly not where we want to go, and not where we need to go in this country.

• (1620)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the NDP insofar as there is any ambiguity here. The Liberals said they would change the law, but the Liberals have broken many of their other promises, so we have no reason to assume that they will follow through in this case. For now, marijuana use remains illegal.

I want to ask the parliamentary secretary if he is aware of any jurisdiction in the world where legalization has led to reduced use. If he cannot name that jurisdiction, I wonder why he thinks Canada's experience of legislation would be any different.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, what we know is that the war on drugs has been an abject failure. What we know is that cannabis use among young Canadians is the highest in the developed world.

We know that the prohibition system has been an utter failure. We believe that the right answer is evidence-based, and it is strict regulation and control. That is what we are moving toward, based on the evidence that we will be amassing through the task force. That will be a better answer for Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the member could provide a comment on this thought.

If this resolution were to pass and the NDP got what they wanted here, my greatest fear is that the gangs and distributors of marijuana will have a field day. They can then go to our young people and say they can go ahead and smoke because it is perfectly legal.

If anything, the biggest benefactor of this motion would be organized crime. The best way to deal with organized crime is through criminal law and through working with the provinces that have the necessary regulations and the framework in place, so that the biggest benefactor is not the gangs, but rather it will be good, sound, social policy.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how I can answer that question other than to say that I find myself in violent agreement with the member for Winnipeg North.

Clearly, the objective of the government policy with respect to marijuana legalization is exactly that, to keep it out of the hands of young people and to keep the profits out of the hands of criminals. That is the process on which we are embarking through this task force, through the consultation with the provinces and territories that have a shared jurisdiction in many of the areas.

It will be a public health approach, and one that will achieve our policy objectives where the old approach, prohibition, has been an abject failure.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go on to resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove, Seniors; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence; and the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, also in respect to National Defence.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion brought by the hon. member for Victoria. He would know that I hold him in high regard even though he is not here, though regrettably I am speaking against his motion.

Business of Supply

I also want to thank the hon. member for Charlottetown for his gracious introduction. I will try to live up to his high expectations.

Let me start by reminding the House that our government has committed to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to marijuana.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada intends to keep marijuana away from children and prevent criminals from profiting from its illegal trade.

[English]

We will take these steps with our eyes wide open. We will take a responsible approach. We do not want to rush or introduce precipitous changes which are unnecessary and could needlessly complicate the transition to a properly designed and regulated system of restricted access to marijuana. As the Minister of Health said in her recent speech to the United Nations, our approach to drug policy, including the legalization of marijuana, must have a solid scientific foundation.

I would like to use my time today to talk about some of what the science says about marijuana and health. There are both health risks and potential therapeutic benefits from marijuana. While new evidence of risks and benefits continue to emerge, we currently have more evidence about the harms, particularly the harms to youth. There is evidence of very real and negative health effects of marijuana consumption, particularly for young people.

• (1625)

[Translation]

The health risks associated with regular use of marijuana during adolescence and early adulthood, when the brain is still developing, include long-term harmful effects.

[English]

Regular marijuana use over time can lead to an increased risk of addiction, and therefore potentially longer lasting harms to mental functioning, such as deficits in attention, memory, learning, and even IQ. This is particularly true for use that begins in early adolescence.

[Translation]

There is evidence that regular marijuana use in early adolescence can have a negative impact on academic success and increase the risk of dropping out of school.

[English]

Early and regular marijuana use has also been associated with an increased risk of psychosis and schizophrenia, especially in those who have a personal or family history of such mental illnesses. These effects can cause profound problems for the individuals and their families. All of this is of particular concern given the high rates of use of marijuana among young Canadians.

[Translation]

On average, young people try marijuana for the first time at age 14.

[English]

Almost one in five students in grades seven to 12 had reported use of marijuana during the years 2012-13. Moreover, Health Canada's most recent Canadian tobacco, alcohol, and drug survey found that 11% of Canadians aged 15 or older reported having used marijuana at least once in 2013. When examined more closely, the data reveals that 25% of young people aged 15 to 24 years reported use in the previous year.

[Translation]

Young Canadians have an alarmingly high rate of marijuana use compared to youth in other countries.

[English]

A 2013 study by UNICEF found that Canadian youth aged 11 to 15 are the highest users of marijuana compared to their peers in other developed countries, and 28% of 15-year-olds in Canada reported using marijuana at least once in the previous year.

[Translation]

Despite the increased risks for adolescents who use marijuana, the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, conducted in 2015, indicated that the perceived risk of harm associated with marijuana use is lower than it was in the past.

[English]

In a talk at a recent conference, the Prime Minister cited the risks of marijuana use to the developing brain when he said that, "we need to make sure that it's harder for underage Canadians to access marijuana. And that will happen under a controlled and regulated regime."

[Translation]

One of the main reasons why we want to move toward legalization is that it would allow us to properly regulate the use of marijuana and restrict access to it.

[English]

Canadians expect us to be responsible as we follow through on our commitment. We need to take the time necessary to get the approach right.

We are concerned that half measures such as the decriminalization that the hon. member for Victoria proposes will only send the wrong message to our young people and amount to a disservice to the public. On balance, decriminalization would amount to a disservice to the public for a number of reasons: First, it does nothing to address the supply side of the issue, leaving serious questions regarding the quality of the substance which we aim to regulate. Second, it does nothing to reduce the law enforcement and judicial resources that would be necessary to still prosecute certain contraventions under a new decriminalization regime. Third, and perhaps equally importantly, it would do nothing to stop the flow of proceeds into the pockets and accounts of organized crime.

Business of Supply

As members can see, this is a complex issue, and many perspectives need to be considered in order to create a safe, secure, and tightly regulated system for the legal production and distribution of marijuana. That is why our government will soon launch a task force that will give us expert advice on how the legalization process should take place. The task force will include perspectives from many different sectors, including health, justice, law enforcement, and public safety. We want to take the time to hear from experts across a variety of fields who have an interest in this important issue. We must learn from the experience of other jurisdictions that have legalized marijuana, and we must consider the implications of legalization for the provinces and territories.

The science on marijuana risks and benefits is evolving. Some clinical studies suggest that some strains have potential therapeutic benefits for some medical conditions, such as certain types of severe chronic pain. There is emerging evidence that some strains may perhaps be useful in treating epilepsy in children and adults. What is clear is that as the scientific evidence continues to advance, Canadians will need a system which strictly regulates the sale and access to marijuana, and ensures that Canadians have the information they need to make informed and responsible choices about their health.

We believe that legalization, regulation, and restricted access to marijuana is the best approach to protecting our children from both accessing marijuana and from criminal records that may negatively affect their lives. To that end, we will introduce legislation in the spring of 2017 to keep marijuana out of the hands of children and illicit profits out of the hands of criminals. We are convinced that this is the best way to protect our children and young people while enhancing public safety.

I am thankful for the opportunity to inform the House on this important government commitment.

For those reasons, I am against the motion proposed by the hon. member for Victoria, and I would encourage members to make the same decision.

•(1630)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I might gently remind the member that it is against the Standing Orders to mention the presence or absence of members in the gallery.

Moving on from that, the member said that we should learn from the experience of other jurisdictions. I very much agree with that. Use has gone up significantly in every case where we have seen the legalization of marijuana. I asked the parliamentary secretary if he could name a jurisdiction where that did not happen and he was unable to.

I agree that there are certainly problems with the current system. That is why our party is advocating for an alternative, which is to allow police a ticketing option while maintaining that the possession of marijuana is a criminal offence. That allows police officers that middle option in the many cases where it might not be practical or proportionate to prosecute and that I think is part of the problem.

From my perspective, allowing a ticketing option while maintaining criminality would give us the best of both worlds. If

the member thinks differently, perhaps he could point to a single jurisdiction in the world where we did see a reduction in the use associated with legalization. I do not think that he can name one.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, the question from the hon. colleague across the aisle is well put. The short answer is that this middle option, which he describes as his party recently endorsing at a convention, is strikingly similar to the decriminalization regime which has been put forward by the NDP member.

It is for those reasons that I do not believe that the middle option, as described by the hon. colleague, would either address the supply side of the issue or would address the scarce resources of law enforcement and the courts, which are currently under tremendous strain and pressure. There is no answer with respect to that. Most importantly, it does nothing to address our aim, our intent, to deprive organized crime of the illicit profits, the proceeds of crime, which they would continue to derive in any kind of regime where we did not address the actual quality of the substance that we aim to strictly regulate.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments on the matter. He brought up the issue of police resources and said that the motion would not impact those resources. I beg to differ. If the police were able to move a lot of the attention away from some of the smaller crimes and were able to put the resources into the organized issue, the high drug offences, that is where they could actually make a difference.

I want to ask my colleague if he agrees that if they were able to put the resources into those high drug trafficking offences that involve organized crime, it would make a difference.

•(1635)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, having spent the better part of 12 years as a former federal prosecutor in downtown Toronto, having worked on organized crime, having prosecuted both street-level drug trafficking and higher-level drug trafficking, I can say to him, with some credibility, that I hope the regime we are proposing right now is precisely aimed at exercising good judgment and sound strategy in how to manage this important file, the marijuana file.

Contraventions will still require police to exercise judgment, to expend resources, to lay tickets, and to prosecute those tickets in a court, which is yet to be defined by the hon. member or his colleague who is advancing the motion.

That is the flaw in creating a criminalization regime.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member what his opinion is on the motion presented by the NDP. We have been hearing a lot of talk about a very idealistic approach, that somehow putting this legislation in place piecemeal, I would say, and decriminalizing right now would lead to people growing marijuana in their gardens and making marijuana that is safer and less strong than the marijuana that is available now. There are all these idealistic opinions. However, they completely fail to recognize the profits that would still be gained by illegal criminal organizations. I would like to get the member's opinion on that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I agree that it is important not to be ideological in our approach to how it is we propose to strictly regulate marijuana on a go-forward basis.

As the Minister of Health said in her recent speech at the United Nations, we cannot arrest ourselves out of the situation. The status quo is not working. We need to take an evidence-based, scientific approach.

The Minister of Justice has said the same thing.

This is a consistent theme that runs through all of our government's policies, be it on this file, be it on health, or be it on the economy. This government does not favour ideology over principled, evidence-based decision-making. It is the reverse, and I am proud to be part of this new approach.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Trois-Rivières.

Despite the Prime Minister's clear campaign promises to move quickly to fix our marijuana laws and stop the senseless arrests for simple possession, the government has spent the last six or seven months doing nothing. The Liberals announced a timeline for future action, in New York, but that action is at least a year away.

I am hearing from a broad range of constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith who are confused by the government's messages on marijuana, so here is a nine-part list of who is affected by leaving marijuana regulations uncertain.

First, there are judges. Justice Selkirk, from the Ontario Court of Justice, said, in December:

I recall distinctly the Prime Minister in the House of Commons saying it's going to be legalized. I'm not going to be the last judge in this country to convict somebody of simple possession of marijuana.

He continued:

You can't have the Prime Minister announcing it's going to be legalized and then stand up and prosecute it. It just can't happen. It's a ludicrous situation, ludicrous.

My second category is taxpayers, because the government spends \$3 million to \$4 million annually in prosecuting simple possession cases. New Democrats believe that it is irresponsible to allow police and court resources to be wasted this way, creating new criminal records for something the government imminently plans to legalize. Police have better things to do.

The third category is legal commercial producers. There are 60 licensed commercial businesses across Canada. One of them, Tilray, is in my riding. These businesses have done everything the government has asked them to do. They have jumped through incredible hoops. They have security, investment, and inspections. It is a very tightly regulated industry. They have invested in good faith, but they are not sure what will be the conditions for further investment. They are in an insecure business environment.

The fourth category is legal personal-production licence holders. Again, the Conservatives made a whole lot of changes, and there were a lot of prosecutions over the last 10 years. They are in an uncertain place. These people are growing medical marijuana legally, but they do not know how solid the ground is on which they stand. It is a problem.

There is another broad group affected in my community: those with illegal dispensaries in their region. These are not licensed under the current law, so the fifth category is local governments that are left scrambling to address the jurisdictional hole left by the lack of federal leadership on the illegal dispensary issue.

The sixth category is customers who are reliant on this dispensary supply. They may well have been prescribed this medically. They believe that it is a legitimate source they can rely on. They are discombobulated by ad hoc police raids and the interruption of what might be a prescribed supply for them. It creates anxiety.

The seventh category affected is that of neighbouring businesses affected by these illegal dispensaries. These people are alarmed by changes in their neighbourhoods, outdoor smoking, and a different clientele mix. The Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce representatives are complaining to me about this and about the lack of federal leadership. There is a lot of work to do on this file.

The eighth category for me is regions that are missing out on the benefits from legal commercial medical marijuana growers. Tilray, in my riding, is one success story. The company added 140 employees in 13 months. Operating impacts are estimated to grow from \$13 million to \$88 million in our region if the government can get ahead and plan what this industry is actually going to look like. We are waiting for leadership.

Finally, the ninth category, which is the focus of today's debate, is the thousands of mostly young adults who will have criminal records for the rest of their lives because the Prime Minister did not respect his promise to legalize marijuana as soon as he took office. Having a criminal record for marijuana possession has big consequences. It can impede one's travel and future work opportunities. This is again the focus of today's debate. It is unfair to impose criminal records on citizens when we are told that this will be a legal drug in less than two years. It is unfair and it costs everyone.

One of the costs is 18 months, under a Liberal government, of needless arrests and wasteful trials that are tying up our police and our courts. The justice department has confirmed that it will cost taxpayers as much as \$4 million a year.

● (1640)

In 2014, there were almost 60,000 marijuana possession charges, and Statistics Canada says that is 3% of all arrests in our country. In 2013, possession of cannabis accounted for 54% of all police-reported drug crime. If police stopped prosecuting young adults, then resources could be focused on dealers and organized crime.

Business of Supply

In my city, Nanaimo, there is a fentanyl crisis that is tying up firefighters, police, health responders, and hospitals. It is causing deaths. This is a serious problem, and we are not getting the action we need on it. There were 17 fentanyl-related deaths in 2014 in the Island Health region, 22 in 2015, and nine in just the first three months of this year. The medical health officer for my region, on Vancouver Island, Dr. Paul Hasselback, says that Nanaimo's fentanyl overdose rate is higher than the provincial average. It is something we really should be focusing on instead of criminalizing simple possession of marijuana.

This follows a trail of Liberal failures. In 1969, a royal commission said that the cost to young individuals was not justified and said to get rid of prohibition for personal use. The Liberals ignored the recommendation. New Democrats introduced a bill, and it was not supported by the House.

In 2002, a Senate report said that the true damage to society caused by marijuana was felt through the side effects of criminal penalties. Again, there was no action. In 2009, the Liberals voted to support Bill C-15, a Conservative initiative to impose mandatory minimums for cannabis-related offences.

The Liberal and Conservative governments have consecutively failed to keep marijuana out of the hands of young people, and giving them criminal records has not helped.

New Democrats want the government to make a difference on the ground right now, to make a difference in people's lives. As the Liberal health minister said quite rightly, it is impossible to arrest our way out of the situation. Therefore, the government should support the NDP motion. It should immediately decriminalize simple possession while it drafts laws to legalize marijuana.

Yes, it can learn from Washington and Colorado. Yes, it can tackle edibles, labelling, and dosage control. It can do all of those things, but while it does that long, extended work, it should make a difference right now in the lives of Canadians. New Democrats believe that it is irresponsible to allow the valuable resources of police and courts to be wasted creating new criminal records for something the government imminently plans to legalize.

New Democrats will continue to push for the government to take common sense steps, such as decriminalizing simple possession of marijuana, while it develops a comprehensive plan and a timeline to legalize it.

• (1645)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also come from the land of B.C. bud and therefore would like to get it legalized, regulated, and licensed. However, I want to ask how we can do something with the right hand without knowing what is happening with the left.

If we decriminalize it, does the member opposite not feel that we will be allowing organized crime, gangsters, and those who are selling fentanyl-laced marijuana to sell it into the hands of children and youth? If we decriminalize it, it will still allow our children, youth, and the young population to interact with organized crime, putting their lives at risk.

The member very well knows that in her riding, as she stated earlier, deaths are very high. How can we legalize use without regulating the product and the means by which people get it in the first place?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for giving me the opportunity to clarify.

I would say two things. The first is that criminalizing simple possession of marijuana, small amounts for personal possession, has not prevented the kinds of effects we are seeing in our country. It is not natural or logical to link those pieces.

The second thing I would say to reassure the member, and I would hope for his support on this motion, is that all New Democrats are talking about is removing the terrible problem of young adults in Canada having criminal records for personal possession. It is simply to get them out of the criminal justice system. It would not do anything for illegal growers, illegal gangs, or fentanyl manufacturers. Those would continue to be criminal actions, and that is what police resources should be focused on: dealers, organized crime, and drugs that are truly killing and harming people.

Individuals who had very small amounts of marijuana and were intercepted by police would no longer face having criminal records. They could well be ticketed, as the Conservatives have proposed, but they would not face having criminal records for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague about two issues which, as far as I know, have not been brought thus far in the debate. I want to ask her what she thinks the effect of this motion would be on marijuana use in driving and how that would affect road safety and what concerns she might have around that.

The second issue I want to raise is that some law enforcement people have told me that having marijuana be illegal makes it easier for them to access drug dealers, because if they stop someone who is smoking a joint and they have a small amount of marijuana in their possession, it allows them to conduct a search and they may well find substantial amounts of other drugs.

I want to hear the hon. member's comments on those two issues: how maintaining the criminal element around marijuana may well improve public safety, at least in those specific ways.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, voting yes to today's NDP motion would allow police resources to be concentrated on true crime in our country and actually getting at the root of drugs and violence that actually affect people on the ground.

They would have more resources to do roadside checks around who is driving dangerously for any reason, whether that is workplace fatigue, alcohol, or anything.

Business of Supply

There really is no downside. Again, because the government has indicated that it is already going in this direction, its task force will recommend that this be a drug that is allowed to be used and distributed. We are simply talking about getting out of the lives of individual young Canadians who will unfairly bear the brunt of a drug charge for which possession, consumption, and distribution will be legal in just a matter of years.

• (1650)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's great comments on this.

The Liberal members have been raising the issue of resources. I want to ask my colleague, what is the cost of inaction? We have already been waiting seven months or more. It is not expected that there will be any action before another year and it may take up to two years, maybe longer, before a regime is actually implemented.

What is the cost to young people, municipalities, municipal police forces? What is the cost to them in terms of delay of action or inaction on this issue?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, like so many areas where we have had a failure of federal government leadership, whether it is oil spill response, abandoned vessels, in this case marijuana dispensary regulations, I have seen my former colleagues from local governments scrambling to fill those holes. It means every community has to figure out its own ad hoc rules. It would be so much better if we saw federal leadership in this area.

The financial cost, the direct cost, is \$4 million a year simply in prosecuting small personal possession charges. That is embarrassing, really, for us in this country in this day and age. That money could be spent so much better elsewhere.

The cost of criminal records for individuals we have discussed, and they can really hamper people's time.

I would argue finally for the government, it has the need to act on the very strong mandate that was given to it by Canadians, and I think voting in favour of this motion would be a show of faith in the Liberals' commitment to follow through on a campaign promise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that, since debate on this topic began today, the discussion has been all over the map, which is probably normal with such a delicate topic.

Despite the fact that we are talking about marijuana, which is commonly known as a soft drug, some people are worried about abuse. I would like to come back to the key aspect of the motion so that we know what we are talking about. I would particularly like to draw members' attention to point (a), which is the heart of the NDP's proposal. It reads:

That the House: (a) recognize the contradiction of continuing to give Canadian criminal records for simple possession of marijuana after the government has stated that it should not be a crime;

We are talking about simple possession of marijuana. That is the situation we have been put in since the most recent election campaign. During that campaign, I often told the people who asked my opinion on the dreams, promises, and commitments of the

Liberal Party to be careful because everyone knows that the Liberals tend to signal left during the election campaign and then turn right when they take office. As a result, we are now in a situation where Canadians' dreams have been shattered. There are many examples of that.

For example, we could talk about all those people who were thrilled at the prospect of a tax cut that would give them more money and help them make ends meet. Once the Liberals came to power, very few people actually benefited from a tax cut, and those who received the largest tax cuts were already among the wealthiest Canadians.

Seniors in my riding were especially attracted by the idea of investments in home care. There was nothing in the budget about that. On the environment, people were saying that they could finally see light at the end of the tunnel. The Liberal government made the same commitments as the previous government in Paris. We can clearly see that on all counts, there is a gap, actually it is an abyss, between the vision presented during the campaign and what the government is currently doing.

In the case of marijuana, I would say that there is an even greater gap, if that is possible. The Liberals told everyone that they would quickly legalize marijuana. However, that is not the case. What people continue to believe, especially adolescents, whom I really understand, is that they are invincible. In fact, I have spent most of my life in touch with adolescence, first as an adolescent myself and then as a teacher of adolescents for 25 years. When we think about our adolescence, which for most people in the House was not as long ago as mine, we can remember often having the feeling of being invincible. When we are adolescents, the things we do are not risky, and we believe everything will be fine. If we try smoking a joint, we are not going to be arrested, because that only happens to other people.

The reality is quite different, and thousands of Quebeckers and Canadians who want to try smoking a joint or consuming an edible, such as a muffin or what have you, run the risk of ending up with a criminal record. They could end up with a criminal record, even though the Liberals made a promise and said that no one in our society should end up with a criminal record for simple possession of marijuana. Therein lies the contradiction and the confusion surrounding this issue we are trying to resolve with the very simple approach of decriminalizing marijuana. The majority agrees on this measure, and we are not talking about 50% plus 1 of Canadians. We are talking about 68% of Canadians who agree with decriminalizing simple possession of marijuana. I would remind members that we are talking about simple possession.

I must admit that the issues are diametrically opposed, but I have a hard time understanding the Liberals' inconsistent approach.

Business of Supply

●(1655)

In recent weeks, we have talked a lot about Bill C-14 on medical assistance in dying. We heard that even though the Supreme Court issued a clear unanimous ruling, society was not ready and we needed to move forward slowly. As a result, the Liberals proposed the criterion of reasonably foreseeable natural death, which has been challenged in both the House and the Senate.

Small steps are necessary in the case of medical assistance in dying, but in the case of simple possession of marijuana, small steps are apparently not needed. In that case, the government wants to go full bore. Legalization needs to happen immediately, which is completely impossible. We need to forget about that. All we have been promised is that a bill will be introduced in 2017. Some Liberal members are saying that it could be introduced later, and, rarely, someone says that it could be introduced earlier. We hear nothing about consistency.

We need a bill to deal with the drug issue once and for all, but the first step is to implement a simple, easy-to-understand measure for everyone. Say a teenager is influenced by a group of friends or just wants to try this once. We need to make sure our measure eliminates the possibility of ruining that teenager's life with a record that will make finding a job or travelling much more difficult. We know that teenagers are tempted to try new things. There is a disconnect there.

I would like to talk about my own transition from childhood to adolescence. In my day, things might have seemed simpler because becoming a man or daring to do the forbidden meant trying to smoke. Cigarettes could be had for a penny, back when we still had pennies.

Obviously, that has changed. Each generation is better educated than the last, and we now have very clear evidence about the dangers of cigarettes. Cigarette consumption has decreased markedly, but the battle is not yet won. Some young people still choose to smoke, and they need to be shown the negative health effects of that choice.

Right now, the legal system spends \$4 million on cases that may result in records for teenagers. If we used that money to educate young people about this, we could make tremendous progress. Contrary to what my dearly departed mother believed, one toke does not a hard-drug addict make. It is a long way from the former to the latter, and we can easily interrupt that progression with health education.

Since time is running out, I will close by painting a picture of the situation using some statistics. We invest \$4 million in our justice system every year, and 80% of the offences that have to be processed involve simple possession of cannabis. If members want to talk about organized crime and everything else, so be it. However, 80% of offences are related to simple possession of marijuana. That amounts to 66,000 arrests a year and 22,000 people who risk getting a criminal record.

As I said earlier, 68% of Canadians are calling on us to take this first step, go ahead with decriminalization, and work on education so that experimentation remains just that, experimentation.

●(1700)

What is even clearer is that all of the parties are slowly coming around to the NDP's approach, which we first proposed a number of years ago.

I see I am out of time. I will end there, as I will have an opportunity to continue through questions.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I travelled around my riding and met with students, both before and after the election, they all asked questions about marijuana. Everyone wanted to know where I stand. I have always been clear. I am in favour of legalizing marijuana. Not a single student thanked me for changing the rules because they thought it was great that they could now smoke. That is not the case. That is not what the vast majority of them think. They really understand what is going on.

Who does my colleague think will control the market if we go ahead with decriminalization without any other changes? Who will control the marijuana market in Canada?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

My 25 years as a teacher compel me to make education the foundation of everything I do. Who currently controls the drug market? Is it organized crime? We will be quick to agree on that.

Since this morning, what I want out of decriminalization is for us to be able to work on the buyer. If there is no longer a buyer, then there is no longer a market. With that we can take a giant step. If by educating the person we ensure there are no more clients, and a student does not get a criminal record for making a mistake once in his life, then we will have taken a big step.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it humorous that we are coming to the defence of those who choose to do something illegal. They choose to do something that they know is illegal and the NDP is standing up for them. I am sorry, but I have a hard time with that.

I want to ask a question again on driving impairment. The NDP motion calls for the immediate decriminalization of marijuana. Does my hon. colleague know what the level of impairment is? Is it one joint, half a joint, or a quarter of a joint? How do we judge? This is important. As we move forward with the decriminalization of this drug, our police agencies are on the side of the road trying to enforce laws and judge individuals' impairment.

Is my hon. colleague aware of any of the studies of the effects of marijuana and what the level of impairment is?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I will respond with something entirely legal that adequately expresses, in my opinion, the state of mind of teenagers who live in the moment and at the whim of their surging hormones.

Teenagers are legally allowed to have sex. Oddly, I often saw cases involving students where the young girl was dumbfounded that she was pregnant because they had sex only once. That is not the issue. Bringing this back to drugs, the issue is on simple possession. I am not saying that we must make it legal for the schoolyard big shot to sell drugs. I am saying that we should not give a criminal record to a student who is experimenting or is caught with simple possession. Again, 80% of our marijuana cases are for simple possession. That is what we are trying to address with our motion.

• (1705)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know a man of a certain age who has a criminal record because he was found guilty of simple possession, which is what we are debating today. Consequently, he cannot travel to the United States. Some of his family members live in a distant country. When you have to travel long distances, most flights leaving Canada pass through the United States. Therefore, he cannot visit his family who lives far away because he cannot travel through the United States.

We spoke about this problem, and we spoke about how difficult it can be to get a job for someone with a criminal record for something that will no longer be illegal in one year's time.

I would like to know if my colleague has come across such cases in his own riding.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

The short answer is yes. Even worse, it is more difficult and expensive to obtain a pardon because of the previous Conservative government's policies. Someone with a criminal record for simple possession of marijuana who would like to be pardoned will find that it has become more expensive to be pardoned for a so-called minor offence. In any event, the Liberals are telling us that this offence will no longer exist in 2017 because they are going to fully legalize marijuana.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

[*English*]

The member is definitely the best dressed member in this chamber.

Given that this is the first time I have risen today, I want to express my condolences to the victims, their families, and their friends for the horrible murder, terrorist act, hate crime, which occurred in Orlando. We were all very touched by what happened and very disconcerted. It is hard for many of us today to concentrate on the motion when we think of the crimes that ISIS is perpetuating, and now we are talking about marijuana.

Let me be blunt. I was not one of the cool kids in high school. I never tried marijuana. To be honest, I am glad that I did not. It is not my style to smoke, drink, or to use drugs, but I also understand that it is not my right to impose my own views and my own values on all Canadians. I respect and accept the fact that our party has proposed making marijuana use legal. As part of that, we also said that we were going to regulate and restrict.

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While I appreciate the motion put forward by my hon. friend and colleague from Victoria, and I highly value his intellect and love working with him, I disagree with the perspective that we are going to simply decriminalize without looking at the other two very important facts: regulation and restriction.

The motion makes no distinction between 14-year-olds and 40-year-olds. It does not say that decriminalization is going to occur only for adults. It is saying decriminalization is going to occur for everyone. One of the things that is incredibly important to me is keeping marijuana out of the hands of children. Marijuana use is not without its effects.

As we all know, it can make people slightly loopy for a certain period of time, but there are also ties to breathing disorders, mental health issues, and particularly for young people whose brains are still developing, marijuana is a dangerous substance. It is not something we want to be widely distributed to our children. However, if we are going to decriminalize without dealing with how marijuana is distributed, without dealing with how we are going to keep it out of the hands of kids, we are going to enter into problems that are not anticipated by the motion.

I do understand, with a competent adult who is looking at a government that says we are going to make this legal, that we would have a certain sympathy for the fact that they are going to be prosecuted and get a criminal record. However, at the same time in my view, the law is the law is the law. Whether we agree with the law or do not agree with the law, whether we believe that a law is going to be rescinded or not, it does not mean we do not have a duty to respect the law as it is. As such, my sympathy for the people we have been talking about today is slightly muted, because they should be, just like the rest of us, respecting the law. That is what we are supposed to do until such time as the law is changed.

The NDP has raised Bill C-14 and I also want to raise Bill C-14 because one of the things this government was criticized for was the quick process that led to Bill C-14. However, in the case of Bill C-14, there was a very good reason. There was a Supreme Court deadline of June 6. In the case of marijuana, there is no deadline.

The key studies and the commentaries that we have had from the states in the United States that have legalized marijuana use, in particular Colorado, among others, has been that we should take the correct time frame to put in place the right measures to go along with legalization. We should not be rushing this.

Not only do we need to have the regulatory rules in place, but we need to have the infrastructure in place. We need to have those people who are ready to legally distribute marijuana. We need to have the police forces and judiciary prepared for the way we are going to treat this. We need to have the educational resources available for how we are going to go into the schools and explain to our young people why they should not be using marijuana and try to disincentivize them from doing so.

One of the things that is also troubling to me around the idea of accepting the motion is the question of regulation of the product itself.

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•(1710)

We have heard from many Canadians, including the hon. member for Outremont in 2012, who talked about the fact that there was marijuana in our country that was very hard marijuana and was dangerous to health. If we are going to legalize marijuana, or even decriminalize it, we need to have standards in place to talk about how it is grown and how to prevent contaminants from getting into it to ensure the marijuana used is safe to consume, to the extent possible.

We need to talk about packaging, distribution, and how we get this out of the hands of organized crime. My fear is that, if the motion is adopted as is, who will everyone buy from? The producers of medical marijuana are not authorized to sell it to those without a prescription. There is nothing in the motion to talk about how the distribution channels would work. As such, my concern is that those people who are currently illegally distributing marijuana across Canada, basically organized crime, are going to have freer licence to go into our schools and talk to our young people about how it is not criminal to possess small amounts and encourage them to buy from them. Once that happens, what other drugs are these people in organized crime selling? How will this stop someone who starts with marijuana from moving toward harder drugs that are also sold by the same distributor, if we are going to call the Mafia that?

This is of enormous concern for me because right now in Canada we have the highest rate of minors using marijuana of 29 countries. Therefore, whatever we do in terms of the legalization process, an important part has to be how we are going to keep it out of the hands of our young people.

I have heard the argument, and respect it, that police forces going after adult possessors of small amounts of marijuana takes police away from more important things they could be doing. I completely agree with this. I do not agree that decriminalization would have the same effect, because it still means these people should be ticketed. It still means prosecutions and the officers would be going to court. The answer is not decriminalization. It is legalization, but legalization with strict enforcement mechanisms, proper surveillance, and supervision.

I am very happy that we have an expert in our government in the area of marijuana use. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Justice is going to be leading us in this effort with his incredible former experience as the police chief of Toronto.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, let me underline that when I talked about his experience, I was not talking about him as a consumer but rather as a Canadian expert in the field who will help us on the path to legalization, but restriction and regulation along with it. He is going to be working with a team of experts in many different fields.

In conclusion, I respect and understand the hon. member for Victoria's point. Hopefully, in a little while adults who have small amounts in their possession will find it to be legal and will not be prosecuted. However, I do not believe we should be rushing forward on a path until we know exactly what the rules are, how to keep

marijuana out of the hands of kids, and how we are going to regulate the product.

•(1715)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government decriminalizes marijuana now, people will still be arrested, but there will be far fewer needless arrests and wasteful trials.

Why not use most of that \$4 million per year to combat organized crime and addiction?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her good question.

Personally, I agree that police officers should spend their time on the things that are most important. I agree that decriminalization may help to distribute certain resources more effectively. However, I think that an attempt to save a few million dollars pales in comparison to the fact that we would be creating a system with no rules and no safeguards for keeping marijuana out of the hands of young people.

This has not been well planned. I think that we need a good plan. We have the opportunity to draft the best bill possible. That seems to be the best way to go, in my opinion.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I almost felt I had to come to the defence of our hon. colleague from Scarborough Southwest, but he corrected himself. I know our colleague from Scarborough Southwest is a long-time police chief with a distinguished career. I appreciate his influence in the House. I know he has a great ability and an incredible amount of experience in policing, maybe not in marijuana use but in policing marijuana use.

Is the hon. member for Mount Royal aware that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has come out against the legalization of marijuana?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the good humour of my hon. colleague.

For my entire history as a mayor and a city councillor, which lasted for 20 years, I dealt frequently with the police on issues related to marijuana. I was constantly faced with the situation where the police agreed that the current mechanisms that we used to stop people from possessing small amounts of marijuana and the de-focus on what really should be their primary attention on important crimes was a problem. They asked parliamentarians to act.

Recognizing that we should decriminalize this, along with strong regulations and prevention, is the right step forward.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am struck by one thing. The motion before us today has an incredibly strong rationale, which is that people should not have criminal records for the possession of a substance that the government in power has run a campaign on, saying that it will legalize it.

The Green Party wants to legalize it. We understand that the prohibition on cannabis serves one major beneficiary and purpose, and that is organized crime.

I did not get a chance to put this question to the Minister of Justice earlier, although I tried to get a question in. Would it not make sense for the Liberal government to commit early that the criminal records of people who carry a criminal record for simple possession, not for participating in organized crime, of cannabis, whenever that crime occurred, would have their records expunged once a legal framework is in place for legalization of cannabis?

• (1720)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, there are two things.

I repeat what I said during my speech, I believe that when something is illegal, regardless of a government's intention to make it legal, it is illegal. We all see what is happening in the Senate with medically assisted dying. Who knows, despite the House of Commons willingness to make something legal, how the Senate is now going to react.

I do not want to prematurely state that something is going to change. People should act in accordance with the law during the period that the law is in force.

I certainly understand what the hon. member said. I would certainly be willing to further discuss that point with her, if and when marijuana use does become legal for adults.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, being the only member of the House who has had the honour of voting for the member for Mount Royal during the last election, I wish to thank him for the pleasure of sharing his time with me.

I rise to respond to the motion from the member for Victoria, which calls for the immediate decriminalization of the simple possession of marijuana for personal use.

[*Translation*]

I will explain how our government cannot support this way of doing things because it will ultimately increase the revenue of criminal organizations.

[*English*]

Until such time as we legalize, regulate, and restrict marijuana, which was our platform commitment, we need police officers to continue to enforce the law related to marijuana.

Under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, marijuana possession, production, and trafficking are illegal in Canada. Simple possession of up to 30 grams is an offence, with a possible fine of up to \$1,000 and up to six months in jail.

More than half of all drug offences reported by police are for marijuana possession. In 2014, they amounted to 60,000 offences reported and just over 22,000 charges laid. Most, if not all, of that marijuana is supplied at the moment by organized crime.

As the House is aware, the government was elected on a platform that included the legalization and strict regulation of marijuana. The Minister of Justice and her colleagues in health and public safety are

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pursuing an orderly and responsible approach to fulfilling this commitment.

[*Translation*]

We will legalize marijuana, regulate it, and restrict access. We will prevent children from accessing it. Furthermore, we will prevent organized crime from profiting from this lucrative business.

We will also provide for harsher punishments for those who supply marijuana to minors, who operate a vehicle while under the influence, or who sell marijuana outside the regulatory framework.

We hope to achieve this by the end of next year, after carefully consulting the provinces and territories, law-enforcement representatives, and other stakeholder groups.

• (1725)

[*English*]

To that end, we are striking a task force on marijuana legalization and regulation to consult with Canadians broadly as well as a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholders will include provincial and territorial governments, experts in public health, substance abuse, law enforcement, criminal justice, and economics, as well as indigenous and youth groups.

The member for Victoria would like us to decriminalize without a proper legal framework in place. It is important to keep in mind that there are unintended consequences to doing so. Of all of the unintended consequences of decriminalization, perhaps the most dangerous is the opportunity it would provide to organized crime groups to profit from illegal drugs.

If we were to adopt the member's motion for the months remaining until legalization received royal assent, marijuana would continue to be illegal, but users could acquire it illegally without fear of criminal justice sanctions. This gives criminals an opportunity to ramp up their operations. Therefore, the unintended consequences of the member's motion would be to aid the criminal organizations that are currently involved in importing, growing, and selling marijuana in Canada. Make no mistake about it. They have no qualms about selling it to our youth.

Overwhelmingly, organized crime groups that operate in Canada are involved in illegal drugs and have established networks to grow, procure, and sell marijuana, and launder the profits. About 80% of crime groups identified in Canada are involved in the illicit drug market, particularly at street-level traffickers.

The sale of marijuana is currently a big business. The profits give organized crime even more power. These criminals can use the profits to move into such activities as illegal migration, trafficking of human beings, money laundering, economic crimes, cross-border smuggling of counterfeit goods, and even environmental crimes such as the dumping of toxic waste.

[*Translation*]

I know that the member for Victoria does not intend to promote such criminal activities, but that is what his motion could do.

By legalizing and regulating marijuana, the government is also seeking to restrict the role of organized crime in selling and distributing marijuana.

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[English]

If we decriminalize before fully exploring all of the elements of legalization, we are giving organized crime an opportunity to further entrench its involvement in the illegal marijuana market. It will be even harder to get these criminal enterprises out of the marijuana trade once we legalize.

There are many other aspects of marijuana legalization that will need to be considered, and the task force will do that. It will look at such issues as the impact on criminal records for simple possession, for example, and I know the impact on ordinary Canadians is a major impetus for the motion before us.

[Translation]

We must consider how the new regime will impact organized crime. If we were to decriminalize marijuana without implementing a legal and regulatory framework at the same time, we would be fully and completely surrendering to organized crime groups, which must be combatted, punished, and deprived of their sources of income.

It would be irresponsible for us to decriminalize marijuana before legalizing it. Until it is legalized, the existing laws must be upheld and enforced.

I therefore invite and urge all members to vote against this motion.

• (1730)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understood from his firm tone that protecting our children comes first. My question is a simple one.

Right now, a teenager who wants to try marijuana has no choice but to turn to organized crime or the illicit market. Once marijuana is legalized, supposing that happens, and once a retail network makes it available to those 18 years of age and over, how will that solve things for a teenager who still cannot buy a joint at the Société des alcools du Québec, for example? That teenager will still have to turn to the illicit market, and that market will surely offer more attractive products to protect its market share.

What we want is for that teenager not to end up with a lifelong record for a youthful mistake.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We need to look at the much bigger picture. This is not just about decriminalizing marijuana and then saying that now it is going to be legalized. This is about setting up a whole framework around the legalization, regulation, and use of marijuana, as well as all kinds of support measures that cover everything from prevention to education and incentives to counter use.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the same question I have asked repeatedly today. The Liberals claim that they are going to incarcerate fewer people for simple possession of marijuana, and that they are different from the Conservatives.

In 2014, 57,000 people were arrested for it. The Liberals came to power towards the end of 2015. They are claiming that they have been a little more lenient and that fewer people have been arrested

than under the Conservatives. However, they will not give us a number.

Can the member provide any figures whatsoever to justify this position that the Liberals are not quite as bad as the Conservatives when it comes to arresting Canadians for simple possession of marijuana for personal use?

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but I want to emphasize that this is not something that can be quantified. This kind of situation has occurred many times in the history of this country.

Parliament has already tried to prohibit certain behaviours. What is needed now is reflection and consultation. Conversely, there have been other times in history when we have considered allowing behaviour that was previously prohibited.

The motion brought forward by the NDP, my colleague's party, is remarkable because it would require us to develop a very strange solution that would involve leaving certain laws in place and allowing people to break them. What my colleague failed to mention is that this motion will only make criminal organizations even richer. I would really have liked him to recognize that. His party does not have any solutions to propose in that regard.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the excellent member for Courtenay—Alberni, who will deliver the second part of my speech.

[English]

It is pretty clear as to what is happening here. I saw, as we all did during the last campaign, Liberals going across the country committing to move toward the legalization of marijuana. That was a commitment that they made, and there were a lot of Canadians in good faith who said they supported that idea so they would vote for the Liberal Party. I will come back to decriminalization in a moment.

Today, we are seeing in case after case, Liberal Party members standing up with speaking notes that are prohibition speaking notes. Their speaking notes are exactly the same as the speaking notes we saw under the previous Conservative government, except at the end of their notes, the Liberals said that eventually, maybe, they will actually move to legalize simple possession of marijuana. They will change all those good things they just said about prohibition.

Let us understand the logic here. As we have seen over the last eight months, the Liberals have broken well over 100 of their promises so far. They made a commitment solemnly before all Canadians that they would move to legalization. They said it would be within a few months. Around April 20, we heard that the Liberals were going to make a big announcement. The big announcement was that they were not announcing anything, but maybe in a year or two years.

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If we understood the member for Scarborough Southwest in his previous comments, not today but at another time, he said it will not be done during the first mandate of the Liberal government. It will not even be done before the next election. We now have this doublespeak from the Liberals, committing to something during the election campaign that is being betrayed on the floor of the House of Commons today, and will be tomorrow. If the Liberals vote against this motion to decriminalize, that would be a betrayal of the commitments that the Liberals made during the election campaign.

For Canadians who are following this debate, I would suggest that over the course of the summer they question their Liberal MPs who campaigned on one thing and are doing something quite different today. They are putting forward a prohibition speech and speaking notes, when what they should be doing is being concerned about the thousands of Canadians, overwhelmingly younger people in their twenties, who are going to have a criminal record for the rest of their lives because of the actions of the Liberals that are being taken over the course of this week.

I will come back in a moment to those governments that have put in place decriminalization. However, instead of saying that Parliament is moving to decriminalize and that they should have put in place an education program and will finally move to do that with the money they are freeing up from charging people for simple possession of pot, we have a prohibition speech. Instead of saying there is a framework that they could add to it, and looking at various other successful countries that have decriminalized possession of pot, we have Liberals today with a prohibition speech and prohibition speaking notes saying they are not going to move in any way to address the concerns of the tens of thousands of Canadians who will acquire a criminal record over the course of the next year because of Liberal actions. Many of these Canadians, in good faith, will have voted Liberal because they assumed the Liberals were actually going to keep their promise about moving to legalize marijuana. It is not about anything other than a Liberal government saying it would act differently, and now acting exactly the same way as the Conservative government acted when it was in power.

What that meant in 2014, as members know, is that more than 57,000 Canadians were arrested for simple possession of pot. What that meant in 2014 was that millions of dollars were spent on enforcing marijuana laws that the Liberals said during the election campaign they had no intention of reinforcing. In fact, I need to bring up the commitment that was made by the Prime Minister and by the Liberal candidates across the country. It was that they would legalize marijuana by removing marijuana consumption and incidental possession from the Criminal Code.

• (1735)

The motion that the NDP is bringing forward today is a motion that strikes historically to what the NDP has always fought for. For almost 50 years, we have been saying it makes no sense to have this war on drugs, to arrest people, to incarcerate people for simple possession of marijuana for personal use. We have been saying it for nearly 50 years. The Liberals said that in the last election, and today and tomorrow when the vote is held, it is obvious that they will betray Canadians who voted for them on that basis, on the basis they would actually keep their commitment.

There is no doubt where Canadians stand. There is absolutely no doubt. Canadians stand with the NDP caucus on this. They stand with other parties like the Green Party, which has also spoken out against this ridiculous concept that we should continue to give people criminal records that they will have to carry for the rest of their lives, which will make it more difficult for them to travel, to acquire jobs.

What we actually need to do is put in place a simple and smart decriminalization policy, so that if the Liberals do intend in their second term eventually to keep their promise, we will not see tens of thousands of more Canadians, aged twenty-something Canadians, acquiring a criminal record that ruins their lives.

Canadians were asked the year before last whether they agree that possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should not be a crime. This is what they said. There were 68% of Canadians right across the country who said that they agree with that statement, that decriminalization, as proposed today by the NDP, is what they believe in. Only 20% believe in what the Liberals and Conservatives believe in, which is continued incarceration, arrest, attacks against those who have small amounts of marijuana for personal use. The prohibition gambit, the war on drugs, started by the Conservatives and continued by the Liberals, most Canadians disagree with.

In my province of British Columbia, 73% of Canadians agree with the NDP decriminalization motion. In Alberta, it is 64%; in Ontario, 70%; in Quebec 64%; in Atlantic Canada, highest of all, 75%. Atlantic Canadian Liberal MPs who are giving these prohibition speeches today are out of touch with three-quarters of residents of Atlantic Canada.

As I mentioned earlier, even among Conservative supporters, a majority believe in decriminalization. Among Liberal Party supporters, it is 74%; three-quarters of Liberal Party supporters believe in the NDP's motion that we are bringing forward today for decriminalization.

It is very simple. If the Liberals really believe in education around it, instead of spending millions of dollars every year in prosecuting and arresting people for simple possession of marijuana, they would be taking that money and investing it in education programs. If they really believed in putting in place a legal framework, they would look to countries like Portugal that have decriminalized. In the case of Portugal, a recent article by the *Journal of the American Bar Foundation Law and Social Inquiry* said the following: "judged by virtually every metric, the Portuguese decriminalization framework has been a resounding success".

When we look at that example, look at the Netherlands, look at countries worldwide that have decriminalized, those examples are there for the government to take. As the member for Victoria said earlier today, we are agnostic on how the government wants to go about decriminalization, but we believe strongly that aged twenty-something Canadians, or Canadian adults of any age, who have simple possession of marijuana for personal use, should not be arrested and should not be facing a criminal record for the rest of their lives.

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It is a very simple proposition. We saw it at the Conservative convention where even Conservative delegates voted for decriminalization. We saw in the commitments that were made by the Liberal Party in the last election that it is time to stop arresting people and putting them behind bars for simple possession of marijuana for personal use.

Our party has stood up for that for 50 years. We bring forward this motion because we believe, as I have proven earlier, that all Canadians believe it is time to stop arresting people for this. If Liberal and Conservative MPs are true to their party's principles and true to what they said during the election campaign, they will be voting for our motion tomorrow when it is brought before the House of Commons.

• (1740)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points I want to qualify.

First, the Prime Minister made it very clear in the campaign and most particularly in the throne speech of our intention in this mandate to bring forward legislation to legalize, regulate, and restrict marijuana. We have not been ambiguous in any way and to suggest otherwise is simply not factually correct.

As I listened to the remarks of the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, I wondered why he was so afraid of saying, “legalize, regulate, and restrict”. He focused very clearly on one aspect of our government's policy, in which we said we would legalize marijuana, but we have also been equally clear about the importance. This is not based on ideology or the latest popular poll, which members across the aisle seem to rely on so much. It relies on science, the best advice that we have received from, for example, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, which is the pre-eminent mental health and addiction facility in all of Canada, on research we have done, and examples we have looked at in other jurisdictions, such as Washington and Colorado.

Overwhelmingly, the science says that in order to address all of the social and health harms associated with cannabis use, the proper approach is legalization, coupled with an effective, comprehensive, and responsible system of regulation on production, distribution, and consumption. I have listened carefully to all NDP members who have spoken today, and they are all loath to acknowledge all of the government's policy. They speak only of legalization and they neglect to include that.

I would ask the member opposite if perhaps he could address the issue of the importance of effective regulation to protect our kids and communities, to take billions of dollars of profit away from organized crime, and to protect the health of Canadians.

• (1745)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to reply to the member and to reiterate the incredible confusion that the Liberal government has caused in its first eight months of its mandate, first saying that it would move rapidly, then saying it would not, then saying that around 4/20 it had a big announcement to make, which turned out to be no announcement at all, basically just another delay of another year.

There have been Liberal members, of which the member for Scarborough Southwest is one, who have said they would find it difficult to tackle in their first mandate. When we take all of those comments together, we see the confusion that is taking place with law enforcement across the country. The member for Victoria spoke very eloquently about that earlier today, that there is a similar level of arrests and prosecution of Canadians for simple possession of marijuana in some parts of the country and law enforcement officials are moving off in other parts of the country. There is total confusion, total chaos.

There is a very effective motion from the NDP today. I have to ask Liberal members why they are backing off the commitment they made to legalize marijuana by removing marijuana consumption and incidental possession from the Criminal Code. The NDP has simply put forward what a lot of Liberals were talking about during the election campaign as a first step in terms of legalization. The Liberal government, in its first eight months, has offered absolutely nothing in terms of a regulatory framework that they have been talking about. What they have done is caused a lot of confusion by talking about different dates, a different process, a different way of proceeding.

It makes me very skeptical that the Liberals are even going to keep their promise on this. I think it will be part of the over 100 promises that they have broken. Why they intend to keep arresting people and putting them in jail for simple possession of pot is something that Liberals are going to have to defend this summer.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I want to remind hon. members to keep an eye on the Chair and when they see my signal, they could maybe speed it up a bit. Those were two very good discussions that took place, but they took up a lot of time. It is partially my fault, but I do not want to cut anybody off, because a very interesting discussion is taking place.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today to speak on behalf of the NDP motion, which reads:

That the House recognize (a) the contradiction of continuing to give Canadian criminal records for simple possession of marijuana after the government has stated that it should not be a crime; (b) recognize that this situation is unacceptable to Canadians, municipalities and law enforcement agencies; (c) recognize that a growing number of voices, including that of a former Liberal prime minister, are calling for decriminalization to address this gap; and (d) call upon the government to immediately decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana for personal use.

This discussion has been going on for a long time. We can look back to the Le Dain commission in 1969. In 1971, the NDP introduced a bill to decriminalize marijuana possession after the Liberals ignored the recommendations of the Le Dain commission report. In 1993, NDP MP Jim Fulton introduced a bill to legalize marijuana in Canada, and the Liberal government voted it down as well. There have been plenty of opportunities for the Liberals to address this issue.

Business of Supply

In 2009, the NDP voted against the Conservative bill that proposed mandatory minimum sentences for marijuana, and the Liberal Party voted in support of that. The NDP used every tactic possible to stop or delay the Conservative omnibus bill that included mandatory sentences for marijuana, and the Liberals were nowhere to be found.

In my community, on the west coast, in Courtenay—Alberni, there has been a lot of confusion. The Prime Minister was elected, in part, on a promise to legalize marijuana. “We will legalize, regulate, and restrict access to marijuana”, reads the platform of the Liberal Party of Canada, though no details were given about the speed at which this legislation might occur.

What has happened in Port Alberni is that seven medical marijuana dispensaries have opened since the election. There were none before. The RCMP in Port Alberni has decided not to take action or prosecute those selling marijuana at their dispensaries. However, in Oceanside, which is a 35-minute drive away, the same force, the RCMP, has decided to enforce the law. It is the same in Courtenay, which is only one hour north of Port Alberni. These are all RCMP detachments. They each have a different commander. It is extremely confusing and is becoming a huge problem for local governments as they try to figure out how this works and where they come in with respect to legislation.

In Port Alberni it fell on the local mayor and council. I will read from the *Alberni Valley News*:

But while the federal government works on delivering its platform promise, municipalities are left to grapple with dispensaries popping up in their storefronts. And given this is a federal issue, there doesn't seem much that municipalities can do.

Currently, selling marijuana—whether medical or recreational—is illegal under Canadian law, said Port Alberni RCMP Inspector Mac Richards.

Despite this the City of Port Alberni voted to regulate medical marijuana dispensaries at its Jan. 25 meeting. It wasn't a unanimous decision. Throughout the three months that city council debated the issue, it was split..

[Mayor Ruttan said that] it was “unfair” for the federal government to have downloaded it onto municipalities—but that he was committed to upholding council's decision.

“But it doesn't matter—this is what council has voted for and I believe that council's position is fairly clear. It is this council's best attempt to control the uncontrollable.

This view was shared by other council members. Councillor Sharie Minions said,

It shouldn't be on the municipal agenda but it is a problem in our community. If we wait it will probably just get worse and worse and worse by the time the federal government does something about it

This is a quote about what it happening in my community. The local government has been downloaded a problem. People in the community do not understand whether marijuana is legal. It is being enforced in two-thirds of the riding of Courtenay—Alberni, and in one-third of the riding it is not being enforced.

I received an email from John, from Courtenay, who said, “There's been lots of raids and arrests at marijuana dispensaries of late. Given that this Liberal government will be legalizing in the near future, I have to wonder why this is happening. If you have any ideas on this matter, I would love to hear them. If there is a way you could remind the government, that would be great.”

● (1750)

I am doing that for John right now, making sure the government has been reminded.

There is another email. This is from Cory Pahl. He is a registered physiotherapist in Qualicum Beach. He says, “While not being a recreational user myself, I'm a member of the millennial generation, so I grew up around it and I have a contemporary view of marijuana professionally and its application in health and also in today's culture.” He also says that his suggestions come from a concern for his generation and the damage criminalizing some of their recreational activity has done. He has a lot of concerns about the fairness side of things.

I think we realize that the government was elected on a mandate to reform Canada's marijuana laws. Right now, the confusion is enormous. It has been left on the backs of local governments, local police forces, local RCMP detachments, to try to figure it out. We have concerns from business owners who are supplying patients who need access to marijuana. We do not know where supply is coming from for a lot of dispensaries, so there is confusion there.

We want to make sure that we use our resources when it comes to the criminal justice system for things that matter. We want to make sure that we use our resources to protect the vulnerable and make sure we give people the resources to be able to avoid choices that might harm them.

I feel it is actually very wasteful that we are spending time prosecuting people where it might affect their potential employment or their ability to travel in the future, when we know that the government has made a commitment that in a year down the road or so it is going to be legal. Why would we not make that decision now? Why would the government and the justice minister not make a directive to the courts to stop enforcing the marijuana laws today, to stop prosecuting people in courts, to stop chasing young adults and people who maybe could make better choices if we took a harm reduction approach? We know the government was elected on a willingness to change. We want to get it right. We know that harm reduction approaches have been taken in countries around the world, such as Portugal.

The NDP has laid out a very thoughtful, very respectful plan on how to move forward with reforming Canada's marijuana laws. Right now, my big concern is that the government made a promise, but it had no plan. It feels like it was made on the back of a paper napkin. There has been no action. It is very unclear and it is creating a very messy situation. Really, we need a decision.

When speaking about people in British Columbia, iPolitics just did a survey. It stated that possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should not be a crime, and 73% of British Columbians agreed with that and 16% of British Columbians did not agree with that.

Business of Supply

No wonder why people, after what they have seen, when they look at our history and the failure of the approach of previous governments in taking this issue on, when they see the mess that is being created today, do not have to look far. They can walk down the main street of Port Alberni or down the main street of many communities and they can see the lack of leadership on this issue is clear. It is creating a grey area. It is not doing what the government set out to; that is, protect young people and the vulnerable.

I call upon the government to support our motion, to support decriminalizing marijuana, and to support using our resources for what we need them to do; that is, take a more positive, progressive approach and follow through with its promise.

• (1755)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask a point of clarification. The member opposite gave some indication that this confusion he alleges exists is on the backs of the RCMP.

Notwithstanding that, quite frankly, on this side of the House, I do not think we could possibly be any clearer that the law remains in effect, so it should be obeyed, it should be upheld, and it should be enforced. At the public safety committee, about a month and a half ago, the RCMP commissioner appeared before that committee, and at that time, he made it very clear when he stated that the confusion around the enforcement of marijuana laws should not be overstated.

In light of those remarks and that clarification coming from him, I wonder if the member opposite would like to clarify his remarks.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, again, there is so much confusion. A perfect example is the RCMP commissioner himself is saying that RCMP officers are going to enforce the law. However, two detachments of the four in my riding are enforcing it and two are not. Therefore, it is very confusing on the ground about where they are going.

I find it disgraceful that people are continuing to be charged when we know in a year it is going to be legal, according to the government promises. Why would the government be charging people today for something we know is going to be legal in a year?

It does not make sense to anyone in my community. I think we would be hard pressed to sell that on the streets of Port Alberni, Oceanside, Courtenay, or to anyone in Courtenay—Alberni.

• (1800)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting to hear members of the NDP as well as of the government talk a lot about other jurisdictions. Yet, when I asked the parliamentary secretary if he could name a single jurisdiction where decriminalization or legalization led to a decrease in use, he was not able to name that jurisdiction. I wonder if the NDP, given that they are advocating this course, can do better. All the evidence I have read suggest that, for better or worse, there is an increase in use when we make the law more permissive, and that is only logical.

As well, with respect to the Conservative position, some members have said that we support decriminalization, which we certainly do not. We instead passed a motion, and I supported it, to have a

ticketing option, to continue to have marijuana be a criminal offence, but to allow police to use a ticketing option. I would consider that a middle way that would allow for effective enforcement in a range of different kinds of situations.

I would like to know, in addition to this question about jurisdiction, if the member has thoughts on that as an option for addressing the situation we face, but also continuing to have that strong sense that marijuana really is associated with significant health problems.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for putting forward some ideas on how we can move forward, and talk a little about the past.

When we look at the past, and we talk about the previous Conservative government, it did not work. Clearly, we did not see that approach reduce marijuana use.

I will cite an example from around the world. Portugal has brought in decriminalization. It brought in a more progressive approach and marijuana was reduced. Portugal invested its resources in harm reduction strategies and education, ensuring that especially young people had the support they needed.

When it comes to ticketing and how we move forward, again, I really appreciate the member bringing forward ideas. However, the NDP has been very clear: decriminalize first so people are not being criminally charged. We can then establish that independent commission with a broad mandate to include health and public health, to consult with Canadians on all aspects of the non-medical use of marijuana, and to provide guidance to Parliament on the institution of an appropriate regulatory regime to govern such use.

Therefore, there are a lot of options to be looked at as we move forward, but start first with decriminalization so people are not getting a criminal record that might prohibit them from getting a job or their ability to travel. With respect to the current laws, it is not an approach that has worked in Canada or around the world. However, we have models from around the world where decriminalization has worked.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP for moving this motion today.

Certainly, the motion deserves to be clearly debated because this is an important issue. Canadians have questions, especially since the Liberal Party wants to legalize marijuana. Decriminalizing marijuana is extremely important because it would help clarify certain things for a portion of the population that does not necessarily make the distinction between the two. However, the distinction is very important in this case. I want to acknowledge the NDP's contribution to this file.

Business of Supply

That is not where I have a problem with this. I take issue with the Liberal Party's position, how it is trivializing drug use, especially by the more vulnerable and young people, by wanting to legalize drugs. This is a real problem because we often hear the Liberal Party tell us that it consults people and respects other jurisdictions. It is nice of the government to try to please a segment of the population by saying that it wants to legalize drugs, but again it has to consult the provinces, the municipalities, and the police forces. What we have seen since the beginning of the discussion on this issue is that very few people have been consulted. On the contrary, they are finding out and are not all very pleased with what they are reading.

At the same time, the provincial governments are putting a lot of emphasis on promoting healthy living. They want to limit the places where people can smoke cigarettes, for example. We all know that there are regulations in place for that. While the provinces were busy working on promoting healthy living to protect the health of Canadians, the Liberal government was announcing in its throne speech that it wanted to legalize a drug, marijuana.

I find it very hard to get on board with a movement that goes against my personal values, like this one. I understand that some people have smoked a joint, that they have used marijuana. I do not think that we need to send those people to prison. I am not interested in judging people who have used this drug, but I think that going from there to promoting its use takes things to a new level and that is worrisome.

With regard to the Liberals, I get the impression that this debate is completely improvised. As I said earlier, they are talking about a plan, but we are all eager to see what that plan is. One thing is for certain: for a party that made the legalization of marijuana a pillar of its election campaign, the Liberals' plan for that legislation is not inspiring a lot of confidence in Canadians.

Ever since they announced that their bill to legalize marijuana would be tabled in the House in the spring, red flags have been going up everywhere. Police officers do not know how to deal with possession of marijuana charges. The municipalities do not know how to regulate the opening of stores that want to sell marijuana, and parents across the country are worried because they do not know how to protect their children.

Those who want to make money selling marijuana are prepared to do anything to sell their product. After Toronto police arrested 43 illegal distributors and closed their dispensaries in May, a good number of them reopened their doors nearby. Toronto's *CityNews* quoted one manager of a few stores, Erin Goodwin, as saying, "We're determined to stand up [to the police] and not bend down to these intimidation tactics".

These sellers are literally defying our police forces, which are turning to Ottawa for information about the plan. There is currently no plan. The sellers boast about selling their products in different forms such as candies, jujubes, and cookies even though these are all products that children can consume. In Vancouver, there are more storefronts that sell marijuana illegally than there are Starbucks where you can buy a coffee. That is indicative of how serious this problem is.

In terms of health, to the best of my knowledge, no doctor is prepared to state that the Liberals' plan to legalize marijuana is a good plan. Once again, the Liberals need to table something so that they can address this.

• (1805)

As part of the debate on legalizing cannabis in Canada, the Research Center of the Sainte-Justine University Hospital, a hospital that treats childhood diseases and is affiliated with the Université de Montréal, recently organized a day of scientific presentations on the theme, "Cannabis and youth health: What have we learned from science?".

Since we are accused of being against scientists, we will share a few statistics and quotes.

Findings on the health of young people and their vulnerability are rather negative. If the government legalizes marijuana, medical prescriptions will become useless, since people can procure it themselves. They could even grow it at home, in their own gardens, next to their cucumbers, carrots, and lettuce. There will no longer be a way to control access to this drug.

As the Canadian Paediatric Society pointed out, the evidence shows that young people who smoke marijuana are more likely to have mental health problems, including diseases such as psychosis and schizophrenia.

Now, I want to share some quotes from a few experts, since I am not making this up. I am far from being a doctor or an expert in the field, but I know that there are ways to take care of your health other than using marijuana.

Here is a quote from the Canadian Press, from our very own government officials in a Government of Canada document:

...marijuana goodies such as candies and cookies pose "significant risks" to children who might accidentally swallow them...

Here is what Paul Frewen, a professor and psychologist at the University of Western Ontario, had to say:

These drugs, both marijuana and other forms of recreational drugs, are being used...for their effects on the nervous system...They have various dissociative qualities...such as the suppression of memory and distress in the immediate short term.

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, the evidence clearly shows that young people who smoke marijuana are more likely to have mental health problems, particularly illnesses such as psychosis and schizophrenia.

Here is a quotation from the CBC, our public broadcaster:

...the health-community consensus is that regular recreational usage carries risks, including long-term cognitive ones for those under 25.

This next quote is from the report by Cochrane, a network of tens of thousands of researchers known for its rigorous methods that receives no sponsorship from pharmaceutical companies.

Youth are especially vulnerable to the health effects of marijuana use because adolescence is a critical time for brain development. Having THC in the brain at such a critical time can therefore interfere with brain development and harm brain function. It can also increase the risk of triggering a psychotic episode or a mental illness such as schizophrenia.

Business of Supply

With respect to safety, while the Liberals talk about legalizing marijuana, police forces raise a number of issues around impaired driving.

The Liberals say that legalizing marijuana will keep it out of the hands of children, but recent events in Toronto prove that to be utterly false. How will the government control the production of marijuana in people's homes when a Federal Court ruling authorizes individuals to grow it for their own consumption for medical purposes? If it is legal for people to grow their own for medical use, then anyone will be able to grow it once it is legalized. It will be easily available, and police forces will no longer be able to protect our children.

Whereas the Liberals would have us believe that legalizing marijuana will contain the growth of organized crime, examples prove instead that its legalization has no effect on organized crime. How will the Liberals manage the flow of drugs at the border when they are legal in Canada, but illegal in the United States?

Here is another quote:

Canadian police forces are worried about drug-impaired driving...Police are concerned about trivializing consumption [and] an increase in drivers under the influence of drugs.

A survey showed that almost half of Canadians who drive under the influence of cannabis believe that they do not pose a threat on the road.

Finally, for those who look to other countries and the only country to have legalized marijuana, Uruguay, I would like to cite Washington's chief of police. He believes that since Washington State legalized marijuana, more than one third of impaired drivers are under the influence of drugs, and they test more than 13,000 cases every year.

I will now quote Stéphane Quéré, a criminologist and expert in criminal networks:

The decriminalization of cannabis use has not eliminated organized crime [in Uruguay, despite what some may say]. It has merely adapted and managed to gain a foothold in coffee shops, while retaining control over cannabis production.

• (1810)

I think that this is a serious problem. There is no plan and no direction. We do not have any information on how we could assure safety. Before we talk about decriminalization, we need to know much more about the Liberal bill before us.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on marijuana.

I wish I could have understood him. It is always dangerous when a Conservative analyzes scientific studies, since, once again, all we get are scientific answers being cobbled together.

I would like to hear what my hon. colleague would think if he were to go back to the days of alcohol prohibition. Do we need to return to a time when alcohol was prohibited here? Should tobacco also not be legalized?

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thoughtful question.

I will tell him what I made sure to say in my speech. Had he been listening, he would know that I in no way consider myself a scientist or a doctor with respect to this issue. All I have done is quote experts in the field.

Instead of asking me questions about alcohol and cigarettes, can my colleague quote one single expert who is well-versed in this subject and can say that using marijuana is good for one's health? There is no evidence that it is.

Today, what I would like to see from the leader here in the House, our Prime Minister, who boxes and seems to like sports, is more emphasis on healthy lifestyles. He should be more like Pierre Lavoie, who encourages young people to join a wonderful movement. What I do not want is a Liberal government Prime Minister who trivializes drugs by promoting the use of marijuana.

• (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, we ask that the vote be deferred to Tuesday, June 14, 2016, at the end of oral questions.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Do I have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016, NO. 1.

The House resumed from June 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 22, 2016 and other measures, be read the third time and passed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division of the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-15.

Call in the members.

• (1840)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 87)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Breton
Brisson	Caesar-Chavannes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chan
Chen	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Di Iorio	Dion
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
East	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Erskine-Smith
Eyking	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Foot
Fragiskatos	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fry
Fuhr	Garneau
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardie	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Kang
Khalid	Khera
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauson (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Lemieux
Leslie	Levitt
Lighbound	Long
Longfield	Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	McCallum
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Nault
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Peterson

Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
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Sidhu (Brampton South)
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Business of Supply

Philpott
Poissant
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Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

NAYS

Members

Aboultatif	Albas
Allison	Ambrose
Anderson	Angus
Arnold	Ashton
Aubin	Barlow
Benson	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Block
Boucher	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brosseau
Brown	Calkins
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clement	Cooper
Cullen	Davies
Deltell	Diotte
Doherty	Donnelly
Dreeshen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Eglinski
Falk	Fast
Fortin	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis
Gladu	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Hoback	Johns
Jolibois	Julian
Kelly	Kenney
Kent	Kmieć
Kwan	Lake
Lauson (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière
Lebel	Leitch
Liepert	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Malcolmson
Masse (Windsor West)	May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Moore	Mulcair
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	Nuttall
Obhrai	O'Toole
Paul-Hus	Plamondon
Poilievre	Quach
Raït	Ramsey
Rankin	Rayes
Rempel	Richards
Ritz	Saganash
Sansoucy	Saroya
Scheer	Schmale
Shields	Shipley
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Stetski

Adjournment Proceedings

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Stubbs
Thériault
Trudel
Van Loan
Viersen
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Colleagues, I think it is notable that tonight was the first time calling the vote for Clerk Jeremy LeBlanc.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1845)

[*English*]

SENIORS

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 13, I asked the Prime Minister why he has not yet appointed a minister for seniors. This is a very important question because one in six Canadians is a senior. There are already more seniors in Canada than youth. In 13 short years, one in four Canadians will be a senior. It is extremely important that our country is prepared for this critical change in Canada. We need the federal government to make this one of its highest priorities. We need the Prime Minister to appoint a minister for seniors, and we need a national seniors strategy.

Unfortunately, we have a federal government now that is playing politics with seniors. The Prime Minister has appointed a minister for youth, himself; a minister for families, children, and social development; but not a minister for seniors.

In the last Parliament there was a minister for seniors, but this government thinks that some Canadians are more important than others, that youth, families, and children are more important than seniors.

The minister of families admitted at committee that the Liberals will not appoint a minister for seniors because they believe ministers for groups of people are only good for photo ops. Why does the minister think that seniors are only good for photo ops? Why does the minister think that the ministries of youth and families are only good for photo ops?

Canadian seniors built this great country and continue to have a very positive impact. They make important contributions to families, workplaces, and communities. As the official opposition critic for seniors, I have met with many seniors across Canada. They are very concerned with the approach the government is taking. Time and again I am told the Prime Minister should appoint a minister for

seniors, just like the previous government did. They also ask for the government to create a national strategy for seniors.

I recently attended a round table with seniors in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove. They requested two things, a national seniors strategy and a minister for seniors.

An organization called 411 Seniors Centre Society wrote to the Prime Minister recently, highlighting the many unique needs of seniors and how concerned its members are that there is no minister for seniors. The letter reads, “We discovered that six ministers have mandates to address specific issues related to seniors. A further seven ministers will be dealing with matters which, while not addressing seniors specifically, will have implications for us. We are concerned that these arrangements carry the potential for fragmentation and even contradiction. Instead, we ask that you act to ensure a focused, coordinated, and comprehensive approach to policy and programs addressing seniors' issues. Our preference would be that you appoint a minister responsible for seniors to coordinate and monitor progress.”

Canadian seniors are very concerned with the government's broken promises. However, it is never too late to do the right thing. I encourage the government to keep the promises it made, respect all Canadians equally, and work constructively with all members of Parliament. I ask the government to appoint a minister for seniors and to work with us on a national seniors strategy.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the opportunity to reiterate this government's commitment to seniors and to highlight once again the concrete measures in our first budget to support Canadians who have earned the right to a secure and dignified retirement, our seniors.

We on this side of the House value the contributions that older Canadians have made and continue to make to our communities, workplaces, and families. We are taking concrete steps to support this important component of Canadian families and Canadian society. One of the first measures that this government initiated when it came to office was to cancel the previous government's plan to raise the age of eligibility for old age security benefits from 65 to 67. Without these benefits, seniors aged 65 and 66 would have faced a much higher risk of living in poverty, and that is not acceptable.

The 20% of people aged 65 and 66 with the lowest income would have lost 35% of their income with that measure, while the 20% with the higher income would only have lost 5%. It is not fair. In addition, the previous government had not been able to produce proof showing that their irresponsible move was based on sound economic research. In fact, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development researched this very issue as a leading university professor of economics and demonstrated that the current system was viable. He also stated in the House that his findings contributed to his decision to seek public office prior to the last election. As a consequence, I am very proud to serve with the minister in the House.

Adjournment Proceedings

Under the previous government's plan, the most vulnerable Canadian seniors would have lost approximately \$13,000 per year. The plan would have plunged 100,000 seniors into poverty. As a percentage of Canada's GDP, the estimated cost of restoring the age of eligibility to 65 represents an increase of less than a third of a percentage point in old age security expenditure in 2029.

Next, this government is increasing the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit by \$947 annually for the most vulnerable single seniors, many of whom are women. This action represents a 10% increase to the total maximum guaranteed income supplement benefits available to the lowest-income single seniors. It will improve the financial security of about 900,000 single seniors across Canada and help to lift thousands of seniors out of poverty. We are also moving ahead with concrete actions to ensure that couples living apart for reasons beyond their control, such as being in long-term care facilities, will receive higher benefits based on their individual incomes.

Most of the measures that I have just enumerated are contained in Bill C-15, the budget implementation act. I would encourage members from across the way to join with this government and support this important piece of legislation for seniors, the middle class, children, and all Canadians. It is not about a title, it is about the substance of the actions that are being taken and the real difference these actions will make in the lives of older Canadians now and in the future.

On behalf of the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the minister responsible for seniors' issues, I am proud to say that we are delivering on the promises we made to Canada's seniors.

● (1850)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I am going to put down my prepared text and would ask my colleague to do the same thing.

The question is very simple. What Canadians want is a minister for seniors and a national seniors strategy. That is what they are asking for across this country and, unfortunately, the member did not address that at all. I have put down my prepared text and I am going to ask him to speak from the heart and honestly tell the House why the government is refusing to appoint a minister for seniors.

I will repeat the question. Why is the government not appointing a minister for seniors? That is the question Canadian seniors want answered. They do not want him to talk about other things. Why are the Liberals not appointing a minister for seniors?

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat that the word "seniors" may not appear in the title of a particular cabinet minister, but I can assure him the needs of Canadian seniors are important for our government. This debate is not about a title. It is about the actions that are being taken to recognize those Canadians who, after a lifetime of hard work, I agree with the minister, have earned a secure and dignified retirement.

This is why this government is taking concrete steps to improve income security for low-income seniors. We are investing in the well-being of older Canadians. For this reason, I would invite the hon. member to lay down his partisanship. I would invite him to unanimously support the budget implementation act so that we, as

parliamentarians, send a clear message on the value we place on the contribution of seniors to Canada.

● (1855)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to participate in these adjournment proceedings as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, the riding that is the training ground of the warriors, Garrison Petawawa, the largest army base in Canada.

I also recognize the members of Canadian Special Operations Regiment, CSOR, their families, members of our Garrison Petawawa family. In the upper Ottawa Valley, every Friday is Red Friday.

I ask all Canadians to remember the brave women and men of the CSOR regiment as they proudly represent our nation in the international war against terrorism, with a special pause for Red Friday.

For the troops and their families that are watching these proceedings, I thank them. I have their backs.

My question for the Minister of National Defence regarding the disdain the Liberal Party has for the women and men who serve in Canada's military is based on the comments I have received from the people who matter most in this debate, the men and women who wear the uniform of a Canadian soldier.

When I was first elected in 2000, the wounds were still raw over the political decision by the Liberal party to punish all the members of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, over the actions of a few individuals, by disbanding the entire regiment.

The Airborne Regiment was thrust into the impossible task of trying to be peacekeepers in a war zone where there could only be combatants and peacemakers. The members and veterans of the Canadian Airborne Regiment deserved better from their government. They became a convenient scapegoat for the decade of darkness that followed our mission to Somalia.

The decade of darkness was kicked off in the 1993 election when Liberal Party leader Chrétien showed the Liberal Party's traditional disdain for our men and woman in uniform when he cancelled the Sea King medium-lift helicopter replacement contract. History is repeating itself today with the stall to manipulate the evaluation process on the need to replace the CF-18 fighter jet aircraft, and without a competitive tender.

We know what happened 10 years after the helicopter contract was cancelled. Canadian soldiers suffered preventable casualties on the bomb-laden roads of Afghanistan.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence has stumbled through the excuse that as members of a military coalition, other coalition members will provide for Canadian lack of equipment. We know from our helicopter experience in Afghanistan that countries look after their own troops first, and rightly so. Only after their needs are met may there be an opportunity for Canada to hitch a ride.

Adjournment Proceedings

Under the Liberals, Canada had the reputation as the freeloader of NATO. Our troops had to beg for rides or contract for transport if it was available from other countries, because the Liberals refused to buy any new heavy-lift airplanes. Our troops were sent into the desert with forest green uniforms.

The Liberal record under the decade of darkness is clear. The Liberal Party refused to buy any new jets. It was our Conservative government that put an end to the decade of darkness. Every time we bought new equipment, the Liberals opposed it. Now they are again choosing politics over buying the best equipment for our troops. With that kind of record, nobody believes their misinformation. Why would anyone believe them when the facts are clear?

What was truly unfortunate in the response from the Minister of National Defence, when he responded to the fact that Liberals held the men and women who proudly wore the uniform of a Canadian soldier in utter disdain, was the complete distortion of the liberal record of the last 20 years. The Liberals slashed and burned, resulting in a decade of darkness, as so stated by the former chief of the defence staff, General Rick Hillier.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to give the hon. member credit for her continuing attack on the so-called decade of darkness. She has a talent for non-sequiturs that is really quite breath defying.

The member started out by saying that they are proud of our military history. Of course, we are all proud of our military history. She said that the Liberal budget is a deceitful betrayal. We have jumped from being proud of our military history to the Liberal budget being a deceitful betrayal. There are no facts to actually support anything having to do with the proud military history or the concept of a deceitful betrayal.

The member said that the Liberal defence review is a shameful attempt to cover up the disdain of the Liberals. I have not even gotten off the ground with respect to the defence review. We have not had one in 20 years. Maybe it is just a basic good idea to start with finding out what the people of Canada want from their military. It is, after all, a massive operation. It is an \$18.6 billion operation. More than 100,000 people work for DND. It has the sixth-largest budget in Canada, after the federal government and the top four provinces. It is a massive operation, yet the Conservatives say to just keep on doing what they were doing.

What they were doing during that last 10 years, that so-called decade of enlightenment, was melting down the previous budget by \$3.3 billion over four years. They never actually got to the point of acquiring the equipment the men and women actually needed. The replacement for the ships is having to be rescued by our government. We are having a go at the jets, because the Conservatives did not get the jets done. There is a whole raft of procurements that have yet to be dealt with, and there were the last 10 years in which to deal with them.

As I say, it is a collection of non-sequiturs. If we actually raise some inconvenient fact, such as what happened in the last four years, the contraction of the budget over the last four years, that had to do with adding to the national debt by \$150 billion. Someone had to pay for that. The biggest program spending in the Government of

Canada, of course, is DND, and DND had to contribute its share to the deficit-reduction program created in the first place by the mismanagement by the Conservatives.

I just want to point out that with respect to the defence review, it is an important initiative on the part of this government. It is rather important that we as politicians, we as ministers, we as members of the government, ask Canadians what they want out of their military. What is it they are prepared to spend? There are all kinds of threats out there. Our first and foremost defence is the defence of Canada. Second is the defence of North America, and of course, all of that is interwoven with a variety of expeditionary missions that require our presence, whether they are NATO missions or UN-mandated missions.

This is a massive operation and is something Canadians need. We are hardly showing disdain for Canadians. Rather, we are appreciating that Canadians should have a lot to say about their own military.

• (1900)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives' watch, the defence budget increased from \$14.5 billion to \$20.1 billion in 2014-2015 on a cash basis, up 38%. Our budget boosted the built-in annual increases for baseline defence spending from 2% to 3%, starting in 2017, which would have added almost \$12 billion over 10 years to defence budgets.

The significant progress we made in procurement and operational capabilities is even more remarkable when we consider the pathetic state of affairs in 2006 after 13 years of Liberal incompetence and neglect. We modernized our military armoured vehicles, tanks, patrol planes, and frigates.

We acquired new air transport capabilities that Canada has never possessed before: five C-17 Globemasters; 17 C-130J Hercules tactical transport planes; and 15 Chinooks. Further, Canada began to take possession of the new CH-148 Cyclone maritime helicopters for search and rescue operations.

We launched a \$36.6 billion state-of-the-art, made-in-Canada shipbuilding program, the largest in Canadian peace-time history, including the new—

• (1905)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member misses some rather salient facts.

While she says that the budget spending ramped up to \$21 billion and that was largely driven by the operational needs of Afghanistan, she neglects to mention that by the time this government came into power, it then melted down to about \$18.6 billion.

The member also neglects to mention that the built-in escalator actually increased the budget this year by \$301 million.

As well, she neglects to mention that the \$3.7 billion was re-profiled into later years, in part because the so-called procurement program, which she thinks is such a terrific program, is actually not delivering the ships that the men and women in uniform need to have.

Adjournment Proceedings

Therefore, there is a collection of failures in the Conservatives' so-called decade.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just on that last comment, I have to correct the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. Our Armed Forces know that they got the equipment they needed when they needed it, and that last comment was completely out of line.

I am rising on a question that I raised back on April 11 when General Jonathan Vance, our chief of the defence staff, said that the battle against ISIS has no end in sight. He went on to say that Canadians should prepare for more Canadian Armed Forces casualties with the expansion of the mission on the ground in Iraq.

I questioned the Minister of National Defence on whether or not the withdrawal of our CF-18s was a mistake, since they had already played such a significant role in protecting Canadian special operations forces on the ground during battle and in actually eliminating the jihadi genocidal death cult that we call ISIS.

I want to remind the House, and Canadians who are watching, that Falah Mustafa Bakir, who is the foreign affairs minister for the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, said in reference to Canada that:

We would like to tell them that the air strikes have been effective, they have helped us a great deal. They have helped save lives. They have helped to destroy the enemy....

And if it were for us [to decide], we request that to continue.

Therefore, they knew that the CF-18s provided much-needed support to the Kurdish peshmerga on the ground and the Canadian special operations forces who were there. That was again reiterated last fall by Jabar Yawar, who is the chief of staff for the Kurdistan Regional Government and the peshmerga ministry. He said, "It is a bad news for us. Canada was a major partner in the coalition and it was a great help to Kurdistan".

Unfortunately, we saw the air strikes quit and the risk factor to the Canadian Armed Forces increase with the increased number of trainers that are now on the ground.

I want to go over what happened after we announced that we were pulling out the CF-18s.

On February 8, the Government of Canada announced that the CF-18s were coming home. On February 22, they were withdrawn. In anticipation of that, on January 29, the Dutch government decided to pick up the heavy load and carry what Canada was sloughing off. The Dutch put six of their F-16 fighter jets into the air campaign and expanded it so that it also covered Syria as our CF-18 jets had been doing. Then, on April 21, Denmark, another very dependable coalition partner, added in seven of their F-16s to go into Syria and Iraq to cover the shortfall left by Canada pulling out our squadron of CF-18s.

The air strikes are still having a major impact. The governor of Kirkuk is now saying, on the attack that is coming up on Fallujah and taking back ground in Mosul, that if they do not have air strikes, they probably will not be able to take the city. He is saying that the Kurdish peshmerga and special operation forces from Canada and coalition partners have to have it.

The air strikes, just last week, reported on Iraqi TV that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who is the leader of ISIS, was actually wounded in an air strike in northern Iraq. Therefore, the air strikes are having an impact and we should be doing everything we can to support our troops on the ground and to support our coalition partners. Rather than backing off the combat mission, we should be more engaged.

● (1910)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague does not seem to understand the basic concept of a coalition. A coalition is a collection of individuals, and in this case nations, that agree on a certain task that needs to be done. Then they allocate those tasks among various partners, for example, one does air, one does ground, one does intelligence, one does aid, one does this, and the other does that. Quite rightly, the Prime Minister identified the fact that a lot of nations were prepared to do the air war part of the campaign.

There is something in the order of about 200 airplanes in theatre at any given time, all available to take back territory from the ISIS group of terrorists, and in large part, they have been quite successful. They have taken back substantial pieces of territory basically on the basis of an air war.

At some point or another, somebody has to get on the ground. In this particular case it is the focus of the Government of Canada to train the local Iraqi security forces and the peshmerga in a fashion that they will be enabled to take back ground, whether it is Fallujah or Mosul or Raqqa, or pick the individual city.

In order to give them the best chance to be successful, we have allocated 830 of our best people. We have effectively doubled the size of the mission and we have put Brigadier-General Anderson into Baghdad. He is performing a magnificent task, doing some coordination and liaison among the various factions.

The member will appreciate that this area is complicated. These people in some respects have been fighting with each other for the last 4,000 years and to think that somehow or another removing six of our airplanes from this particular conflict is going to bring resolution or even better protection to our own troops is just a nonsensical and fanciful thought.

We are doing what the Conservatives refused to do, namely, making available to the peshmerga and to the other Iraqi security forces people of the highest quality training. Our people are the top of the tops and by making them available, which admittedly as General Vance has said, increases the risk to the mission, there is a much better chance that when the Fallujah initiative takes place, and part of it is already taking place, and when the Mosul initiative takes place, these Iraqi security people and the peshmerga will have the best possible chance of success.

Frankly, six airplanes in theatre adding to the already almost 200 airplanes that are there would not increase the chances of success in any substantial measures.

At some point or another, we have to realize that there are phases to conflicts and at this phase, there is an opportunity to take out ISIS and take it out big time.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is being disingenuous when he suggests that the rules of engagement for fighter jets are the same across the board. Nothing supplants force protection that is provided by having our own fighter jets in theatre. Their first role is to protect our forces on the ground. The parliamentary secretary should know better than to suggest that by having other fighter jets there that our troops are just as well protected. That will not happen if there is a full-scale attack on other coalition partners. The first line of defence for those coalition planes is to protect their own troops on the ground before Canadian troops.

The words that the parliamentary secretary is using diminish the major role that the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Air Force played in the combat mission.

We are not saying that there is anything wrong with increasing the training mission and doing more on the ground as is happening, but there is a role from the combat side. We should not be backing away when everybody else is stepping up.

Prime Minister David Cameron said in the British *Debates* back in November, “we should not be content with outsourcing our security to our allies. If we believe that action can help protect us, then, with our allies, we should be part of that action, not—”

• (1915)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, again, that is a fundamental misunderstanding of what a coalition is. A coalition is that everyone has everyone else's back. We are not just flying our airplanes in order to protect our troops. The Americans are not just flying their planes in order to protect their troops. The Americans fly their planes to protect ours, us, them, and the Dutch theirs, etc. That is the way that a coalition works.

When there is a gap in the capabilities that needs to be addressed, where troops need to be trained, that is where we can contribute best.

To therefore attribute a disrespect for the people who fly our airplanes and have been flying them for the last years is just absolutely wrong. That is a nonsensical statement.

I want to go to a statement made by John Kerry, the United States Secretary of State. He said, “So Canada is deeply invested in this and we need that partnership”.

He is pleased that the Prime Minister has honoured his campaign decision.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:16 p.m.)

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