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Thursday, December 8, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 8, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*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 seven petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the reports of the Canadian parliamentary delegation respecting its participation at the 25th Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Tbilisi, Georgia, from July 1 to 5, 2016, and the autumn meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Skopje, Macedonia from September 29 to October 3, 2016.

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[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage entitled, "Interim Report on Media Study: The Impact of Digital Technology".

[*English*]

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I move that the second report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, presented on November 28, 2016, be concurred in.

It is with great pleasure that I rise this morning to perform what could colloquially be called a rescue mission of sorts. We have seen the government launch a very expensive and broad survey that has been met with a great deal of ridicule from a large number of Canadians.

The report I am presenting today was passed by the electoral reform committee, the same committee the minister first threw under the bus but now says did great work. It was the second point she made that was true. We were an all-party committee that worked very hard through a number of important questions about our democracy, and we came out with a report of several hundred pages, the most comprehensive report on Canadian democracy in Canada's history. It looked at all the elements, the pros and cons of various changes that are proposed, all in an effort to help the Liberals keep a Liberal campaign promise. It was extraordinary work. I think I can speak for all committee members in saying we got along very well. We felt very enriched by how Canadians invested in us, and we got to hear from some of the best experts, not just here in Canada, but right around the world.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. I neglected to mention that.

The member moved a motion, so I thought it appropriate he be afforded some time to speak as well. His motion reads:

That, in relation to the questions on democratic values that the Minister of Democratic Institutions intends to make available for Canadians' responses on the website, MyDemocracy.ca, the Committee encourages the Minister to reproduce and include in its entirety the questions within this Committee's e-consultation survey, either as a replacement for other planned questions, or in addition to any other questions that the Minister wishes to include;

and that the Committee report this motion to the House.

The committee is now doing that today, to bring forward debate in an attempt to rescue what has been derided from all corners, not just from average, ordinary Canadians who tried to participate or did fill out the survey, finding it incredibly frustrating, confusing, and insulting to their intelligence actually because the survey never comes to the point of actually asking the question that is in front of us, which is "What do you want to do with the Canadian voting system?" I am not a rocket scientist, but that seems like a pretty obvious question to me when talking about changing the Canadian voting system, rather than some of these vague questions that I will read out in a minute.

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The notion before us is that there needs to be a reset button done of this whole process. The government is spending a large amount of taxpayer money through a sole-source contract to one firm. There was no consultation whatsoever with other members of Parliament, or other people outside that little inner circle. They produced a survey that confuses, confounds, and insults Canadians, with such gems as, “There should be parties in Parliament that represent the views of all Canadians, even if some are radical or extreme.” What kind of false choice is that? Canadians need to either say yes, they would like all the views of Canadians represented in Parliament, but gosh, what if some of them are extreme or radical? That is a false choice if I have ever read one.

There is another gem here, “A party that wins the most seats in an election should still have to compromise with other parties, even if it means reconsidering some of its policies.” What does that mean? Of course Canadians want parties to compromise. Of course they want parties to reach out and governments to actually engage members of the opposition, even their own backbench who are not in cabinet, to come to the best solutions, because no one party has all the solutions to the challenges we face, particularly when we get to an issue like voting, which has at its core an element of partisan interest that we are seeing on display from the government, unfortunately.

The Prime Minister has said he actually has a preferred system. The minister said she has a preferred system as well, but she will not tell us what it is. The only time the Prime Minister has actually taken a moment to say what voting system he would like is one the committee heard would not only make the problems in our current system dramatically worse, with more unfair voting, more wasted votes, and more false majorities. It also as a by-product would probably keep the Liberals in power forever. What a coincidence that is, that the current Liberal Prime Minister favours that system.

The Liberals said they had to offer all these false choices in order to gauge out and tease out what Canadians really felt about it, that they could not ask a straightforward question. However, they did ask straightforward questions like, “The voting age for federal elections should be lowered.” They did not even include “if the following crisis were to ensue”, or even “if chaos would follow”.

•(1005)

They also said, “The day of a federal election should be a statutory holiday.” That's a straightforward question. There is no binary, there is no poll, there is no false choice.

“There should be a limit to the length of federal election campaign periods.”

If we go through the questions, and Canadians did, they were a source of some significant humour on social media. I will give the government that. We often need levity in this place because we deal with serious things and people say that politics is boring. The response from Canadians was not boring. Rather, it was quite funny. However, when a government is being mocked, it is not a good day. Canadians can disagree with a policy that government has, they can take a countering view, and that is respect. When we get to the level of fundamental mockery, Canadians do not respect anything that the government is doing at all. That should be a warning sign.

Carole said, “The questions were unclear and several repeated themselves in a backward fashion. They certainly could have been better written.”

Will said, “I did the survey anyway, but was struck by the nature of the questions, which did not seem to want to address the various alternatives to the [first-past-the-post] system directly. I wondered why.”

Barbara said, “I filled it in. But felt like the questions were so circuitous and aggressively either/or that I knew less at the end.”

We have to keep in mind that the government will say that 150,000 Canadians filled it out, assuming that the experience of those Canadians who went through this was a great one, when we know for a fact that it was not. Rather, it was the opposite.

We also know this fact. The minister misspoke yesterday in the House when she said that people could fill this survey in and not provide all that incredibly personal information at the end. She neglected to mention that then the survey does not count. To me that seems to be a strange thing if the government wants to know the opinions of Canadians.

The one question the survey did not ask is whether or not they are Canadian and if they could vote in federal elections in Canada. We would think that if the government is surveying Canadians with respect to Canadian values toward the Canadian election system it would include the questions, “Are you Canadian?” and “Can you vote in our elections?” Those would be important ones, and people should have to tick those boxes before they answer these other vague and posterously stupid questions.

Clark said, “I thought I'd be able to give my opinion on different forms of voting, but was presented with vague, meaningless (and repeated!) statements, where I was often unable to actually answer in a way that actually reflected my 'values'.”

The very definition of a bad survey is one where we go through it and are unable to express what it is that we care about.

The government goes on and on about values. Here are a couple of important values.

With respect to integrity, here is a question that could have been on the survey, “Do you think the Prime Minister should keep his promise?” I know it is a tough one.

With respect to fairness, this is another question, “Do you think every vote in Canadian elections should count?”

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What we have said today is that the all-party committee, working with the analysts in the House of Commons, who are the best, put together a survey that we offered before to the government. It did not hear us, so maybe today it will. The survey had such radical questions as, “Voters should elect local candidates to represent them in Parliament.” Do you feel strongly about that? Do you feel not strongly about that? That way there is no confusion.

We asked about, “...the number of seats held by a party in Parliament reflects the proportion of votes it received across the country.” People did not have a problem filling out their opinions on that. Some people said that it is very important, and other people said it is not. We did not add any chaos element. We did not add any skewing to try to drive people in one direction or the other. We had enough respect for people and their intelligence to just ask them the question.

We asked whether, “If I vote for my candidate in my riding who does not win, my vote is wasted.” We heard at committee over and over again from people who said, “I’m a good Canadian. I participated in the elections, but I live in riding X, and this riding never supports the party that I represent”, be it a Conservative in Toronto or a New Democrat on the east coast, ridings that for so long have voted a certain way and voters feel unheard, because they are.

As I said, this is a rescue mission. We need to reset this process for the government. It has not heard the overwhelming wave of feedback and cynicism that has been heaped upon it because Canadians are frustrated with governments that come forward and say, “We’re going to consult”, and then we get to that consultation meeting, we try to add our input, we read bogus questions, and we read a skewed survey. We read questions that will lead to bad data, as a leading Canadian pollster told us.

This is an opportunity for the government to make good on its promise to work with the opposition. This is its opportunity to make good on its promise to truly consult and listen to Canadians in a respectful way.

•(1010)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member himself presents a valid argument as to why it is not the responsibility of the NDP to come up with the actual questions. The member said the first question is a no-brainer; it should have been “Are you Canadian?”. May I remind the member that there are roughly 1.5 million people who are residents in Canada and, for a wide variety of reasons, do not have their citizenship. I would argue, contrary to what that member might believe, that they too have a vested interest in the democracy we have here in Canada.

I think we have to open the doors, as this government has clearly demonstrated, and get all Canadians involved in the type of democracy we have.

Why do the member and his party believe that individuals who are not citizens should not have their opinions taken into consideration? In many ways, they will become citizens of Canada. Why would the NDP deny—

•(1015)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, what is he talking about?

The survey the Liberals set up allows people from anywhere in the world to answer the questions as long as they can fill in a postal code that is connected to Canada. It makes the results of their survey utterly useless, never mind the fact of the questions that are so idiotic and nonsensical that Canadians, when responding to their survey, say “I am trying to let you know what I think and what my values are, but your questions are so stupid that I cannot get through it; I am insulted”.

I do not know why the Liberals would not take up this offer, because that is what it is, an offer to do better, an offer to work with the opposition. They say the words all the time. Here is an opportunity. Let us see that the words actually match the actions.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the government wants to avoid this discussion by all means necessary.

The member spoke about some of the substantive problems. I want to just probe further this issue of the technical problems, because of course we and anyone who has filled out online polls know that often a poll will leave some kind of cookies on our computer, so we at least cannot fill out the same survey multiple times with the same device.

I wanted to test this out. I filled out the survey twice and got different responses both times, incidentally, in terms of whether I am a guardian or whatever it is, but the government did not even put in place basic security mechanisms in order to ensure that we could not fill out the same survey multiple times on the same device.

There would have been a variety of ways of protecting people's privacy while still ensuring that there are not multiple responses, and of course there is the issue of people out of the country.

I want to ask this in the spirit of the survey. Does the member think the questionnaire should seek to prevent people from filling out the survey multiple times, or would he prefer a plague of locusts?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It is such a hard question, Mr. Speaker. I want to prevent people from filling it out multiple times, but I do not know about the locusts thing. It sounds like something that could have been written by the Liberal friends who wrote the survey.

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The basic security is incredibly concerning to us, and members will notice that the survey does not ask for an individual's name, but it asks for an email address. At first I thought it was asking for the email, like those surveys that do that to make sure the respondents are not one of those robots that automatically fill them out. They email them back, and then they have to confirm they are human. That is not what this did. It is just gathering emails. Why?

Why is the email important to the survey in any way whatsoever? Is this a data mining exercise? A taxpayer-funded data mining exercise for the Liberal Party of Canada would break a significant number of laws, never mind the basic morality of a government hiding under the pretence of consultation simply to try to gather more data to run more effective elections for itself.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I hope to address this later, because as a member of the now extinct Special Committee on Electoral Reform, I am enormously proud of the work we did and of the report we tabled, and I think all members from all parties on that committee share that pride.

I am wondering if the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley does not think that, in a rescue mission of this kind, even now we could ask that the minister direct the firm the Liberals have hired to have an automatic opportunity for anyone who goes to MyDemocracy.ca to be encouraged to click to read the report we submitted.

My biggest concern is the disconnect in timing. We submitted a report December 1, and now all people want to talk about is an online survey, which bears no connection in terms of building upon our work.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, of course, now the minister admits that the committee did very good work. One would have thought the work was so good that on the big survey, and 15 million postcards, they would have included a click to connect to that good work, because it is comprehensive. It just walks one through, in a non-partisan way, all the different questions and considerations, the trade-offs and the values, and the important things, but the Liberals do not reference it all, as if it did not exist.

My question is this. What are the Liberals going to do with the results? Some 20% of Canadians are guardians, 15% are pragmatists, and a bunch are innovators. What does that mean? What system do we get from that? We do not get one. It is totally subjective and is as useless as the exercise has been deemed by Canadians, which is absolutely accurate.

This does not merit the time of Canadians. Unfortunately, Canadians are experiencing that when they go through it, and that is why they are feeling insulted by the process.

• (1020)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the New Democrats for graciously agreeing to split his time with me. His reason for doing so, as I understand it, is that we do not know what the Liberals are going to do. Are they simply going to force this debate to adjourn before others have had the chance to speak? It is something they can do if they move a motion to that effect. Of course, they have the majority in the House. Therefore, I am grateful for the time, even though it means that both his time and mine are somewhat foreshortened.

I will not be addressing today the security issues, except in passing, simply because they are not the subject of Report 2: Electoral Reform, of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I will simply observe that my colleague is quite right.

One can fill this in from any place in the world. Of course, it can be filled in by a non-citizen of Canada, if one is willing to pretend to be a citizen. A person can do numerous other things that are problematic, such as filling it in multiple times, and so on. I simply observe that these are problems if this is an exercise that will have its results publicized, and we understand that is what the government intends to do. At least the general results will be publicized if not the actual data, and then we can say that we have discovered the following things. However, we will have discovered nothing, because of the security issues.

Yesterday we heard the minister offer the number of people who filled it out, and I think she said 80,000. However, the impression I get is that at least half of those must be people in this very House who have been experimenting to find out what the flaws with the system are.

Clifton van der Linden, who runs the Vox Pop Labs, who actually organized this, has a system for weeding out these kinds of responses, and members can read his literature on how they do it. However, that becomes a problem too, as we are going to weed out some valid responses, because they looked, according to the algorithm that was designed, the metric that was designed, as if they were non-valid responses. Therefore, from a systems point of view, it is a complete shemuzzle. Nothing that comes out of this will be useful data from the point of view of figuring out what Canadians want.

Now, some would say that this is what the government's objective was to start with. Of course, I would never be so cynical about the Liberal Party of Canada, and they are free to quote this in their literature from now on. It is motivated exclusively by a unique advocacy and care for the good will of the people of Canada, which is unmatched by any party in this country or indeed by any other party in any country in the history of the world, possibly the galaxy.

Nonetheless, we have reason to be suspicious of this instrument. There are some problems with this. My colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley and I have been on a number of panel shows with the parliamentary secretary, who is defending the kinds of questions that we have, the either/or questions that have been the subject of so much ridicule. Also, he has talked about why there are no specific questions. He says we have to have values-based questions. This is not the time for specific questions, he explains, with regard to electoral reform.

However, as my colleague noted, there are numerous specific policy questions, not values questions, on other aspects of the electoral reform committee's mandate; for example, eligible voters who do not vote in elections should be fined; or the day of a federal election should be a statutory holiday. One has to agree or disagree with these things. Another is that the voting age for federal elections should be lowered, and one is asked to agree or disagree with that, although the government seems to have decided unilaterally on this exercise that it is now 16. Another is that there should be a limit to the length of the time of campaign election periods, and one must agree or disagree.

So here we have specific questions. However, when it gets to asking which kind of system one would prefer, even in the general category system, that is excluded. The argument is that these were just too complicated. Canadians cannot handle these questions. At any rate, they are unlike values questions. Also, we have to ask questions in this either/or fashion to determine what people think at this stage of the process. It is just not the right time to get into determining priorities in some sort of other manner.

I just want to go through and explain how the ERRE committee handled this, because what this motion is saying is, in addition to the questions being asked, to include the questions that were designed and approved unanimously by all the members of the special committee on electoral reform. We had to deal with the problem that there are trade-offs. There is no such thing as a perfect electoral system, one that would give maximum local representation, proportionality, choice of one's own MP, and minimum party discipline, all together in one package. There are trade-offs.

• (1025)

Here is how we did it. We would have questions grouped together. We would have four or five of them in a row, and on each one people would be asked if they agree or disagree on a scale of one to five, the exact same scale that is used in the MyDemocracy.ca survey; so there is no incompatibility there, but as they go through, they may agree with multiple statements but at different levels and intensity.

Here is an example:

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Canada's electoral system should favour the following outcome: one political party holds a majority of seats in Parliament and is able to implement its campaign platform.

And people rate that one to five.

Canada's electoral system should favour the following outcome: no single political party holds the majority of seats in Parliament, thereby increasing the likelihood that all political parties will work together to pass legislation.

Canada's electoral system should ensure that voters elect local candidates to represent them in Parliament.

Canada's electoral system should ensure that the number of seats held by a party in Parliament reflects the portion of votes it received across the country.

Independent candidates (not part of a political party) should be able to be elected to Parliament.

What we can see with that series of questions is the problem of not having a really clear mandate when multiple parties forming the government together have to negotiate. Both its good and bad sides are presented, but not presented as a false dichotomy. They are presented as two different options. People can indicate they favour

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both, but then the strength of their preference is also captured, and that will hint at where their values lie. This is a much more robust, much more useful device for actually determining how people feel about these issues. There are no false choices. There is nothing they can poke fun at here, and at the same time we are getting both the values and the policy preferences.

The government could have done that, but it chose not to do it.

Here is another example:

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with any of the following statements.

The current electoral system adequately reflects voters' intentions.

If I vote for a candidate in my riding who does not win, my vote is wasted.

The current electoral system should be maintained.

The current electoral system should be changed.

There are four different ways of asking the fundamental issue, which is whether we should replace first past the post with something else, and if so, with what. The former questionnaire was about whether people are in favour of proportionate versus majoritarian systems, the series of questions.

This series of questions is about whether or not people are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with the status quo. There are two very robust, helpful, values-based, but also policy-based ways of determining how people feel. Because there is more than one question, we do not have the problem of false dichotomies, the plague of locusts questions, and that sort of thing: would they vote for proportional representation, which is covered with rabid fire ants, and questions like that.

The argument has also been presented that this is all too complicated, and the parliamentary secretary has been saying this over and over again. This is a completely disingenuous argument. Canadians do not understand first past the post, single transferable vote, and multiple member proportionality. They especially do not understand the acronyms—MMP versus STV versus DMP—in the same way that we often find it hard to attach the right label to the right thing. However, when we set the labels aside and actually move to the substance of the issues, people have a very keen understanding. This was demonstrated quite well both by the large number of responses we received—22,000—to the committee's questionnaire and also by the intelligence of the comments people provided. The reason we were able to do this was that helpful and intelligent information was provided, as it was at the town hall meetings we held, about the different kinds of systems.

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There were demonstrations easily transferable onto a computer screen explaining how each of these systems work, both for our consultation and, of course, the government's consultation as well. This includes all the systems, including the ranked ballot system that is the Prime Minister's favourite. Had it included those—and the government can still do this and then ask questions about each of these systems—we would get meaningful responses that would allow the Government of Canada to move forward, as the committee has requested, with a referendum. It could pit the first-past-the-post system against the proportional system that seems to be the one that is favoured by the largest number of respondents to the survey—or even preferential, if that is what comes out. That could be done in time for election 2019.

• (1030)

I encourage the government to reconsider what it has done and to actually follow the committee's recommendation and add these questions to its survey.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over 25 years I have had the privilege of being an elected parliamentarian, and throughout those years, the one thing I have really grown to appreciate is the value of consulting with constituents. Questionnaires or surveys are often the best way to get a good sense of what my constituents believe. That is something I have consistently done over the years. For the most part, 95% of the time, I develop the questions to try to gauge what my constituents were thinking. That said, I know that I am not the most able-minded individual in developing questionnaires. There are professionals who can do the job.

Would the member not agree that this is such an important issue that we should recognize that there might be people better qualified than elected officials in the chamber to develop questionnaires for Canadians on electoral reform?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what happened with the set of questions prepared by the electoral reform committee, which it put on its website. These are the ones that received the responses I spoke about earlier. They were developed by experts at the Library of Parliament and then brought to the committee and discussed. Adjustments to them were made by members of the committee, but, in general, we bowed to their expertise. I tried to demonstrate in my earlier comments how objective and thoughtful the questions were, and I can only encourage others to go to the report of the special committee to see just how thoughtful the responses were as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on this issue and his work in committee.

I wonder if he could try to explain why the government decided to do a new consultation, a new survey. As we have known from the start, since coming to power, the Liberals have said that they will keep their promises. The government is still holding consultations, as are the committees, and now there is this new survey.

Does the member agree that the new survey was created because the government has not received the answers it wants? Maybe it did

not get the answers it wanted and was happy with, so why not do another survey? Maybe it will keep doing that until it gets the answers it wants. Does the member agree that this is why the government is doing another survey and another consultation process?

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, since the beginning, I have been under the impression, as I articulated a year ago and reiterated in mid-May in an article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, that the Liberals are trying to run out the clock. If the promise that the 2015 election would be the last one using first past the post is maintained and seen as sacred, and the clock runs out, it starts to narrow the range of options available to us.

The first one that would be lost is any form of electoral reform that requires redistribution. Most forms of proportional representation require some form of redistribution. That takes about two years. There is an expedited form of redistribution that could occur in a year, but if action is not taken by the end of next spring's parliamentary sitting, redistribution is out and, therefore, many forms of PR are out as options as well. That would be the first thing to go.

The second thing to go would be a referendum, because that takes about six months. Once that is gone, we are left with this sacred promise, which the Prime Minister repeated as recently as yesterday in question period, that the government will change the system. Then all that will be left will be the one system that does not involve redistribution, which just happens to be the one, ranked ballots, that guarantees the Liberals will win more seats in every election. That is a problem.

• (1035)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend for participating so ably in the special committee.

There is a disconnect between what the parliamentary committee did and this online survey. I am not against an online survey, by the way. I am not against reaching to out to every Canadian household, but it strikes me as more than a lost opportunity. It is a waste of resources that when people are doing the survey, they are directed to work done by other groups, but not to the special committee.

I will use one example. There are multiple questions in the survey on online voting, but there is no information to inform the people who are filling out the survey. They do not get to read our report first. My hon. colleague will remember the expert advice that committee members heard that changed our minds. We heard from Barbara Simons, an expert and former executive of IBM. She said that knowing what she knows about security, Canadian elections could be hacked and stolen. That is why we in the committee said that we were not ready for online voting at this time. However, people filling out this survey will not know that.

Could my hon. colleague comment on that disconnect?

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Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I just want to say what a pleasure it was working with my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands on the committee. She brought real life and a fresh insight to the committee at every meeting she was at, and I personally very much appreciate it.

The member is quite right about the point made by Barbara Simons in her testimony on electronic voting. But the same point applies, and this is probably part of what the member was trying to say, to all the other subjects of the committee's report as well. It is regrettable that this information is not included.

As one final note, including a link would be very simple indeed. It could be done at a moment's notice. There are already links to a number of other resources in this survey. So putting in this link would be no effort at all. It really should happen.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for me, the question is where do we start on such an important issue, one that I have been engaged in in one way or another for many years. Like many Canadians, I have a good number of opinions on it. At the start of the debate, it is really important to talk about how important it is that we take a multifaceted approach, so that we in government and all members of the House can reach out and ensure that Canadians can provide input in the process.

For those who are watching and those who have taken a keen interest in this subject, I cannot recall when a government has been so committed to getting the input of all Canadians in one form or another. That is what is really important to recognize. It is about trying to tap the minds of Canadians in all regions of our country so that they can give us their thoughts and ideas on how we can improve democracy in Canada. I would like to think that we would consider all sorts of vehicles for that communication, and here I will cite a few examples.

As I indicated in the question I just posed to the member across the way, there is the issue of questionnaires or surveys. We have the MyDemocracy.ca site, which is a phenomenal reach-out to all Canadians. I believe in excess of 15 million households are receiving a card in the mail and are being asked to get engaged on the topic. That in itself should not be new. I would be surprised if there are any members of Parliament who have not taken the opportunity to consult their constituents by sending out cards or some form of questionnaire. I know I have done it on numerous occasions. It is an excellent way to get feedback from our constituents. I know for a fact that New Democratic members of Parliament have done it; Conservative members of Parliament have done it; and I and, I know, other Liberal members of Parliament have done it. It is a good thing to do, reaching out to our constituents in many different forms.

I will share with the House some of the ways I do it. I have used cards, even protest cards at times. I have had questionnaires go into my riding with 40 or 50 questions. Sometimes they are just simple yes or no questions. Sometimes I am asking for an opinion on a list of subjects. It really varies. The reason I do it is that even though I knock on doors and go to many different types of events and meet all sorts of people at my office or at a local restaurant, that does not guarantee in any way that we are reaching the bulk of our

constituents. Changing our democratic system is one of those issues on which we should do whatever we can to reach out to Canadians.

What have we done? We all know that the Prime Minister indicated prior to the election that this system needed to be changed and that if we were elected to government we would fight for that change. I like to think that we have been very aggressive in making sure that Canadians are afforded that opportunity.

● (1040)

I would like to see a greater sense of co-operation. If members of the House understand and appreciate how much the public desires this change, then there should be a great sense of co-operation to ensure that it takes place. I do not question whether it is Prime Minister, the minister responsible, the parliamentary secretary, or members from all sides of the House who genuinely want to see that change. We saw a demonstration of that last spring.

We have standing committees of the House, which typically have a majority of government members. When there is a majority government, there is typically a majority of government members on a committee. Through discussions and a debate in the chamber, the government, on this particular issue, acknowledged and agreed that we did not need to have a majority and that it would be in our best interests to make sure that there was all-party representation. Ultimately, we had minority membership on that committee.

I would like to echo many of the words of our Minister of Democratic Institutions. She has clearly indicated that the work put in by each and every member of that committee has been truly amazing. We recognize that. In our caucus, the amount of time sacrificed by the committee members, during the summer months, while we are sitting in the House, and in evenings, is valued and appreciated. It truly is.

The committee travelled and met with Canadians in all regions of our country. As one member of the House, I truly appreciate the efforts of each and every member who served on that special standing committee.

They came up with a report. I have not had an opportunity to read the entire report, but I look forward to reading more of it, as our minister has encouraged our caucus colleagues to do. I suspect that the report will get a very good reading by all members of Parliament. I believe that will apply to many individual Canadians who are really following this issue.

The calibre and quality of presenters was incredible. I would like to thank the hundreds of presenters who came before the standing committee, whether here in Ottawa or in one of the many different regions of our country where meetings took place. I compliment each and every one of those presenters for the sacrifice they made in taking the time to share their understanding and knowledge of this very important issue.

Now we have a report, which I appreciate. However, I believe there is still more that we can do, just as the Minister of Democratic Institutions is saying. She has taken the MyDemocracy.ca concept. As opposed to trying to press down and say that it is a bad idea, which is what we are hearing from the opposition, we want to see further interest in this topic. The opposition should be supportive of the idea.

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We see that, and I made reference to it earlier. Members of Parliament of all political stripes will often use questions and surveys. That is exactly what the government is doing on this issue. People at 15 million addresses have been advised through the mail that there is a wonderful opportunity to be engaged on a great issue, in a great debate that we are having here in Canada on democratic reform.

●(1045)

Those cards will hopefully cause a good number of Canadians to either phone or go to the website. The more Canadians who participate, the better.

When I say Canadians, I am also including permanent residents. One does not need to have Canadian citizenship to participate in the survey. I would estimate that about 1.5 million people who have landed call Canada home, and many of them will be citizens even before the next election.

We all should feel good about our democratic system. We should all have a say in it. We need to be inclusive in the process. That is why I was a bit surprised by some of the statements on this issue. I do not believe that the members of the standing committee ever asked a presenter if he or she was a Canadian citizen, at least I hope not. We should not be asking that question of an individual who wants to fill out the survey.

I will acknowledge that I am not the best person to devise a questionnaire that would go on the Internet. I have opinions, and I have experience. I have sent a litany of questionnaires, surveys, and cards over my 20-plus years as a parliamentarian. Ninety-five per cent of those questions were developed by me, myself, and I after working with constituents to get a sense of what questions I might want to ask to get an understanding of what is taking place on topical issues at both the national and provincial levels.

We all have opinions. The NDP member who spoke before me said he would ask if people are Canadian citizens. I would not ask that question. It is not for me or that member to make that determination. We might have an opinion, but we have professional organizations that have expertise that we might not necessarily have as MPs. I like to think that we are very knowledgeable, but there is a certain level of expertise I would like to see that would ensure that as many Canadians as possible are engaged.

If I sent a direct letter to my constituents that they could mail back to me, I would get a 5% to 7% return rate. There is a difference between sending an envelope in which they can put their results versus if there is no envelope. It all has an impact.

About 50% of people do not want to be identified on questionnaires and will not put a return address. The other half will include a return address. I take all into consideration in one form or another. What I might publish might be somewhat more targeted. At the end of the day, I want to ensure that as much as possible, the results reflect what my constituents believe on the issues I have brought to their attention.

I suggest that we look at the design of MyDemocracy.ca. Some questions have arisen in the media and on social media about whether the results of this exercise will be statistically valid. The answer to that is yes.

●(1050)

MyDemocracy.ca was designed by social and statistics scientists from Vox Pop Labs, which has launched similar engagement applications all over the world.

Some from across the way mock it. I have more faith in the science of this issue and the individuals who actually can deliver results and have a proven record.

I would challenge other members on their personal credentials, as I have. I acknowledge that I might not be the best person to develop it. That is why I have confidence in those individuals who have the experience to do a thorough job.

All the questions we see on MyDemocracy.ca were developed in collaboration with the government and reviewed by an academic advisory panel.

The government chose to work with Vox Pop Labs, because the company has a proven track record when it comes to using large sample data to draw valid empirical conclusions.

Members of Parliament have held town halls in ridings across the country to hear directly the views of their constituents and have submitted individual written reports of input they received.

Further, the Minister of Democratic Institutions and her parliamentary secretary have travelled to every province and territory to hear the views of Canadians on the future of our voting system.

It has been very thorough. I held two town halls on the issue. I made it very well known, with cards and phone messaging, that I was holding these town halls. I appreciated those individuals who showed up. In total, I believe there were maybe 40 to 60 people in two town halls on this issue.

The Conservative member across the way heckled, "big group". I do not underestimate the constituents I represent. If 50 show up for a town hall, I appreciate each and every one of them, and I trust that the member across the way would do likewise. I am hoping he did not try to demean my constituents. I am sure he did not.

Having said that, what I know is that to get a better reflection of what my constituents want, I welcome the card that has been sent out by the Government of Canada. I will encourage my constituents to get engaged with MyDemocracy.ca.

I am grateful that we had a standing committee that went to every region, including the city of Winnipeg. I am grateful that we had a Minister of Democratic Institutions and her parliamentary secretary go to every province and territory of our country to seek opinions and advice.

Routine Proceedings

I believe that this government has been true to its commitment to reach out and work with Canadians to try to get a better understanding of the type of democracy Canadians want. It would have been wrong to be completely dependent on a standing committee or on town halls or on a questionnaire. I think we have to have a multi-faceted approach to dealing with this issue. I believe that if we consult and work with our constituents, if we allow the standing committees to do their work, if we allow the ministers and the government to do its job, we will be in a good position to make a decision going forward, if it is desired by all members of Parliament.

Hopefully, what we will see are some political parties recognizing that if we truly believe in democratic reform, the best thing we could be doing on this particular file is, in fact, encouraging those individuals to participate in MyDemocracy.ca.

I would challenge any member of this House to come to Winnipeg North, and we can knock on 10 doors and see what they say to me in the form of a question.

• (1055)

If we ask, “Do you want first past the post, a ranked ballot, or some hybrid system?”, chances are we will have to explain in detail to get the answer. If members were truly honest, they would recognize that the questionnaire being proposed, with the level of expertise we have developed in MyDemocracy.ca, is doing what is in the best interest of all Canadians so that we can have legitimate, true reform.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to this entire speech, and I am dumbfounded. I wish to share with the House that the government asked us, all members of the House, who worked very hard last summer, to host sessions in our constituencies about electoral reform and share with our constituents what some of the various options might be.

I instead held my session in the fall, because everyone who has done this kind of work, which I have done for 40 years, knows that they do not get a good turnout in the summer. I held my session in September, and I am delighted to say that I had 250 people. Two days later, the minister arrived in town and reported that she had 17 people.

I also went to the effort, with my staff, to circulate a survey, asking very simple, straightforward questions, explain the alternatives, and get feedback. We compiled it and presented it to the government.

I find it an affront to my constituents, having done all that work, that now they have to deal with this puffery piece, which does not present to them the same level of honest options.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not know about the member's actual numbers, but 50 or 60 people attended both my town halls, which were actually held in September. I am sure she is not trying to impute motives to my own constituents. I am very proud of the residents of Winnipeg North.

The hon. member might be content with 200 or 300 individuals from her riding. I want to provide many vehicles for my constituents to be engaged in this issue, and I want to see a government being proactive in consulting with Canadians in every region. That is what this government is doing.

I am not settling for two town halls with 50 or 60 of my constituents. I want my constituents engaged. I am promoting that they get engaged on the issue.

• (1100)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has made reference to a panel of academics who were involved in the survey as her defence for the survey being as is, in the order it is, the way it is. We are told that the experts who designed it made it this way. The parliamentary secretary has repeated this statement today. This seems like a dubious assertion to me.

I want to point out, first, that if one goes to the Vox Pop website, it points out that the choice as to wording the questions this way was actually ultimately a government decision. It is on its website.

I have the following question with regard to the panel of experts and the design of the questions.

Number one, did the panel of experts design all the questions, as opposed to some of them? Was it every single one of the questions on this as opposed to some of them?

Number two, did the panel of academics design the questions in the preliminary version of the survey, some of which were dropped from this survey, and if so, what was the basis for changing it?

Number three, which questions did they have a say in removing from the preliminary version and that were not included in this one?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as I have tried to explain, I have had many years of writing questions and having surveys and questionnaires going out to my constituency, and I truly believe that I have done a relatively reasonable job doing questions and surveys. However, I recognize that there is a point when we need to have individuals who bring to the table a certain level of expertise. By using that expertise, we are able to gain a better understanding of what average Canadians truly believe about their democratic system.

Yes/no answers are not the only types of answers. Sometimes we need to dig more deeply, and at the end of the day, I have more faith in the level of expertise that has been brought to the table to develop MyDemocracy.ca than in individual members of Parliament.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I may fall in between extremes here. Every Canadian should go to MyDemocracy.ca. and fill out the form. Then they should contact the minister and the Prime Minister and give them some feedback.

I can accept the point of view of the hon. member that these people were designing a survey of a different type to tease out values. What I find very disturbing is that the key essence of the promise in the Speech from the Throne is premised on an order to make every vote count. Therefore, the key effort here is to ensure that 40% of the vote equals 40% of the seats, something Canadians overwhelmingly agree is a matter of fairness. However, there are not any questions in the survey that tease out a values question of, “Do you think that 40% of the votes should equal 40% of the seats?” The key question before us is omitted in teasing out the values in the survey.

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Would my hon. colleague not agree that there is no harm whatsoever in acceding to this motion and allowing the non-partisan questions that were passed unanimously by the special committee being attached to the survey?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to compliment the leader of the Green Party on her general attitude toward genuinely trying to make a difference. I am somewhat sympathetic to it. In Manitoba, for many years I was one of two MLAs in Manitoba. At one time we would get 18% of the vote and would get that sense of a need for reform.

I have confidence in the types of questions that have been developed, as it has been explained to me. Could there always be additional questions? Could there have been some questions deleted? We could talk about this indefinitely, but as an overall package, I believe the intent is to try to draw out Canadian values toward our democratic system. To that degree, we will see a successful—

The Deputy Speaker: I will try to get two more questions in here. I ask hon. members to be concise with their interventions.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

• (1105)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague just said, what is the harm in adding some questions that deal specifically with the choice that parliamentarians are facing?

The government has promised to bring forward legislation in May on a new voting system. All we have simply said is to take these non-partisan questions that were developed by the best analysts we have on the Hill, which the minister has said do excellent work, and did excellent work. The Liberals, the Conservatives, the New Democrats, and the Bloc agreed to these questions. They ask a simple, respectful, straightforward questions of Canadians. Canadians have no problem understanding them and answering.

Here is the challenge. At the minister's town halls, she never got to the question. People would try to insert it into the conversation, but she kept wanting to back it up, saying never mind voting systems, never mind the way the ballots were cast and counted. Ultimately this is what the government must decide. She never asked.

That is also true of the survey. To say some experts wanted this, when it has been the Liberal pattern on this topic from day one, begs a certain curiosity and unbelievability of what the member is saying. Simply add in the questions to which everyone has agreed. They are good solid questions that will get the Liberals an answer so they can finally put some legislation forward.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, perhaps there is an easier way for me to use what the member said earlier as an example. The member suggested it should be a given, that we should ask people who signed in if they were Canadian citizens. I disagree wholeheartedly with that. Many landed citizens are not citizens today but will be citizens at the time of the next election. I would not want to do something that could potentially discourage them from participating. Are we saying someone has to be a citizen in order to participate?

There is the difference. He has an opinion; I have an opinion. I have faith in the individuals who have been tasked with the

responsibility to draw out the values of democracy in which Canadians believe. I have faith in that system.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned he had a town hall with a total of, I believe 50 people. I had a town hall also. I had 40 people. Even the Prime Minister could only draw 40 members to his town hall. This is the Prime Minister holding a town hall on electoral reform.

The question the Liberals did not put out there, which I did in a householder to over 60,000 households in my riding, was “Do you feel there should be a referendum before any change to Canada's electoral system?” Why not put that simple question out there first? That is the priority question. We can find out if Canadians want to change it, and if so, whether there should be a referendum. Why not do that?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have great deal of experience. Before I answer the question, let us not marginalize the importance of town halls. Whether 10, 15, 300 or even a 1,000 people show up, the numbers do not really matter. The first and most important thing is that members of Parliament extend the opportunity for their constituents to get engaged in town halls.

With respect to the question, if I were to ask a question about whether we should have a referendum on X or Y, generally speaking and depending on the topic, people who will respond to surveys will quite often say “yes” to 30, 40 or 50 different types of referendums.

I understand how questionnaires and surveys work. I used to be in opposition too. With MyDemocracy.ca, we are reaching out to all Canadians and affording them the chance to share their values.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House, and I also want to inform my colleagues, and you of course, that I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherbrooke. This just goes to show that this really is not a partisan issue, since the member for Sherbrooke is an NDP member, although a worthy successor to the hon. Jean Charest, who used to be a Conservative leader and minister. This shows we can take a non-partisan approach.

As we gather here in the House today, once again we are witnessing another instalment of the Liberal government's blatant improvisation, and on such a delicate and fragile issue as electoral reform.

I would remind the House that, in the throne speech, the Governor General uttered the words that would lead to the exercise that brings us to where we are today. He said that 2015 would be the last election under the old voting system. What are we dealing with today?

Routine Proceedings

I remember clearly when the Governor General made that statement. I was in the Senate lobby with a number of members of the House of Commons. Right next to me was my friend, the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with whom I have little in common politically, given the nature of his commitments as compared to ours. However, I have the utmost respect and admiration for his genuine political commitment. For 20 years he has been recognized across Canada as perhaps the leading academic expert on constitutionality, elections, the electoral process, and politics. He earned a doctorate in political science in France, and, as we know, he is the former leader of the Liberal Party. He was quite surprised and quite pleased. In fact, I have that wrong. He was not surprised, but he was pleased to see that the government, through the Governor General, was committed to change.

I need hardly remind the House that the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs made his own commitment in 2012, when he said that if we wanted to change the electoral system in Canada, then all signs pointed to a referendum, given our Canadian experience.

It was not us, the big bad Conservatives, who said that. It was the current Liberal minister, a senior minister in the current Prime Minister's government. The ball was in his court. We were very surprised to see this commitment because it was a major change.

The Liberals continue to remind everyone that it was an election promise and that more than 60% of people who voted for political parties wanted change. Need I remind them that in the Liberals' 97-page election platform there were three sentences about this promise. It cannot be said that it was a major commitment. There were five televised leaders' debates during the election campaign where the leaders could address the issues they felt were the most important. How many times was this subject raised by the Liberal leader? Zero. Not even once.

The only time this subject was ever raised was by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, the leader of the Green Party. The Liberals never made this a major issue. Nevertheless, it is an extremely important one because making changes to our electoral system means changing the most important institution in any democracy, since the electoral system determines who will sit in the House of Commons, who will form the government, and who will rule the state. Every other decision, whether we are talking about the budget, defence, foreign affairs, health, transport, or anything else, stems from the electoral system. As a result, the electoral system is the backbone of any democracy. If by chance the government wants to change the system, we, the Conservatives, like the Minister of Foreign Affairs, believe that it must be done by referendum because we politicians are all in a position of conflict of interest in this regard.

We are all human. Naturally, any time we make a decision we think about how it will affect us personally. For anyone who is involved in politics, there is nothing more personal than the electoral system. That is why we are fundamentally in a position of conflict of interest, and that is why we want to hold a referendum. I will come back to that later.

The Governor General made that announcement, but for six months, the government dragged its feet on telling us what its game plan was. Since we know that it wants to get this done in this term,

and that it will take at least two years to change the electoral system, time is running out, and still it took them six months just to announce that a parliamentary committee will be formed to study the issue.

● (1110)

Here is the second piece of evidence of this government's improvisation: under pressure, primarily from the NDP but also the Green Party, the government finally agreed to change the membership of the committee so that it would not be partisan and the government would no longer have a majority. Some folks might say that after what happened with the majority report, perhaps the government would have changed its position if it had known how that was going to turn out, but that is another story.

Now the Liberals are improvising once again by changing the number of members on this parliamentary committee. What did we do? At my leader's invitation, I had the great privilege of sitting on that parliamentary committee, with such eminent and esteemed members as my friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who is right beside me.

I always have a hard time naming the federal ridings, as some of the names are so long. If we could use the electoral reform as an opportunity to simplify those names, everyone would be happy, myself included.

My 12 colleagues and I spent several months working long and hard on this issue. I would like to say hello to those who are here today: the five Liberal Party members; the official opposition members; the NDP members, with whom I really enjoyed working; the Bloc Québécois member, a former colleague of mine from the National Assembly; and the member for Victoria. We criss-crossed Canada to hear Canadians' thoughts on electoral reform. The results are pretty impressive, as is the amount of work that went into this.

The report that came out last week covered 57 meetings during which we heard from 196 witnesses. Another 567 people participated in the town halls that were held in 18 cities across Canada. The Victoria and Vancouver events were packed. Over 70 people registered. Attendance was not quite as high in other places. I have to admit that, in my hometown, Quebec City, barely 10 people came out. People are interested in this issue, and those who are interested are really very interested, but we have to recognize that not everybody cares about this issue.

The first step of this process consisted in consulting Canadians to see what they think. Nearly 600 people attended 18 town hall meetings from coast to coast to coast. There was even an e-consultation, the central theme of our discussion today. Exactly 22,247 people took part in that. Let us look at the numbers: 567 people attended town hall meetings and 22,000 people engaged in e-consultations.

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On the government's suggestion, a number of MPs held kitchen meetings, as we say in Quebec, to see what people thought. There were 172 reports by members, plus two others, for a total of 174. An estimated 12,000 Canadians or more had their say at these meetings. That is great. Again, many people participated, and I would briefly add that some of them may have taken part in every form of this exercise. The bottom line is that a lot of people were engaged in the process. The NDP members also held their own consultations, in which 37,000 people participated online or responded to mailings.

However, we, the Conservatives, asked our fellow Canadians in 59 of our ridings what they thought. We asked them this question: if there were a change, should it be decided by a referendum? How many Canadians answered? With all due respect for previous exercises, it was not 567, nor 22,000, nor 12,000, nor 37,000 Canadians who answered, but 81,000. With all due respect for my colleagues, we had the highest score, as they say in hockey. We reached the most Canadians and obtained their opinions.

What 90% of these Canadians, or 73,740 of them to be precise, told us was that if by chance the government wants to make a change, it should hold a referendum. That is what the committee heard and what it identified in its report, the majority report in which the Conservatives, Bloc Québécois, NDP, and the Green Party asked that a referendum be held. That is the solution because we, the politicians, have a conflict of interest. If we want to change the underpinning of the entire electoral system, the government must ask Canadians what they think.

We submitted this report, and the government tried to play it down and set it aside, even make a mockery of it, while insulting those who had prepared it. The government apologized, and so much the better.

• (1115)

However, the reality is that if the government ever wants to change anything, it has to go through a referendum and not this new improvised consultation called MyDemocracy.ca. Canadians deserve much better when it comes to electoral reform.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the work that he did with us in committee. As he knows, we heard from witnesses from across the country. If we are going to change the electoral system, we need to find a way to ensure that Canadians are heavily involved in the process. Unfortunately, the committee was unable to do that, although many Canadians were involved in the work we did in committee, which was very well done.

Does my hon. colleague understand that there is still a lack of consensus with regard to how to make a change? The NDP publicly announced that it was in favour of a referendum. Then, the party immediately turned around and indicated in the supplementary report that it had serious concerns about a referendum. This shows that there is still work to be done to get Canadians involved in these fundamental issues.

• (1120)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer that question and to point out the great work that the member accomplished, along with our other 11 committee colleagues. He and I often had the opportunity to talk at the committee meetings, and we

really enjoyed ourselves. I thank him and commend him on his excellent French.

If there is one thing that everyone can agree on, it is the fact that Canadians need to have the last word on this. Yes, we need to take the time to explain to Canadians what the issues are. However, when we held our own consultations and asked citizens whether they wanted to be consulted on this subject, 90% of them said that there should be a referendum. All of the polls also indicate that 70% of Canadians want a referendum if by chance there is a change. If there is one thing everyone agrees on, it is that there must be a referendum.

Technically speaking, we could hold a referendum, make the necessary changes, and establish a new voting system, if that is what Canadians want. However, we should let Canadians decide by holding a referendum.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Conservative party.

This is a somewhat strange situation. All the opposition parties worked together to get the Liberal party to keep its promise. Normally the four parties, the Green party, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP, and the Conservative party, do not have much in common. However everyone is in agreement on the Liberal party's promise.

In the last election, the Prime Minister said that this was the last time the old system would be used, calling it out of date, broken, and unfair. All the parties worked on this, and made concessions and other things. However, the ongoing problem is that it is not parliament or the opposition but rather the government that is refusing to keep its own promises. This is a situation that may be unique in Canadian history.

Together, we can do something very important for our democracy and our citizens. It is a sign of respect to listen to what is happening with respect to the real questions, like the ones we have recommended to the government. Is it just a small sign, or is it an effort to respect the intelligence of the citizens of this country?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on the quality of his French and his efforts. He was also a member of the committee.

This shows what we have been saying from the beginning: it smells of improvisation from beginning to end. Since the findings of our report do not suit the Liberal party, which would like preferential voting, it says we did not do enough consulting with Canadians. That is preposterous, even farcical.

That is why, on page 179, we find recommendation no. 9, which clearly states that Canadians have to be consulted by means of a referendum that will require them to choose between the "current system" box and the "preferential vote" box. Canadians are intelligent and in a much better position than us politicians to decide which is the best electoral system.

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[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a global statistical specialist for a business for several years, and so I can say absolutely that the results of this survey will be meaningless in terms of saying what Canadians want, for a variety of reasons including the fact that anybody on the planet who knows a Canadian postal code could answer and answer multiple times, and the Liberals are excluding people who did not include their personal data.

I want to ask the member about the content of the survey. Certainly the committee talked about this. The members of the committee talked about what the questions should be. Why does the member think the Liberals went ahead with their own questions without waiting for the committee's questions?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it is quite simple. It is because the Liberals are not happy with the conclusion of the committee's survey. We travelled from coast to coast to coast, but not a lot of people talked about preferential votes. That is why the government designed something to steer it the way it wants. Canadian people are more intelligent than the Liberals think and that is why people should decide in a referendum what is best for our electoral system instead of following the Liberal platform that says it should be a preferential vote, which is not good for Canadians or democracy. The best way to know where people stand is to ask them in a referendum.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to take the floor after my hon. colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. I thank him for graciously sharing his speaking time so that I can address the House on this extremely important subject that I care so much about.

Prior to the 2015 election, I had the opportunity to act as the deputy critic for democratic reform. I was pleased to learn a good deal on that occasion, and I continue to follow the developments in this area very closely. I followed in particular what happened during the last election, when the Liberals made a promise that could not be any clearer. We know that other promises were more nuanced, and unfortunately, Canadian citizens who are a little more cynical might have expected them not to be kept.

However, in the case of electoral reform, we were promised that the 2015 election would be the last one under the current system. That was a clear, plain, and specific promise. It could not have been clearer or more obvious that the government was promising to change the electoral system.

The Liberals had the support of a majority of Canadians to act on that promise. In fact, that is what the government mentioned at the start of its mandate. It mentioned the number of votes it had received, demonstrating that 60% of Canadians in the last general election had spoken, one way or another, in favour of reforming the voting system.

It was in that context that the committee was created. I want to salute that committee, and I also want to thank its members for their tireless work. The committee kindled a lot of hope in me, and I think

in many of my colleagues. All the parties succeeded in reaching agreement, including those that are not officially recognized in the House. This committee managed to produce a report that contained clear and specific recommendations.

I was very hopeful about the follow-up to this report, until I heard the response of the Minister of Democratic Institutions the day that the report was tabled, on December 1. That response was very hostile and very surprising.

One might have expected the minister to accept the report and its recommendations, since it was the Liberals themselves, with all-party support, who agreed to set up this committee. This committee produced a report containing recommendations that the minister could have accepted and decided to implement. Instead, she criticized and insulted the committee's members. It is a real pity, and it has diminished all the hopes I had on this matter.

The other thing that has dashed my hopes of seeing electoral reform materialize is the survey that is online right now. That survey comes from the Minister of Democratic Institutions, who feels the need to engage in consultations one more time. The work of the committee that was created does not seem to satisfy the minister. She clearly said that she was not satisfied with its work, incidentally insulting all her Liberal colleagues who sat on that committee. She said it was not good enough for her, and that she had to conduct another consultation, using another approach to try to get the opinion of Canadians.

Her way of doing so is completely shameful. The entirety of the survey has been ridiculed by experts and by Canadians. It has been ridiculed by the people who took this survey on the Internet. Those people agreed to take it in good faith. They saw it as an opportunity to make another contribution to this debate. They were very disappointed and dissatisfied with the quality of the questions.

I will give the example of a person called Rory, who commented in English:

[*English*]

I just did this survey, and then at the end I was thinking I might have been doing a Facebook personality survey. Very much like a pop quiz type thing you find on FB all the time, like what your sign is, very disappointed with the bubble gum type personality of the survey, crazy that this came from the government. Silly. Insulting. Useless

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

I think that is a good summary of the opinion of most of the Canadians who took this survey.

We are therefore asking the House to adopt report 2 of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which we are debating today; this report was first adopted in committee.

It asks the Minister of Democratic Institutions to replace the survey questions or to add to them. That may not be what she will do if the report does get adopted. We ask that she at least add the questions discussed in committee, which were proposed by the Library of Parliament analysts who were in attendance.

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Very specific, direct and clear questions could be included right now in the questionnaire on MyDemocracy.ca. That is what we are requesting today. Indeed, considering the extent to which the questions have been mocked, this would seem to be the appropriate course of action. I hope that the government will listen to reason and choose the right way to improve the questionnaire. What we are proposing to the government today is an improvement to the questionnaire that at the moment is the laughing stock of many people in the country. We are giving it the chance to take the right approach, the one that is appropriate if we want to conduct proper consultations.

The problem with the questionnaire is that the data collected, which we hope will subsequently be published, will be almost worthless. Allow me to explain. Respondents are being asked for personal information at the end of the questionnaire. If they decide not to provide that information to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, their views will simply be rejected. Their opinion will not be taken into account.

That is absurd, because respondents are being required to provide personal information. They say there is no obligation to do so, but if respondents do not, their survey result will be rejected and not considered. How can they tell these people they are engaging in consultations when they are forcing them to give their personal information so their opinion is taken into account?

The other serious problem is the worldwide accessibility of the MyDemocracy.ca site. Anyone on the planet can access it, even many times. That is completely nonsensical.

Most surveys conducted by academics or even students doing a school project are organized on a more rigorous scientific method, so as to arrive at reliable conclusions.

This survey, organized by the government of Canada, does not even meet the expectations for scientific rigour. When a government conducts consultations or surveys, we expect it to follow a rigorous approach. In my opinion, the data collected in this survey will be absolutely worthless.

It is a shame, because it could have definitely produced better results. I get the impression that the Minister of Democratic Institutions decided to hold another consultation because she was not satisfied with the responses obtained thus far. What is more, I think that is the Liberal government's strategy on this subject, for it has no intention of keeping its promise to Canadians.

As long as the Liberals do not have the answers they want, that is, their choice of electoral system or no change at all, they are going to continue holding consultations. That is my impression. They will keep on asking the question until they get the answer they want. It is unspeakably sad.

The consultations that my House of Commons colleagues and I carried out in our ridings and the evidence provided to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform led to some pretty clear conclusions and a broad consensus. The vast majority want the new system to include some form of proportional representation. That is what the Special Committee on Electoral Reform's report indicated. Apparently that is not the answer the government was expecting.

• (1135)

Because the government did not get the answer it was expecting, it decided to consult some more, to ask the question again. Maybe if it gets the answer it wants someday, we will see the light at the end of the tunnel and an electoral reform that will give the Liberals what they want.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for his speech.

[*English*]

When we went across the country and spoke with academics and Canadians, what was impressed upon all committee members was the complexity of our governance ecosystem and how changing an electoral system would effectively change many other aspects of the way Canadians related with their Parliament, the way governments were formed and dissolved, and all other aspects of our political ecosystem. It is tough to engage Canadians on these complex questions. Would the member not agree that continuing to sloganeer and make arguments that allow one side to argue right past the other is being disingenuous to Canadians? Would he not agree that engaging them in an online activity that allows them to understand the values that underpin our democratic institutions is an important process in this engagement process, which has to continue to be undertaken in order for Canadians to be engaged in this conversation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I only wish I could have supported this new consultation and congratulated the government on an excellent, sound initiative that will produce clear, reliable results for parliamentarians. Unfortunately, the Liberals' online consultation is anything but sound science. That is what I am against. It is not a good survey with meaningful questions.

That is exactly what the minister criticizes all the time. She says the committee did not give her clear, direct answers that everyone agreed on. How is her survey going to produce clear, direct answers when her questions are neither clear nor direct? She cannot expect to get clear, direct answers if she asks bogus questions.

The questions are useless, and the whole survey misses the sound science mark, so the data will be useless. I would have been happy to support this survey if it had been done properly and if its results could at least be considered reliable.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I found interesting about the entire situation was this. The then leader of the Liberal Party campaigned on this. He then became Prime Minister. Now we hear concerns raised by the Liberals about complaints to their Prime Minister. That is really where those questions should be directed. They in effect got this process going. It was well-noted that it was the opposition parties that agreed to work toward a political objective of the Liberal Party, this being the last first-past-the-post vote as the Prime Minister promised.

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We worked on this side of the House. We went across the country to work on an objective that was politically noted in the campaign by the Prime Minister, and public money was used for that. Now the Liberals are complaining, but they need to be doing that at the caucus meetings. Maybe it is happening, I do not know, because a thorough examination is not happening in the chamber.

Would it not have made sense to at least consult the committee about what type of questions public taxpayers should pay for democracy since its members travelled the country together?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Indeed, that would have made a lot of sense. The committee members would have been happy to participate and give their opinions on the questions the Minister of Democratic Institutions wanted to put in her survey. I am sure the committee members, across party lines, would have been happy to be consulted. Considering everything they heard during the months of consultations, they would not have refused the minister's offer if she had asked them to suggest questions to be included in the survey she was planning for December. The committee members would have been quite happy and would have definitely helped draft the questions.

That did not happen, which is why today we are debating a motion for the adoption of the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. That committee had actually suggested some questions to the minister. Those questions are much more valuable and much more direct. They would have solicited meaningful responses and results. It would have been much better if the survey had been done thoughtfully.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Montcalm.

This is the first time in a while that I have stood in the House to speak about electoral reform. I used to speak about it quite often in the last Parliament. If it is okay with everyone else, I would like to start with a story. It is my own personal development around this issue. I do not think my situation is that much different from any other Canadian who may not have had a distinct interest in this topic or an interest in changing the system. Here is why.

In 2004, I was elected as a member of Parliament. When I was 12 years old, I wanted one job in life, and that was to be a member of Parliament. I wanted to represent my riding, my colleagues, my brothers, my sisters, and my family. I wanted to be the representative of my home. I take no greater pride than in being that person who currently represents the office, and I respect it greatly.

To me, the essential part of democracy was about direct representation. I was directly elected to represent my constituents. By way of example, recently the Coast Guard announced it was going to remove the oil from a tanker that sank many years ago. If we had a system in our country where everybody in the House was chosen by one person to sit and represent the whole country—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The interpretation system does not seem to be working.

[*English*]

We will continue on, and we will ensure we are fully operational.

Mr. Scott Simms: Being lost in translation is nothing new to me, Mr. Speaker. As I have said, I have a lot of experience being a politician, and it happens on occasion that I have an accent, but I will try to tone it down just a little bit. Perhaps that may have been a problem.

Mr. Speaker, I am a direct representative, and I love the fact that I represent this Parliament directly, and to me, that is sacrosanct.

Why would a person choose people to sit in the House when local issues, like the one I just expressed, would never be addressed or might only be addressed some day down the road when it is too late?

From 2004 straight up to 2010, I was a person who believed that every member of the House should be directly responsible to one riding and one riding only. However, the leader of the party a few years ago named me critic for electoral reform, and I got to speak to a group of people from Fair Vote Canada. I also spoke to another group from Leadnow. We had a fabulous discussion about representation in this country. Should votes of an individual be counted? Should the representation in this House reflect the general vote of this country? That is a legitimate question. Why should a person feel like they have wasted a vote because they have voted for a party that is in a small corner of the House, which we were at that time?

I was struck by several elements of this. As I was talking about it, I became more open to the idea of introducing perhaps some type of proportionality, which would be good for this country by better reflecting where it wanted to go, just by parties and party policy, not from the direct representatives. I am not saying that I endorse that position, but I certainly became interested in the concept, thanks to people who engaged in the discussion. Here we are, to this day, having this discussion and the myriad of ways that we can go.

I believe that we need to speak to Canadians in terms of their values, as was done in many other countries, for example, New Zealand and Australia. Many countries throughout Europe have engaged in this, and many Canadian provinces.

I had the distinct honour of visiting British Columbia to meet with a lot of people involved in its campaign to bring in STV. I met with many people from Ontario who had a referendum on MMP and discussed the effects of that referendum. I have also spoken to people in P.E.I. who have done the same about the systems.

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I truly believe that this discussion needs to branch out into many areas that have not been discussed. I can tell members that I went to my riding with a question when I had my forum. I asked what system they wanted. Did they want AV, STV, RU-STV, or MMP? My constituents looked at me as said, “You know, with all those letters, it's a lot of BS quite frankly”. However, this is essentially what we need to do. We need to ask, “What do you want?”

Everyone needs to take the journey that I did, where we go from strictly, “I want everyone in this House to represent one riding and one riding only”, to a broader perspective. When I spoke to people, they gave me a perspective that I had not thought about before. I was not rigid. Before anyone in this House accuses me of flip-flopping, which I think is a ridiculous term, this is a journey for all of us to take.

In all of the provinces, the committee held a total of 57 meetings, and heard 196 expert witnesses, 567 open-mike participants, and received 22,000 responses to surveys. This is a good step.

I will recite to members a favourite quote of mine from the report, which is on page 2. I have managed to read past page 2, by the way, but page 2 really struck me.

There is a gentleman by the name of Thomas Axworthy. I have met him before and am always interested in his writing on how we can progress as a nation, as a federation. We are a large country with few people in an international perspective, and so we have to have a system that strengthens that federation. This is the other part of that journey that I have discovered. He said:

...there is no perfect electoral system. There are advantages and disadvantages to all of them, and it is really a question of values, of differing perspectives,

This is the differing perspective I received when I became the critic.

• (1145)

Not everyone in this country has the benefit of being here, but we certainly do realize that benefit; all of us do. Mr. Axworthy also said, “It is basically a political process of deciding your purposes and values and what you value most”. It is about what we value the most.

I still believe that I want to represent one riding. I still want to represent the people who live in the place that I call home. I have done it for 12 years. I will do it for as long as they deem necessary, and at that point upon reflection I will call it one of the greatest honours anyone in this House can receive.

When I had my forum, something very interesting happened. People started exchanging ideas about where we should go. They said they have a system called MMP, in which two thirds of the House is directly elected like we are now. One third is what is called PR, proportional representation; and there are certain variations of that, by the way. Essentially, that would result in a better reflection of the national vote. There was one gentleman in the audience who said to me, “I have a question for you, sir. There is something that no one is asking in this. You keep talking about members of the House, who they are, where they're from, what political group they're with, and how many seats they represent, etc. No one has ever described to me what the ballot will look like”.

Here is one of the arguments that arose when I looked at MMP and I thought that maybe this is not a bad idea. One side of the ballot would say that the voters want this person to represent them in the House of Commons; the other side would say which party should lead this country, which party should lead this federation. I am not endorsing MMP, but, by God, that is a valid point.

Every point is valid. Should we have ridings that have multi-members, bigger ridings where everyone gets to go on a ballot? We could have two or three people from the same party on that ballot. I may not agree with that, but there is an element of logic in it that makes sense. If we do not engage with Canadians on values, then we are never going to see the logic of a new system that creates a better country. That is what we need to do.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to my colleague, because I am generally polite and let women speak first.

I have a question for my colleague opposite, who spoke about the importance of holding consultations and of the special committee. I even had the opportunity and the privilege to travel around Canada with some of our colleagues opposite.

The member suggests that we must continue to discuss it. However, someone decided a throne speech would be a good time to tell every Canadian it would be the last time we would have a first past the post election. The member spoke about the importance of taking one's time. He even referred to New Zealand, which, by the way, consulted its citizens for 10 years. That was one of the first things we pointed out, but the government wanted to move quickly, and it did. Nevertheless, it took six months to set up a committee, which was then changed as a result of pressure from the opposition parties.

My question is simple. The committee did great work. After criss-crossing Canada and hearing from a multitude of experts, it arrived at a conclusion: there must be a referendum to ensure that all Canadians can weigh in on the matter.

Would the member agree to put a very simple question to Canadians in a referendum, one that gives a choice between proportional representation and the status quo, that is first past the post, so we will know where they stand on this issue?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, there are also many jurisdictions that did not have a referendum. There are also many jurisdictions that had a longer conversation, and he pointed to New Zealand in this regard. There are also jurisdictions that had a much smaller conversation and made that choice.

Electoral reform was discussed in the election campaign, and I say that there was an interest and hunger to have something that would strengthen this federation, as I spoke about earlier.

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That is the point of this. I have no problems discussing the idea of a referendum, but the problem is that everyone is racing to the bottom or ultimate solution to this without engaging the values of this country on what we want to do.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I apologize if my speech is interrupting his heckling, but I will continue.

Here is the situation. That party never engaged the electorate on this. I was there when the Conservatives did the Fair Elections Act. I use air quotes because it is quite comical. The Conservatives never once said anything about a referendum. That is #disingenuous, if they want to call that a Twitter campaign activity.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear the member across the way speak in the House. It has been a pleasure working with him for many years in this place.

There is one profound point that my constituents, and in fact, people from right across my province, have raised many times. It is that they are fed up with the process in which less than 40% of the vote receives an even larger majority government. That is what happened with this government. We again have a mass majority government that received less than 40% of the vote. It is clear and simple. People have told me there has to be a better way to do it.

We have had a lot of great discussions with groups like Fair Vote Canada. Professors have talked to me about systems in other countries. People were free to fill out, with no pressure, a questionnaire giving some of the options. The committee did a sensible review. What is so upsetting is that we now have the valuable information to simply make the decision at the right time, and yet we have this nonsensical survey that has people incensed.

Would the member agree with me that we should just proceed to begin making amendments?

Mr. Scott Simms: In the spirit of mutual admiration, Mr. Speaker, I say the same about my experience working with the member and others on electoral reform in the past, including the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley and the leader of the Green Party as well. We have had many great discussions.

To the member, that is the valid point that we are trying to seek here with representation in the House. That is why we committed to making the previous election the last one held under the first past the post system.

The member may not like a lot of the details about the survey, but the survey is good in that it goes back to what Thomas Axworthy said, which was to explore the values of where we want to go and not get caught up in all the details first. The details will follow, but let—

● (1155)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Montcalm.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to work with members from both sides of the House during the work of the special committee. This morning, I find it rather

ironic that a Bloc Québécois MP is sharing his time with a government member.

Experts came and told us that changing the voting system would allow us to have a consensus democracy and change the way politics is done in this legislative assembly of the House of Commons. It would allow for a collaborative approach. This morning, ironically, it is the government side that is talking about collaboration and fair play.

Every parliamentarian that is part of the executive branch is a representative of the people first. I want to address those who are not part of the executive: the legislators, the representatives of the people. This House is the repository of what we call parliamentary democracy. I would like those members to express their true convictions.

The Bloc Québécois has said from the start that it is in favour of change, but not just any change. We will not accept a voting system that diminishes the weight of the Quebec nation and relegates it to a geographic entity only. The report respects that. Together with the Conservatives, the NDP, and the Green Party, we came to a consensus. This debate must not be the sole purview of politicians, insiders, and experts. It must belong to the people if it is to be meaningful. It is up to the people to decide.

Obviously, our Liberal colleagues are having a hard time supporting that position, because, before the committee even began sitting, the executive had completely ruled out the possibility of holding a referendum. That puts the Liberal members in an awkward position. The minister is rising in the House to trivialize and discount the idea of a referendum by saying that it is an outdated way of doing things, when in fact it would allow the population to retake control over a debate as important as determining the new rules of a parliamentary democracy. It is no wonder members on the government side are having difficulty distancing themselves from that. That is unfortunate, but it is the reality. What upsets voters the most is the fact that their elected representatives are kowtowing to the executive.

● (1200)

When we consult people, they often criticize this way of doing politics. They want their MP to vote the way their constituents would have them vote.

It is also ironic to see that the House of Commons, which initiated a reform, still has a long way to go to catch up to the Senate, a chamber that is considered to be antiquated. Right now, the Senate is treating its independent members a lot better than this chamber is.

However, the report that was tabled does offer some hope. A consensus was reached on recommendation no. 11 and the discussions surrounding it. It reads:

The Committee recommends that electoral system reform be accompanied by a comprehensive study of the effects on other aspects of Canada's "governance ecosystem"...

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That means that, if we make any changes to the voting system or the Canada Elections Act, we must also look at what effect it might have on political party financing and parliamentary procedure in order to ensure that we do not create two tiers of political parties or parliamentarians. The committee was very clear about the fact that the majority of the testimony given by those who wanted change was in favour of proportional representation.

So how do we deal with this? Committee members were not there for themselves; they were there to hear what people had to say. Every member had his or her own point of view. Initially, the Liberal Party was somewhat in favour of a proportional system; the Conservative Party wanted the status quo; the Green Party and the New Democratic Party preferred mixed-member proportional or single transferable vote, STV; and the Bloc Québécois wanted a proportional system, but not just any proportional system because, as I said earlier, it could affect our status.

The witnesses were not unanimous, but the majority of those who appeared before the committee advocated for a proportional system and a referendum to let the people decide. The idea was that a referendum would have people choose between the status quo and a proportional system. Everyone agreed on that regardless of where they stood and the outcome they wanted. Starting from scratch, the committee concluded that there must be a referendum to ask all Canadians from coast to coast if they prefer the status quo or a proportional system. That was our guiding principle. Those people over there like to talk principles; well, this is the one that guides our majority report.

Let us keep at it, because we need to get to the next phase. What will be the terms? We have been using the current system for 150 years, but what will the new proportional system look like? How big will the ridings be? All these questions will be considered in the second phase of the consultations. We believe this phase of the process should take place during the 2019 election, after a referendum. That makes more sense than a bogus, vacuous survey.

• (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the members from Newfoundland and Labrador who spoke previously mentioned a number of things in terms of a way of movement. I thought his speech was pretty good. Unfortunately, he criticized the notion of flip-flops, despite the fact that he has called ministers the minister of flip-flops in this House.

Sadly, this becomes a problem for the Liberal Party in terms of credibility. The Liberals are the ones who brought this process through an electoral promise. Then it is the fault of the rest of Parliament that we have to follow through with that because they have a majority, and there is actually sincere interest in this country to have some type of electoral reform, and now it is the fault of the opposition.

I ask my colleague, why is it suddenly everybody else's fault, including the general public, who are now looking at the questionnaire out there, by the mere fact that the Prime Minister was the one who brought this forward? Why is now everybody else's fault, except for the Liberals, who are doing this themselves? That is a problem.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that the interpretation was the problem. Perhaps it was the hon. member's thinking that was not clear.

I am not saying that it is everybody else's fault. I am just saying that there is a way to respect the consensus that was reached by this committee.

The fact that the Prime Minister made a statement with a deadline that is just hot air is one thing. However, giving a committee a mandate from this House and dismissing its hard work out of hand is unacceptable. The government will have to take the blame if the hon. members across the way, who are legislators just like me, do not call the executive to order.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Montcalm, who represents the Bloc Québécois on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

We worked very hard together, and I am very proud of the work everyone did, including my Conservative, NDP, Liberal, and Bloc friends.

My question is simple. Why does the member think that our committee report is being rejected here, and why are we debating a survey on a website rather than debating the recommendations made by our committee?

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, it was also a great pleasure for me to work with my colleague from the Green Party.

It is abundantly clear that the minister's reaction and therefore that of the executive, and I will choose my words carefully because I do not feel like repeating this whole debate, was to say, "Thank you and goodnight", and then do their own thing anyway, because they did not agree with the majority consensus. It is appalling, but there it is. This is more likely than a scenario in which unrealistic deadlines were set according to a statement the Prime Minister made during the election campaign, which would be a terrible way to govern.

I will therefore continue to appeal to my colleagues, to all parliamentarians across the aisle, and to all those who care about being an MP, a representative of the people, to call their minister and the executive branch to task, and ensure that we continue and that we quickly move on to the second phase in order to get into this debate. The people are fed up with these broken promises.

• (1210)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

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I want to start first by thanking the committee for the tremendous hard work it has done. I watched my colleagues spend a good portion of their summer either in meetings in Ottawa or travelling across the country. I know they all performed their work with diligence. To be quite frank, I was very dismayed when I heard the minister be so dismissive about the work they had done. That was shameful. She did apologize, so we do need to move on, but it was an extraordinary thing to say to the members of the committee who had worked so hard during the summer, and also to Canadians across Canada who had participated in the process.

What was very fascinating about the majority report is it actually ended up, in a very unusual way, reflecting what happened in the riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo in terms of what the major recommendations were. The riding I represent is a very large riding in the middle of British Columbia. It turned out that there were two independent processes that happened. One was a local group of community members who got together, many of them with affiliations to the NDP, to the Green Party, and to the Liberal Party. I also had a process, independent from them. I was really looking at things perhaps at a hundred-thousand-foot level. I had a number of town halls, mostly in the rural communities. To be quite frank, in the middle of summer it was not very well attended in terms of engagement. They were beautiful summer days, and talking about electoral reform was not as high a priority as perhaps enjoying the very short summers we have.

However, I did reach out, with a mail-out and a telephone survey. I had three questions. I am not someone who designs survey questions, but I think they were logical and made sense. My first question in the telephone survey was, “Are you aware that we’re actually talking about the issue of changing how we vote?” Asking about awareness is probably a good start. Out of that, I was actually surprised. Some of the work over the summer had started to penetrate. This went out to 8,000 homes. It was answered by citizens across the riding. Sixty-eight per cent of the respondents actually had an awareness that there was a discussion going on around electoral reform.

The next question I asked was, “Do you believe that we should be changing our system?” Again, it is a pretty simple question, “Are you happy with what we have or do you think we need to change it?” Again, I am not an expert in survey development, but these were intuitive questions. Forty-one per cent thought we should have changes to the system. Fifty-eight per cent said it was fine the way it is. Thirty-two per cent did not have an opinion.

My third question was about a referendum, of which 66% of the people who responded to the survey said they believed there should be a referendum. That is actually pretty similar to a lot of the responses from different groups’ surveys across the country.

Independently, at the same time, the citizens’ group had had more granular sessions where they had sat down with people who had a real interest in the system. They had conversations with them about if we are going to change the system what the system should look like. This was led by a former Liberal candidate. He was the one leading the charge, and he was very interested in sitting down and talking with the people. What came out of the work they did was interesting. Their recommendation was very strongly for a proportional representation system. The people who had attended were very

keen on electoral reform, so the response around the issue of a referendum was perhaps smaller, but certainly I felt I had reached out to many.

What we ended up with in our riding was the two principles that came together in that majority report: a referendum and a proportional system, exactly what happened with the committee in terms of how we need to move forward.

● (1215)

I think the committee and the numerous town halls from across the country gave the government a road map for moving forward with a referendum on proportional system.

It is really kind of surprising that all of a sudden, at the nth hour, the dissenting report by the Liberals says that this is confusing and complex, and that we do not need a referendum. All the other parties are trying, as my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley said, to help the Liberals fulfill their promise, and it is the Liberals’ dissenting report for a majority committee that sort of put the kibosh on it. It was very interesting.

All of a sudden, the Liberals have postcards being mailed across the country. I would suggest that the step they have put in the process is, first of all, a little dubious and is muddying the water a little. The committee had offered to provide some questions, and if the government was putting out a postcard linking people to a survey, there are a few things the committee would recommend. We have looked at this all summer.

There are some questions we think the government should ask. Further, the survey does not link to the report of the committee, which to me is absolutely stunning. People can go to MyDemocracy.ca, and there is no link to see what the committee said but there are links for other things. It did not incorporate logical questions.

It incorporated perhaps logical questions about age and where to vote, but not around the issues the minister criticized the committee about. She said that the committee did not get to the details and the nuts and bolts. In the same sense, she has sent out a survey that in some ways, quite rightfully, has been widely mocked because she is not asking the basic questions and she criticized the committee for not getting to around a specific model.

The committee gave the minister some very strong directions. It is actually very bizarre that we end up in this position with no link to the work of the committee, and there are questions that sometimes miss the point.

I have other concerns about the survey. I mentioned that it did not link to the work of the committee. I had a friend call me last night. She said that she went on the website, cleared her browsing history and went on it again. She made sure she answered the questions. They were in a different order, but she answered them the same way each time. She came out with a different assessment each time, in terms of what kind of voter she was.

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She asked “What is this?” That was her question. She was sending me notes and asking what it was all about. She thought it was just crazy that she was answering the questions in the same way, and was getting different results. That did not really make any sense. This person who has a bit of an interest in this topic just cleared her browsing history and kept on going.

Earlier we heard that the parliamentary secretary thinks it is perfectly all right that people from across the world can answer the survey if they choose to. It is pretty easy to look up a postal code. It is pretty easy to answer the survey. I have real problems with that. I cannot believe in this. I have no confidence in anything that actually comes out of this survey.

The minister indicated that personal information is not required. The personal information being asked is how much one makes and for their email address. Why does the government want the email addresses? I have some concerns. The minister said people could do the survey anyway, but what she did not tell us is that those responses would not count.

I think Parliament has done the work that it can and should do. I have always said, and this is my own personal belief, politicians and political parties not only have a vested interest, they have a conflict of interest, and they had guidance. It needs to go to a referendum.

• (1220)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was on the committee, along with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

We travelled across the country. We held hearings. What I noticed, and I am sure my colleagues would agree, is that many people came to the committee hearings seeking proportional representation. In some cases, it almost seemed unanimous. However, those same people were also against the idea of a referendum.

The majority report, which is really the opposition party report, called for a high level of proportional representation with a referendum.

Does the member think that is testimony to the opposition party's flexibility and ability to compromise with each other? Is that to the opposition party's credit?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I am going to say absolutely. I talked about what happened in my riding. The process that I undertook was a referendum. I am acknowledging the legitimacy that there was another group that went into granular levels and those people were very interested in changing the system. They essentially unanimously came out with proportional representation, so it is not incongruous that there is an agreement over how we should move forward and also the vast majority of Canadians and people in my riding believing a referendum, which is not only how they felt we should move forward, but it is what has been done traditionally in the past. I was in British Columbia as we had referendums. We could talk about the issues of thresholds and a referendum, which are not mutually exclusive, so I think it was perfectly right that they did what they did.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

I am wondering if she believes, as I do, that the reason for the new survey and a new consultation is that the government did not get the answers it was expecting from the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

I know that politicians never answer hypothetical questions. However, had the report provided the results that the minister was expecting and that would satisfy her, does the member believe we would be having another consultation? If so, does she believe that the Liberals would finally have moved forward with the promised reform? In other words, is there a new round of consultations because the results were not what the minister expected?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, this has always been a little concern among many in terms of where the Liberals ultimately intended to go with this. That brings me back to my comments about vested interests and conflicts of interest. Certainly we know what the preferred model of the Prime Minister is and obviously the results of the cross-Canada process did not head in the direction of his preferred model. Not only do I believe the Liberals have created a very messy reform system, but I certainly have concerns in terms of what the ultimate motivation is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my colleague's opinion.

The report tabled requires that the public be consulted through a referendum. A lot of work was done, and the member opposite who just spoke did a really great job as the chair of the committee. I believe he heard the same things we did and that we came to the same conclusions in the end.

According to the member, why does the minister not want to consider this report and why did she decide to launch another Internet consultation, which does not even refer to a referendum, proportional representation, or anything else discussed by the experts and Canadians consulted?

• (1225)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about this survey process that they have undertaken, about security, privacy issues and what the ultimate goal is. A referendum, which has been done in British Columbia, which has been done in many cases, is the ultimate way to get to an answer in terms of do people want to change our system, yes or no, and what the preference is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the concurrence debate on the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

Canadians want us to do our best to ensure that all MPs and all parties in the House are working together. If possible, we should work to find solutions that will satisfy more than one party. Obviously, the Conservative Party, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, and the Green Party have very different views on most subjects. However, after a lot of hard work, the opposition parties managed to come up with a common report.

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We recognize that Canadians want a referendum so that they can choose between the existing system and a proportional system. It is absolutely vital that we hold a referendum so that the government only act according to the wishes of Canadians.

[*English*]

It is clear that the members on this committee did very good work, that they heard from many different Canadians, and that they did their job. I include in that Liberal members who worked very hard and, at times it seems, whose contribution is not appreciated by their own government. All members of that committee worked hard, had important discussions, and listened to what was before them. Although there was not unanimous agreement among members on the committee, four of the five parties came to this conclusion: that it was a majority of the witnesses who favoured electoral reform who were looking for reform in a particular direction, very clearly, but also that there was a need to consult Canadians in a clear, transparent way through a referendum. I again commend all the members of the committee for their important work.

The government, having seen this detailed process happen, initially tried to delegitimize it, then apologized for that delegitimization but, really, has not actually stepped back from its response, which was to try to undertake a completely different so-called consultation, hoping that if it consults more times and maybe if it jimmies the questions one way or another, it can somehow produce a different result.

However, I would say, aside from the minister's comments, that really is where the profound disrespect is toward this committee and this process. It is in trying to put aside their work through this clearly much less open, much less effective process.

I want to share with the House that, before being elected, I was the VP of an opinion research company, so I have been very much involved in this whole area of opinion research. The first thing we have to recognize is that we may have someone coming in, wanting to do a particular research study, hoping that the results will be one thing or another, but we have to always be very clear that the purpose of research is to get good information. It is to ask the public its opinion, to get a sense of its values, and also to understand what exactly the public wants.

If we try to skew our research in one way or another, there is just no point in doing it, because we would not be able to rely on the results we get. This point, I suppose, should be fairly obvious.

Our lead critic on this, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who has done excellent work on this, asked the parliamentary secretary this morning if this research design and the questions fully reflected the work of independent experts or if it was actually the government taking an initial draft and really setting it up exactly the way it wanted. The parliamentary secretary did not answer the question at all, and we are still wondering what the answer is. It is important that we actually have a proper research design.

Members have, I think, made some good and worthwhile jokes about just how absurd the design of these questions is. They are clearly not designed to ask the obvious specific questions.

In my riding, we had very robust consultations around this issue. I noted, as other members have noted, that it is more difficult to get people out to town hall or round table type meetings during the summer. Therefore, in September, still within the window of the time available for the committee, we did multiple round table type meetings within my constituency.

● (1230)

This is something we do in Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan on a regular basis on a wide range of issues. We said we would make sure we did enough round tables so that everyone who was interested in participating could participate, but we wanted to have each individual round table small enough that we could have a free-flowing conversation. Therefore, we had multiple round tables with about 10 people to 12 people, and we did them throughout a particular Saturday. We had great participation from people who I know to be from a wide variety of different political backgrounds: those who have been active with our party, as well as those active with the Liberal, the NDP, and the Green parties, all from within my own constituency. We had very good discussion, and very insightful points were raised, and I provided feedback to the committee.

What was identified throughout was that virtually nobody, with the exception of one gentleman, would speak in favour of the Prime Minister's preferred system, because that is a less proportional system. There were those who defended the status quo and those who advocated for a more proportional system. Clearly, that was the shape of the debate that occurred not just in the round table events I held but also in the wider discussions that were taking place across the country.

I also joined with my colleagues in doing a mail-out survey. This was very important as well. Round table or town hall events are great opportunities for hearing from those who are most active or most invested in particular issues. However, there are other ways of engaging perhaps a more representative sample. That is why many members of our Conservative caucus sent a mailer out to their constituents. The overwhelming feedback on that was that people wanted a referendum. That was the feedback in my constituency, as well as in the various constituencies that were polled by other Conservative members. It is clear that Canadians are looking for a referendum. It is also clear, from the discussions that were happening, that it is a referendum between the current system, which has many advantages, and a proportional system, which has other kinds of potential advantages. Obviously, every electoral system has advantages and disadvantages.

This was the series of consultations that we undertook within our own constituencies, consultations that we were asked to do by the government, but that I do, and we do, on a regular basis, regardless of what the government asks us to do or not do. My constituents will now get another piece of mail from the government, at huge expense, asking them to fill out a survey that will not provide any kind of useful data.

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It's baffling in one sense, but on the other hand it is clear that the government's approach is to re-ask questions in different ways because it does not like the feedback it received. We have been through this process. We had four out of five parties in this place endorse a report that emphasizes the importance of a referendum and also explains exactly where the debate is and therefore the kind of referendum we should have.

In listening to this debate, I am amazed how the government members are avoiding the question, by all means necessary. The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader made a strong point about how this has to be open to people who are not Canadian citizens so that people who are permanent residents or future Canadian citizens living here could fill out the survey, while missing the fact that there was nothing in the survey they have created to prevent somebody from participating in this survey who neither is a Canadian citizen, nor is a Canadian resident, nor has any interest in becoming either. There is nothing to prevent somebody who lives somewhere far away, who has never been to Canada and has no interest in coming to Canada, from not only filling out the survey once but filling it out multiple times. I was incredulous to find that I could actually fill out the survey twice on the same device.

It is hard to understand where the government is coming from if it really is trying to justify this process as a credible consultation exercise. We need to do so much better.

I again commend the committee for its work. It gave us a clear path forward. The government should listen to the committee rather than try to do it all over again just because it does not like the result.

• (1235)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned that all four opposition parties agreed with the two main recommendations; namely, for a referendum and for proportional representation that meets the Gallagher index 5 quotient. I was quite surprised to learn that the Conservative Party was in favour of proportional representation, and I am wondering if the member could tell us where along the road the conversion took place.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. I commend the member for his work on the electoral reform committee, but he is obviously trying to shift the ground here.

The reality is that our party has been very clear from the start about the need for a referendum. Reflecting the conversation that has taken place, the referendum must be on something, and the predominant voices we have heard through this process are those defending the status quo and those defending proportional representation. That is the choice that has emerged in this debate and that Conservatives think needs to be offered, rather than the government trying to go in a completely different direction, advocating a system that is less proportional.

That is the reality of the report and the information that came out of it, so it is important for the government to take on board the substance of it, rather than try to maybe pin new positions on people as a result.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad there is co-operation in the House to bring this motion forward to use the questions from the all-party

parliamentary committee with the help of very objective parliamentary staff. Their very even questions feel like a great improvement on the government's online survey about democratic reform, compared to what the Minister of Democratic Institutions is using on the government's online consultation.

Based on the member's previous experience with public opinion polling, I would be interested in his perspective on the kinds of questions the government is now using. For example, one question is:

Ballots should be as simple as possible so that everybody understands how to vote OR ballots should allow everybody to express their preferences in detail? To me, the question assumes that it is impossible to have both, and I cannot imagine anybody saying they want an incomprehensible ballot. This is an example of very misleading and biased questions, to which we are hearing people across the country react badly.

I would like to know if the member agrees that these are bad questions and that we would be better to rely on the more neutral ones that have been tested by the committee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the point my colleague made. These are bad questions, and they are not fair questions. They are clearly not designed to get clear information about people's opinions about specific subjects.

I will take this opportunity to comment on some of the other things that have come up in the debate just in the context of asking people questions. The implication from some members has been that there cannot be an open, clear consultation about questions that are complex. I think Canadians are capable of and interested in thinking about these complex questions. It does not mean that, if we were to ask people we bump into on the street what they think of STV, they will know all the detail on it, but it does mean that people are interested in giving their opinions if they are also given an opportunity, in the context of that, to learn the key information about it. We could very easily ask people clear questions while also providing them with dispassionate, neutral, summative information.

The other point is that there is a distinction to be made between statistical social science research and consultation, insofar as generally with consultation people with opinions are provided the opportunity to come forward and present that information; whereas often with social research, a representative sample may be sought. In government consultation, there will almost never be a representative sample because it is engaging with people who have chosen to participate in that discussion. Therefore, it is important that we ask neutral questions, both to increase the research value and also because that is the right way to consult, to give people the opportunity to give their opinions.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise to discuss this topic. I am very familiar with it, as are the other committee members. I will be sharing my time with another committee member, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

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[*English*]

Like all members of the committee, I am very proud of this report. It is really an excellent piece of work. It moves the ball forward on what is a complex and oftentimes technical issue. It is today's most up-to-date and comprehensive compendium of analysis and insight on electoral reform from a Canadian perspective. It is a wonderful piece of work.

If it is a wonderful piece of work, it is because the committee did a fairly thorough job within obviously some constraints. We had to report by December 1, which gave us about five months to do our work. We heard from 196 witnesses during that time.

[*Translation*]

The committee held 57 meetings between the beginning of July and the end of November. A total of 567 people participated in the open mic sessions on electoral reform, and the committee heard from 763 witnesses and received 574 briefs in all.

Many MPs chose to consult their constituents. In fact, 174 MPs responded to the call to consult their constituents. Some members did so by holding a town hall meeting, or even several such meetings. Others sent out questionnaires to find out what their constituents thought about the subject.

The committee travelled across Canada, stopping in each of the 10 provinces and three territories.

We visited 18 cities or municipalities, including three cities in Quebec. On Vancouver Island, we met with first nations representatives, and we also held meetings in Victoria. We travelled 31,000 km. All that to say, we did a very thorough job.

[*English*]

I would like to salute the work of the committee members, some of whom have been in and out today, obviously the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands and the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who is extremely knowledgeable about the issue of electoral reform. He has a very high level of technical understanding of the issue. I would like to give the House an example.

Witnesses who are experts on electoral reform were piped in from Germany. One of the witnesses, Professor Pukelsheim, developed a system called the Double Pukelsheim, which is some kind of electoral system. The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston had actually heard about that system before the witness even appeared.

Let me read something to highlight how complex the topic of electoral reform can be. We think it is quite easy. We think it is a choice between first past the post and list PR like we find in Israel and Italy, but it is a much more complex subject matter than that. I will read a press release from the Parti Vert'Libéral du canton de Fribourg:

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

The Vert'Libéral party of the Canton of Fribourg, the PVL, adopted a position with respect to the complementary consultations on the new voting system for the Grand Council. The PVL is pleased to note that the appointed expert, Professor Jacques Dubey, is of the opinion that the bi-proportional system proposed earlier this

year, the “double Pukelsheim”, rectifies the problems with Fribourg's voting system identified by the cantonal court.

[*English*]

I read that to highlight how complicated the issue can be, and it was further highlighted in the report by the invocation of the Gallagher Index.

In my life, I have taken mathematics courses. I am no mathematical genius by any stretch, but I took some university-level math courses and nonetheless I even found the Gallagher index formula a bit daunting. Electoral reform is complex issue, but the Special Committee on Electoral Reform embraced the issue in all its complexities and did a marvellous job.

Any electoral reform has to be based on the foundation of citizen values. Why? We heard from committee witnesses that there was no perfect electoral system. In a sense, there is a relativistic element to electoral systems. In other words, the electoral system that suits a particular nation is a function of the democratic values of that nation. Those democratic values are shaped by national identity and experience.

What the minister is seeking to accomplish through her survey questionnaire is something that was not really in the committee's mandate to accomplish. Nor was it within the committee's means. It was preoccupied with the technical aspects of electoral reform. If Canadians look at the report, they will see we detailed a number of systems and variations on each system.

Coming into this exercise, I thought there were majoritarian systems and proportional systems, but there are mixed systems. Within a system, there can be variations that attempt to adapt to the geographic realities of a particular country. We were focused on that. However, ultimately electoral reform has to be based on what Canadians want, and what they want in an electoral system will always be a function of values. That is the point of the minister's exercise through the MyDemocracy.ca questionnaire.

It has been a little disingenuous of some members of the opposition to suggest that the questions in the questionnaire are not relevant. Anyone who knows anything about sampling or creating surveys of the public knows that in order to eliminate bias, some questions must be proxies for the issue we are trying to get at. Otherwise, it is very easy for the individuals answering the questionnaire to essentially answer it in a biased way that they think maybe provides the answers expected of them. Therefore, a lot of these questions are essentially proxies.

Opposition members have also asked why we do not take some of the questions the special committee had in its survey questionnaire, which were fundamentally more complicated and more technical, and cut and paste them onto the minister's questionnaire. That is a bit disingenuous. Anyone who prepares surveys knows that a survey has its own integrity, that it has its own core methodology. We just cannot borrow here, there, and everywhere for political reasons because we will get a mishmash that, at the end of the day, will tell us nothing and will not be particularly useful to our purposes.

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• (1250)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech of my friend, both in and out of the House. It has to be said, and I think this was agreed by all committee members, that he did an admirable job as the chair of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. He handled a very difficult job. We went all over the place, and he was always non-partisan and very fair to the witnesses.

The member mentioned two things about integrity, sort of impugning some sort of political motive in asking Canadians for their direct opinions on something.

I was with a pollster last night and had coffee with a political scientist who works in this field. They asked me what we were doing today. I told them we were trying to add some direct questions. There are some direct questions in the government's survey, such as, "Would you like to lower the voting age?" That is a direct, simple, straightforward question. However, any question that deals with arriving at a system of some kind is not direct. They always have these additions, such as "even if chaos were to follow", or "even if democracy were to fall apart", these extreme and false choices. They said that this was a problem with the government's survey. The Liberals have produced a survey that cannot get them good results. Bad questions equal bad data, was what a colleague said, who is highly esteemed in the world of the social sciences.

Was it not political of the government, of the minister to choose to not ask the obvious question?

Canadians want to be consulted, and they are glad to be consulted. They will come into the conversation in good faith. However, if in the midst of that conversation they realize this is a cynical exercise that never asks the question they hope to answer and then spits out results calling them a "navigator", "protector", or some value that they do not agree with, then they are more than offended by it.

Therefore, let us not make this political. Let us make it accurate. Let us make it something that all parties agree on, and get an honest and clear answer from Canadians over a question that belongs to them and not to any political party in this place.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to salute the work of the hon. member. He was extremely engaged in the process.

As chair of the committee, I did not approach the hearings with bias. However, I really enjoyed it when witnesses were properly grilled, whatever the point of view of the questioner. I thought it was very important to have a rigorous process, and all members of the committee did that process proud.

I understand the hon. member has political scientist friends, and they may tend to agree with him on some positions. However, it is true that all the questions in the survey were reviewed by an academic advisory panel. These questions were, in a sense, peer reviewed.

Academics are professionals and they have a code of ethics. I prefer not to impugn their motives. I believe this academic advisory panel provided sound and objective advice on the issue when asked its opinions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to salute the member for Lac-Saint-Louis for his outstanding and truly brilliant work as chair of this very sensitive committee whose mandate was difficult to manage at times. He did it with grace and the kind of parliamentarianism that should inspire all members of the House.

Earlier, the member talked about the fact that many of the observers we heard from were not in favour of a referendum. Unfortunately, I must agree with him even though one of the most distinguished men of all, Benoît Pelletier, an esteemed academic and Quebec's former minister responsible for the reform of democratic institutions, was in favour of a referendum.

In the member's opinion, why does the online survey at MyDemocracy.ca not include a very simple question for Canadians about whether they want a referendum or not?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, when I said that most of the participants wanted a proportional system with no referendum, I was not referring to the experts or the stakeholders at the table; I was referring rather to the people in attendance in the room, some of whom went up to the microphone.

With regard to the specific questions, as I mentioned at the outset, the minister's questionnaire aims to identify the values Canadians associate with their democracy. While the questions on values are sometimes vague, they are fundamental to anything that may follow, whether an assembly of citizens, a referendum or whatever else. We must start from these general values.

• (1255)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues.

I share the view of my colleagues from Skeena—Bulkley Valley and Louis-Saint-Laurent and all the others who mentioned the incredible work done by the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis as committee chair, as well as all of the committee members.

Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, members of the Bloc and I worked together as a family, like a real team. We were willing to work hard in the interest of real democracy in Canada, and not in the interest of our party or to make political gains.

[*English*]

It is clear that electoral reform is a complicated issue, but at its essence it is about making democracy work for Canadians. Our goal in finding our values was to set aside our partisanship and to say, okay, what do voters want? This is the fundamental question, and Canadians participated in droves in this process.

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We have had a discussion in Parliament, and I certainly accepted the hon. minister's apology. She knows we worked hard, but to me the essence of it is that we delivered on our mandate and got a very impressive report out on time and on deadline. It was not just the members of the committee who worked hard, but thousands of Canadians. We received unsolicited briefs that showed an enormous amount of effort by hundreds of Canadians who toiled to produce them. We would talk about it among ourselves as members of Parliament, the work in the briefs that were hundreds of pages long, as Canadians attempted to come up with the very best system, a made-in-Canada solution to ensure fair voting.

We also had hundreds of people come to our hearings across Canada, many of whom did not get up in the open-mike sessions but sat through hours of testimony just because they were interested in the subject and showed their support for those who spoke. I do agree with the member for Lac-Saint-Louis that we heard people call overwhelmingly for electoral reform, as our report notes. We heard them call for an end to first past the post and for fair proportional voting.

In my own case, I held many town halls across Canada as leader of the Green Party, but I also sent every single household in my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands a special newsletter on electoral reform. I gave as much of the background as I could in explaining why it meant so much to me as a member of Parliament to know that the Speech from the Throne committed to ensuring that every vote would count and that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post.

I polled the residents of my riding through a direct questionnaire mailed to them, and hundreds of people responded. I would like to share what my constituents said. I have never been able to do this publicly, but 82% of the voters in Saanich—Gulf Islands who responded to my questionnaire said, yes, they supported proportional representation. In response to the question, “Do you believe it can be accomplished without a referendum?”, there was more of a split, with 62% saying yes they definitely wanted a referendum, and others not being sure.

In response to, “What do you think about mandatory voting?”, there was a split, with 40% thinking it was a good idea, and 44% thinking it was not a good idea, and prepared to dive into the details. Of the voters in Saanich—Gulf Islands who responded, 44% said they liked hybrid proportional representation, 16% liked MMP, 17% STV, and 12% wanted to keep first past the post. That is the kind of engaged electorate I am so honoured and privileged to represent here in Parliament.

Not only did citizens come to the MP town halls and to our electoral reform committee meetings, they wanted to participate and wanted to be further engaged, so I was one of those, when called by the media about the MyDemocracy.ca survey, who said, “Well let us give it a chance”, but I want to see it build on the success of the committee's work.

That is why this motion, Motion No. 2 from the electoral reform committee, is so important. I am very gratified to know that finally in the House of Commons we are discussing and debating electoral reform. We are talking about the content of the report. As for the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, I did not get a

chance to thank him at the time because his question period was up, but what a great engagement it was by a member who was not on the committee, but who was able to say, “I am interested in mixed member proportional. It looks like a good system”. He stopped short of endorsing it.

• (1300)

We took a big step forward in the Green Party over the weekend. We had a large gathering, a special meeting of members, to address the committee report and to deal with what I came down in favour of, a referendum. I did not think I could find a consensus, but I did. As a result, our party has now changed its opposition to a referendum to being open to one in some circumstances. These would not be the circumstances the Conservative Party wants. It would not favour a referendum that included an option for first past the post before we moved to PR. However, we moved as a party towards a view that we could hold a plebiscite like Prince Edward Island did, with multiple PR choices in advance of the next election, or we could go through two elections and then hold a referendum. This is a significant shift.

We also decided that our preferred voting method is mixed member proportional, another big move, in light of Prince Edward Island's voters choosing mixed member proportional in their plebiscite and the Law Commission report of 2004 picking mixed member proportional. In deference to my colleagues in the NDP, they have favoured mixed member proportional as well.

Let us try to focus on a solution, and encourage the government to live up to the promise to ensure that first past the post is never used again in Canada. Why would we feel so strongly? It is because it is a threat to democracy if a minority of voters can elect majority of the seats. This is the fundamental fairness question.

I want to quote from the report, in which Bernard Colas, a lawyer who worked on the Law Commission report in 2004, put it in very straightforward language:

One basic instinct of a human being is about fairness. If you have young kids, the kids will say it's not fair. The first question you ask Canadians is whether it's fair for someone to be elected with 30% of the vote, or 40%....They will answer “no”. Then you say, “Okay, we're here to make a proposal to correct this system and to improve its fairness.”

That is my big complaint with the MyDemocracy.ca survey. It is interesting as far as it goes, but that is the fundamental question. None of the questions put to voters in MyDemocracy.ca go to the value of fairness. We have a lot of questions on online voting, but without information upfront on why our committee recommended against it at this time. There are a lot of questions about mandatory voting, but nothing about why it is the right thing to do, and we hold the government to account that it was the right thing for the Prime Minister to promise that first past the post would not be used in 2019.

Routine Proceedings

Our committee found that ranked ballots was the only system worse than first past the post. We recommended proportional representation to the government, but not through a pure list system.

We did our job. Please, I urge the government to accept the report of our committee, improve the online questionnaire, and live up to the promise of electoral reform.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I request that the vote be deferred until the expiry of the time provided for government orders on Monday, December 12, 2016.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Monday, December 12, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

• (1305)

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there have been discussions amongst the parties, and if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the recorded division on the motion to concur in the Second Report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform be deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on Tuesday December 13th 2016.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present petitions signed by people from across Canada. The petitioners are concerned about the

accessibility of violent and degrading sexually explicit material online and its impacts on public health, especially the well-being of women and girls. They are calling on the House to adopt Motion No. 47.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

EMPLOYMENT IN ALBERTA

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair has received a notice of a request for an emergency debate. The hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 52(2), I wrote to you to press for an emergency debate on the jobs crisis in Alberta.

I have had the pleasure to visit schools in my riding and talk with students. I often hold mock debates with the classes, taking debate suggestions from the principal. At an elementary school I went to in my riding of Edmonton West, I asked the principal what we should debate. What she told me left me stunned. It was not Trump, or topical issues like the Oilers, or medical marijuana or pot legalization. Top of mind for the students was stress. They are in grade 7, and the main issue they are dealing with is stress. It is stress from not knowing if they will have a roof over their heads; stress from not knowing whether mom or dad will have a job, or when they will find a job; stress from not knowing why the family car was taken away, or why their parents are splitting up.

There is a jobs crisis in Alberta right now. The number of unemployed Albertans has nearly doubled since 2014, from 112,000 in January, 2015, to 206,900 in August, 2016. This is not just an oil and gas problem. Since the start of 2015, our province has lost one in five resource jobs, one in five agriculture jobs, and one in four manufacturing jobs. Over 122,000 energy workers have lost their jobs since the oil crash, and Alberta's unemployment rate now sits at a 22 year high of 9%. Food bank use is now up 60% province-wide.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, 45% of Alberta business owners are looking to cut back on staffing, while only 4% are looking to hire. This is a new record low for this indicator. Just two years ago those numbers were reversed.

The government has systematically refused to address the jobs crisis facing Alberta. Our communities are suffering, families are struggling, and a generation of young people have no career prospects.

Mr. Speaker, I draw to your attention the past emergency debates granted on job losses in the softwood lumber sector on November 1, 2001, on page 6807 of *House of Commons Debates*; on fisheries industry job losses, on April 28, 2003, page 5456; and finally, on livestock industry job losses, on February 13, 2008, page 3012.

Mr. Speaker, I simply ask that you grant us, on behalf of these struggling Albertan individuals, families, and businesses, the opportunity to be heard here on the immense impact of the oil price collapse in the energy sector, and the ripple effect on Canadians from coast to coast.

• (1310)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Edmonton West for his well reasoned and well presented arguments on the matter. In this case, the request does not meet the exigencies of the requirements for an emergency debate.

I would certainly encourage the hon. member to consider other means within the Standing Orders where the issue at hand might be brought to the consideration of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TAX CONVENTION AND ARRANGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill S-4, an act to implement a convention and an arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and to amend an act in respect of a similar agreement, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak today on the act to implement a convention and an arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion, with respect to taxes on income, and to amend an act in respect of a similar agreement.

What we are going to be talking about today is implementing tax conventions that are going to be very beneficial for our country. They are going to create jobs, promote commerce, and favour the protection and the avoidance of tax evasion in our country.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today on the second reading of Bill S-4.

Bill S-4 would implement a double taxation convention and a double taxation arrangement recently concluded and publicly announced with the State of Israel and with respect to the jurisdiction of Taiwan.

Bill S-4 would also amend the legislation that implemented the Canada-Hong Kong double taxation agreement, to add an interpretation provision for greater certainty.

[Translation]

The double taxation convention with the state of Israel replaces the current tax convention with that country which was signed in

Government Orders

1975. The revised double taxation convention brings us up to date with the current tax treaty policies of Canada and Israel.

[English]

There is currently no double taxation arrangement between Canada and Taiwan. Taiwan is one of the few remaining large world economies not covered by Canada's network of 92 tax treaties currently in force and, thus, the conclusion of a double taxation arrangement with Taiwan has been an important objective for Canada.

Taiwan is a significant trading partner for Canada, ranking as Canada's fifth-largest trading partner in the Asia-Pacific region and ranking 12th worldwide, in 2015. In 2015, Canadian exports to Taiwan were valued at \$1.46 billion, while imports stood at \$5.46 billion, for a total of more than \$6.91 billion in trade between our two jurisdictions.

Taiwan currently has double taxation arrangements in force with 30 other countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

In keeping with Canada's "one China" policy, a double taxation arrangement with Taiwan has been concluded as an arrangement between the Canadian trade office in Taipei and the Taipei economic and cultural office in Canada, as opposed to an agreement between sovereign countries.

This double taxation arrangement with Taiwan is consistent with other existing Canada-Taiwan instruments in a wide range of areas, from air transport, agricultural market access, visa exemptions, and postal services, to science and technology research, financial supervision, and youth mobility, among many others.

Once implemented in Canada, through this bill, the double taxation arrangement with the jurisdiction of Taiwan would constitute a functional equivalent to a tax treaty.

• (1315)

[Translation]

The convention and arrangement to avoid double taxation contained in Bill S-4 will facilitate trade and bilateral investment with the state of Israel and the territory of Taiwan, by eliminating or relieving double taxation on transborder transactions, which will mean that taxpayers will pay tax only once on a given income. This will also help to prevent income tax evasion, which is undermining the tax base and our taxation system.

Bill S-4 relates to the ongoing efforts being made by Canada to update and modernize its network of tax conventions with other territories. As was mentioned earlier, Canada relies on one of the most extensive tax convention networks in the world, with 92 tax treaties currently in force.

*Government Orders**[English]*

I want to make it clear that Bill S-4 does not represent any new or significant change in policy. In fact, the double taxation convention and arrangement covered by the bill, like its predecessors, is patterned on the model tax convention of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, which is accepted by most jurisdictions around the world.

The provisions in the particular double taxation convention and arrangement comply with the international norms that apply to such double tax conventions and arrangements.

[Translation]

As Canada's economy is increasingly integrated with the global economy, the elimination of fiscal barriers to trade and international investment has become more important. Double taxation conventions and arrangements such as those we are discussing today are specifically designed to facilitate cross-border trade, investment, and other activities between Canada and each of the signatory jurisdictions.

The expression "tax convention" primarily designates income tax conventions and arrangements that establish the extent to which a jurisdiction can apply personal and corporate income tax to a resident of another jurisdiction.

[English]

For Canada, our tax treaty gives us assurances of how Canadians and Canadian businesses will be taxed abroad. Conversely, for our tax treaty partners, Canada's tax treaties give them the assurance of how their residents will be treated in Canada. Our tax treaties are all designed with two general objectives in mind. The first objective is to remove barriers to cross-border trade and investment, most notably the double taxation of income. I am sure that is something that every member in the House would agree with.

The second objective, and I am sure members would also agree, is to prevent tax evasion by encouraging co-operation between Canada's tax authorities and the tax authorities of the other signatory jurisdictions.

Those are two objectives that I am sure will get unanimous consent from all the members in the House.

Allow me to take a few minutes to expand on each of these very important objectives for our country. Let us talk first about removing barriers to trade and investment.

• (1320)

[Translation]

First of all, removing barriers to trade and investment is essential in today's global economic context. Without question, investors, traders, merchants, and other stakeholders doing business on an international scale want to be certain of the tax repercussions of their activities in Canada and abroad.

Similarly, Canadians doing business or investing overseas want to be sure that they will be treated fairly and consistently with respect to the income tax they pay.

[English]

In other words, they want to know the rules of the game and they want to know the rules will not change in the middle of the game. That is one of the objectives of Bill S-4, to remove uncertainty about the tax implications associated with doing business, working, or investing abroad. Tax treaties establish a mutual understanding of how the tax regime of one jurisdiction will interface with that of another. This can only promote certainty and stability and help produce a better business climate especially with respect to eliminating double taxation.

Let me turn to double taxation.

[Translation]

No one wants to have their income taxed twice, something that should never happen in any case. However, in the absence of a convention or arrangement to avoid double taxation, such as those contained in Bill S-4, that is exactly what could happen. For example, in cross-border transactions, the two jurisdictions might apply their income tax without granting taxpayers relief with respect to the income tax paid to the other jurisdiction.

To reduce the possibility of double taxation, tax conventions apply either of two general methods, depending on the particular situation.

In some cases, the exclusive right to tax a particular income is granted to the jurisdiction where the taxpayer resides.

In other cases, that right is shared.

[English]

For example, if a Canadian resident employed by a Canadian company is sent on a short-term assignment, say for three months, to any one of the two signatory jurisdictions in this bill, Canada has the exclusive right to tax that person's employment income. If, on the other hand, that same person is employed abroad for a longer period of time, say for one year, then the jurisdiction where that person works can also tax the employment income. However, in this case, under the terms of the double taxation convention and arrangement in Bill S-4, Canada must credit the tax paid in that other country against the Canadian tax otherwise payable on that income. This is one example of how the allocation of taxing rights between jurisdictions under tax treaties ensures that individuals and businesses are taxed fairly.

Let me move to withholding tax.

[Translation]

One way to reduce the potential of double taxation is to reduce withholding taxes. These taxes are a common feature in international taxation. It is imposed by an authority on certain items of income earned within its jurisdiction and paid to the residents of another jurisdiction. Types of income usually subject to withholding taxes include, for example, interest, dividends, and royalties.

Withholding taxes are levied on the gross amount paid to non-residents and represent their final obligation with respect to income tax payable to Canada.

Government Orders

[English]

Without a tax treaty in place, Canada usually taxes this income at a rate of 25%, which is the rate set out under our own domestic tax legislation, the Income Tax Act. The double taxation convention and arrangement in Bill S-4, however, would provide for a maximum withholding tax rate on portfolio dividends paid to non-residents of 15% in the case of the State of Israel and the jurisdiction of Taiwan. For dividends paid by subsidiaries to their parent companies, the maximum withholding tax rate is reduced to 5% in the case of the State of Israel, and 10% in the case of the jurisdiction of Taiwan. Withholding rate reductions also apply to royalties, interest, and pension payments. The double taxation convention and arrangement in this bill would cap the maximum withholding tax rate on interest and royalties at 10%, and on periodic pension payments at 15%. The double taxation convention and arrangement also would provide that no tax may be withheld on cross-border payments of interest in specific situations, such as interest paid on loans made, guaranteed, or insured by Export Development Canada; or a similar institution in Israel or Taiwan.

• (1325)

[Translation]

withholding tax rates provided for in the convention and arrangement covered in Bill S-4 are consistent with current Canadian policies on double taxation.

[English]

Let me move now to encouraging co-operation.

[Translation]

I mentioned that tax treaties have two main objectives. I talked about the first objective, which is to remove barriers to cross-border trade and investment by eliminating double taxation.

The treaties' second objective, and I am sure everyone here will agree with me, is to encourage cooperation between tax authorities in Canada and in treaty countries. Bill S-4, for instance, has to do with a convention and an arrangement to avoid double taxation through cooperation with tax authorities specifically in the State of Israel and the jurisdiction of Taiwan.

For example, tax treaties include a mechanism for settling disputes or enforcement issues that arise after a treaty on double taxation comes into force.

[English]

In such cases, designated tax authorities of the two jurisdictions, known as the competent authorities, are to consult with a view to reaching a satisfactory solution, under which the taxpayer's income is allocated between the two taxing jurisdictions on a consistent basis, thereby preventing the double taxation that might otherwise result.

The Canadian competent authority under Canada's tax treaties is the Minister of National Revenue or the minister's authorized representative, who would normally be an official at the Canada Revenue Agency.

Furthermore, one of the most important benefits of increased co-operation between Canada and other jurisdictions is preventing tax

evasion. Indeed, tax treaties are an important tool in protecting Canada's tax base in that they allow consultation with and information to be exchanged between our revenue authorities and their counterparts in jurisdictions with which we have a double taxation convention.

[Translation]

In that regard, the convention and arrangement to avoid double taxation listed in Bill S-4 implement the internationally agreed standard for the sharing of tax information on request created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, which gives Canadian tax authorities access to information needed for the administration and enforcement of Canadian tax laws, while also helping them prevent international tax evasion.

Thus, the convention and arrangement to avoid double taxation listed in Bill S-4 will help ensure that Canada's tax regime is fair by making sure that taxes owed are actually paid. Conversely, as I have already mentioned, these treaties also help ensure that taxpayers do not have to pay more than their fair share.

[English]

Let me move to timing and consideration.

[Translation]

Once this bill has been enacted, Canada will be in a position to send its notice of ratification of the convention and arrangement on double taxation contained in the bill. Taiwan has already sent its notice of ratification to Canada, and Israel has promised to do so and to make every effort to send its notice by the end of the year.

[English]

Under the terms provided in the double taxation convention and arrangement, it will take effect the first day of January in the year following that in which the latter of these notices of ratification have been exchanged. Thus, it is important that this legislation be enacted before the end of this year so that Canada can send its notices of ratification regarding the convention and arrangement in order for the double taxation convention and arrangement to have effect commencing January 1, 2017. Otherwise, the next opportunity for the coming into effect of the convention and arrangement would be January 1, 2018.

The benefits of Bill S-4 are clear. The double taxation convention and arrangement covered in Bill S-4 would promote certainty, stability, and a better business climate for taxpayers and businesses in Canada and in the partner jurisdictions.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Furthermore, the convention and arrangement to avoid double taxation will serve to further consolidate Canada's position in the increasingly competitive circles of international trade and investment. They are in line with the OECD's international standards, and they will help strengthen the taxation system to the benefit of Canadians and to achieve our tax fairness objective for all Canadians.

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[English]

These actions are consistent with the basic principles of economic efficiency and responsible fiscal management.

For these reasons, I invite members of the House to support the bill. It will support trade. It will support tax integrity. I am sure that every member will support the bill, because it is not just the smart thing to do for Canada, it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Conservatives support this legislation. We are pleased with the implications it would have for our relations with some important countries and for commercial opportunities.

I wonder if the member could speak specifically about deepening our relationship with Taiwan at the current juncture. Taiwan is a place that is democratic and is a beacon of democratic values in an immediate area that certainly benefits from that positive example. Canada can help strengthen Taiwan, especially in that context.

I wonder if the member would have some further comments about the Canada-Taiwan relationship specifically and what it means for that region.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, our relationship with Taiwan is increasing. Taiwan is already a significant trading partner, ranking as Canada's fifth-largest trading partner in the Asia-Pacific region. The member would agree with me that this is a growing region of the world.

This is about creating more opportunities for Canadian companies to export. We know that certainty and stability is what business is looking for. When we look at the potential we have with Taiwan, this is certainly the right thing to do. It will create opportunities for Canadian businesses to export more and to create jobs in our country.

It will be beneficial for all Canadians if we can ratify it before the end of the year. Otherwise, we will lose one year of growth in our business with Taiwan.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

Not so long ago, we had a debate in the House on one particular tax convention, on the initiative of a member of the Bloc Québécois. The debate concerned the tax treaty between Canada and Barbados, to avoid double taxation, the subject we are addressing today.

What makes the case of Barbados different is obviously the fact that companies that do not do business directly within the jurisdiction of Barbados are taxed at a rate of 0.5% to 2%. Consequently, as a result of the treaty to avoid double taxation that we have with Barbados, certain companies can benefit from the Barbadian preferential rate prior to repatriating the funds to Canada, telling the Canadian tax authorities that they have already paid their income tax and cannot be made to pay more, because they are sheltered by the treaty to avoid double taxation.

Outside these two good agreements, can my colleague talk about the potential danger and the necessity for Canada to monitor the tax

situation of each of the countries with which it has entered into a convention, to make it possible to review those conventions, or even cancel them if necessary, when they make no sense, when we see a situation like the one between Canada and Barbados?

• (1335)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, who is doing very constructive work on the Standing Committee on Finance.

He is well aware that combatting tax evasion was an important theme of the last 2016 budget. We have invested \$444 million in the Canada Revenue Agency precisely in order to combat tax evasion. We want to be sure that the Canada Revenue Agency is given the resources, the teams and the technology to fight tax evasion.

Members may recall that in our statement we spoke of international co-operation, as my colleague well knows. One of the things that these conventions do, and we have over 92 of them all over the world, is to permit information sharing among tax authorities.

Members will agree that this information sharing makes it possible to combat tax evasion. This is the right thing to do for Canada. These agreements promote trade among jurisdictions, but they also give us one more tool to guarantee the integrity of our taxation system in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even though we are talking about taxes, whether with respect to Israel or Taiwan, it is important to recognize that part of the lifestyle we have in Canada today is because of trade agreements and trade in general. A very important aspect of world trade is the whole issue of taxation and how tax policies are administered.

If the member looks at the broader picture of how important trade is to our country, taxation is something that cannot be overlooked. It is a very important aspect of trade.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, Canada is a trading nation. Canada depends on trade for growth. Members will recall that in the fall economic statement, we created an agency to attract investment in Canada, the invest in Canada hub, because we realize that we need to make efforts to market Canada to attract investment.

When we have these conventions and arrangements in place, we are providing certainty and stability. That is what people who want to invest in our country want to know. They want to know what the taxation will be between the two nations or two jurisdictions when we do these things.

Our trade with Israel is increasing. Our trade with Taiwan is increasing. Our trade with Hong Kong is increasing and is important as well.

Government Orders

We are doing the right thing, because this is about making Canada one of the most attractive places in the world to invest. We have 92 of these arrangements and conventions in place. It is the smart thing to do, and that is why we are putting this forward. I would urge all members to support us so that we can put the notices in so that the convention and arrangements can take effect January 1, 2017.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for answering the question I asked earlier.

He thanked me for being constructive, which I try to be as much as possible, but unfortunately, his response certainly was not as constructive, as he avoided answering my question. He did not tell me whether he foresees any potential risk with the conventions on double taxation. Obviously, he has a lot to say about these two conventions today, which makes sense. However, my question was quite simple.

Does the hon. member see any potential risk in these conventions when they are concluded with nations that have very low or non-existent tax rates?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to rise a second time to answer him in an entirely constructive manner.

I will talk about Bill S-4, since that is what is before us today. We note that in the tax convention and arrangement to be signed with Taiwan, that these two conventions contain standard provisions of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or the OECD.

My colleague is well aware of the fact that we are modernizing our tax conventions. As I was saying, we have 92 of them and year after year we incorporate standard OECD provisions in the conventions. They allow us to have the best possible tools for combatting tax evasion and my colleague knows it.

That is one of the things we stated in this government's first budget. We invested \$444 million precisely because fiscal integrity is important to Canadians. To us, this is another tool in our toolbox to ensure that people pay their fair share in taxes and at the same time to promote trade.

That is what we need to do for Canadians in order to promote trade here in Canada.

• (1340)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. Before he begins, I will inform him that he has 18 minutes before question period. He can resume after question period and finish things off.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will make it that much easier for the government members who want to hear my speech to come now and then stay for question period. I know many of us are receiving a lot of correspondence from our constituents on Bill S-4, so it is important to talk about it and study it in detail.

Bill S-4, which come to us from the Senate, would implement a tax treaty with the Government of Israel as well as a tax arrangement with the Government of Taiwan. It would also amend the Canada-Hong Kong Income Tax Agreement.

These types of tax treaties are very important for facilitating international trade for investment between different countries. Certainly, in that light, our party is very much a pro-trade party, and that is why we support the bill.

The bill is about enforcement, fighting tax evasion, and more broadly about facilitating trade liberalization. It is about making it possible for companies to do business in multiple jurisdictions and, in particular, deepening our relationship with some very important partners, with Israel and Taiwan.

Today I will talk about three issues: trade liberalization in general, the Canada-Israel relationship, and the Canada-Taiwan relationship.

With respect to trade liberalization, I have said before that it is important for the government to move from inertia to action on trade. We have had a number of different bills and issues up for debate with respect to trade: the implementation of the trade facilitation agreement, the CETA deal, and next week I believe we will debate the Canada-Ukraine free trade deal. The Conservative Party supports these, in part because we recognize they are really the continuation of work that was begun under the previous government. One does not come up with a tax treaty overnight. In fact, these are cases where a lot of hard work was done by the previous trade minister and by Stephen Harper, the previous prime minister.

When it came to trade, we were quite aggressive in our trade agenda. We were negotiating and updating agreements. We were undertaking a vast array of different negotiations to expand Canadian access to trade, such that at the time of the election, there were trade deals that we had negotiated between TPP and CETA, which represented over 60% of the world's GDP. Therefore, Canada would have been uniquely positioned with respect to trade.

We know the story on the TPP, with the government not leading on TPP and backing away from it to a large extent, but still being supportive of some of these things we had done. Therefore, the government is putting these bills before the House, and this is one of them with which we agree. We see them as positive bills, but they reflect as well a certain inertia, the continuation of policies that were begun under the previous government. That much is good.

It is positive to see the continuation of good policies that were started under the Conservative government, but we also need to see the Liberals be proactive on trade and start new initiatives that reflect emerging opportunities and challenges. Inertia is not going to be enough, especially given the current global economic climate. The history of the Liberal Party in office has been continuing to leave in place trade deals that the previous Conservative government created but not necessarily implementing new original trade initiatives. This is the general context.

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An emerging protectionist sentiment is happening around the world right now. We have a president-elect in the United States who has expressed in the past a certain degree of skepticism of the value of trade within North America, and perhaps more so of trade between the U.S. and Mexico, but there is generally a concern about trade coming from the new incoming administration. It is important for other world leaders, other nations in general, to make strong arguments about the importance and benefits of an open economy.

● (1345)

It is for us to be actively pursuing that discussion, but also to be seeking out opportunities to sign new agreements, to move a trade liberalization agenda forward, perhaps with other countries, perhaps in different kinds of arrangements than we have seen exist in the past. We can do that and at the same time we can show the benefits of those trade arrangements. Canada should seize this moment and continue to be a pro-trade country, a country that benefits from trade, not merely continuing with inertia but also undertaking new initiatives.

When we talk about trade liberalization, and specifically about the bill before us, it is important to recognize that these kinds of agreements have economic benefits, but they are also ways of affirming and deepening relationships between like-minded countries.

Certainly our strategic relationships with Israel and with Taiwan are important. They reflect our values. These are both places which are democracies in regions, in environments that are not as friendly to democracy as perhaps our context is, Israel, of course, being the only democracy in the Middle East. Then we have Taiwan, not declared as an independent state but as a self-governing jurisdiction, which is a democracy, and certainly beside the world's most influential non-democracy. That really speaks to why Taiwan and Israel, in a special way, reflect Canada's values.

When we sign these kinds of agreements, they create opportunities for commerce, which create economic benefits for Canadians and for people in these countries. However, it is also a powerful signal about the importance of these relationships, and it creates a deepening of people-to-people commercial and therefore social ties between these nations. We should recognize the economic benefits of trade, but not entirely see trade as being distinct from the opportunities to build a greater community among like-minded democracies.

The current environment, in which we may have an American administration more skeptical about trade, should not prevent us from seeking other opportunities to pursue new and deeper trading relationships with other like-minded and pro-trade countries. For example, in light of the Brexit vote in the U.K., the U.K. will be working through what exactly its new relationship with Europe will be. However, we know that many of those who were pro-Brexit were also supportive of having broader trading relationships for the U.K.

After the relationship between the U.K. and Europe is finalized, we certainly need to pursue the opportunity to deepen trading relationships and pursue free trade between Canada and the U.K., and possibly, depending on the trajectory of the trans-Pacific partnership, we need to deepen our trading relationships in Asia with like-minded countries like Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

Under the previous government as well we commenced free trade negotiations with India. I think there is a very strong opportunity to continue this process and hopefully be able to see the realization of a free trade agreement between Canada and India. Very strong people-to-people ties exist between Canada and India. Despite a lot of differences between the ways our economy is structured, there is a positive opportunity there for us to benefit from those ties and to establish deeper commercial relationships as well.

In that context, I am skeptical of the government's trade policy in that the only new trade initiative it has talked about is pursuing a free trade agreement with the People's Republic of China. From my perspective, the strategic genius of TPP was about establishing a trading agreement among like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region that would have really set the terms of trade within that region in a way that would invite the People's Republic of China and other countries to come up to that standard in environmental protection, human rights, labour rights and intellectual property.

Instead, the emphasis from the government, rather than negotiating those kinds of strategic partnerships with like-minded countries that will advance our values, is before we have even completed the process with countries like Japan, Australia and New Zealand, let us go and negotiate a bilateral trade agreement with China, a country where there are obviously significant problems with human rights, environmental protection, labour rights and intellectual property.

● (1350)

We see in that not a sufficient appreciation of that relationship between economic collaboration and our values, the benefit of having trading relationships that establish the strategic conditions for advancing our more fundamental and important convictions in our values and in terms of our ideas on human rights.

To sum up this point, we are in an environment where there are increasing challenges, rhetorical challenges coming from different quarters to the idea of trade liberalization. Therefore, it is important that we continue to move forward with initiatives like Bill S-4 that deepen trading relationships and create more opportunities for international commerce. It is also important that we not just continue with things that were done under the previous government, but that we also look for new initiatives and emerging opportunities to advance our trading position, our economic as well as our strategic position within the world.

Having said that as a general point, I would like to delve a bit into specifically the importance of the two principal relationships that are touched on by Bill S-4: our commercial relationship with Israel as well our commercial relationship with Taiwan.

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I had an opportunity to visit Israel this summer. It was a great visit. I went as part of a parliamentary delegation with a number of colleagues from different parties. Whenever we hear about Israel in the news, it is often in the context of our important strategic and security relationship with perhaps Israel's relationship to different conflicts that are happening in the region. However, it is important for us to appreciate, and perhaps look into, an aspect that is not as often discussed, which is Israel's economic vitality and the unique innovation, how co-operation between Canada and Israel gives us opportunities to understand and benefit from that innovative culture and strong economy that exists in Israel. It was a real pleasure for me, and I think, for the other members who participated in the trip this summer, to understand and see first hand some of that innovation taking place.

The advanced tech and research and development that occurs within Israel has rendered it the nickname Silicon *wadi*. *Wadi* is an Arabic word for valley. It is kind of a Middle-Eastern adaptation of Silicon Valley. A lot of innovation happens in Israel, and we see that in a number of different indicators. The highest level of research and development spending relative to GDP anywhere in the world takes place in Israel and it is the largest destination for global venture capital per capita worldwide. There is significant investment and research happening there.

A lot of my colleagues and I asked about the policies that were in place in Israel to encourage this kind of innovative economic culture, and how we could learn from that in the context of our own discussions about encouraging innovation in Canada. Certainly there are opportunities to learn from each other. We can learn lessons from the incredibly innovative dynamic in Israel. However, it is also interesting to reflect on the connections between Israel's innovative economic environment and also the culture. Members who have read the famous book *Start-up Nation* will know that aspects of creativity and innovation are really encouraged throughout Israel's culture.

One of the discussions we had as part of our delegation, especially when we were in Israel, was learning about the strong sense of purpose and mission of those in Israel. For the most part, there is a real appreciation of Israel as a nation with a specific purpose, to be a homeland for the Jewish people. That sense of purpose and mission feeds people's desire to create, to contribute, and to build a stronger society. As well, the system in Israel is one of military service that takes place after high school. Virtually everybody participates in this national service. That as well is a time in which innovation and creativity are encouraged and people are given opportunities to learn skills they can then use as part of subsequent innovation throughout the rest of their lives.

• (1355)

There is this fascinating connection that exists between an innovative culture and the economy.

Obviously not all of those lessons are particularly applicable to the somewhat different kind of society we have here in Canada, but the opportunities that come from increased collaboration, commercially and otherwise, are very significant. We should appreciate the importance of security and strategic co-operation with Israel, but also understand it within the context of economic opportunities.

I would like to speak, as well, about the Canada-Taiwan relationship.

I think members know we have a bit of a curious relationship with Taiwan. We do not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan. That is why we speak here not about a tax treaty but a tax arrangement, which is different in name but similar in form to what we are talking about with Israel and what we deal with in other cases.

The kind of relationship that exists between Canada and Taiwan is extremely important and close, notwithstanding the uniqueness of the names we use, because Taiwan has not declared itself as an independent state. Taiwan is a major trading partner for Canada, and the great opportunities for us to share and to learn from each other, as I guess somewhat different kinds of societies, are very significant—obviously, Canada drawing on a rich wealth of natural resources.

Taiwan also is a—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I want to remind the hon. members that debate is taking place. It is nice to see everyone getting along and talking to each other, but it is getting a little bit loud. If we can respect the hon. member who is speaking, I am sure he has a lot of interesting things to tell us. We will continue.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is great to see that so many government members have come to hear my speech. This is a good thing.

With respect to the trading relationship that happens between Canada and Taiwan, the main exports from Canada to Taiwan include mineral oil, asphalt, wood, coal, nickel, meat, railway vehicles, and metal ore. Canada is Taiwan's 24th largest trading partner. We import mobile devices, recording equipment, boilers, steel products, and plastic products. A lot of important economic exchange is happening between Canada and Taiwan.

The importance of Taiwan as a society is that it is Chinese-speaking—it obviously has a close relationship with China, in terms of cultural similarities—but it is also democratic. Some of these arguments we hear from the Peoples Republic of China are that it cannot have democracy there or that it has to have a different kind of a system because it reflects the culture. The reality is that democracy exists in Taiwan; it is very well and it is a strong example, in terms of what can work there.

I believe I will have a few minutes to continue later.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Yes, the hon. member will have two more minutes once we resume from question period.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

● (1400)

*[Translation]***AIR TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will read you the motion that was adopted unanimously by the Quebec National Assembly this morning:

That the National Assembly denounce the will of the federal government to allow the construction of an airport in Mascouche despite the Quebec Environment Quality Act and community opposition;

That it call on the Government of Quebec to intervene and prevent the construction of this airport.

Everything decision Ottawa makes involving Quebec ends up being detrimental to its interests. When Ottawa interferes in our business, it ends up at best with a unanimous motion by the Quebec National Assembly denouncing this government that undermines Quebec or, at worst, before the courts.

Everyone pays the price: our sick, our consumers, our forestry workers, our environment, and our agricultural land. In this case, the entire population of Mascouche will pay the price.

I see that the minister is laughing. He could not even be bothered to acknowledge my letter of November 10.

The message from Quebec's elected officials is clear: stop walking all over us. I hope that the Minister of Transport got the message.

* * *

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am adding my voice to that of my colleague from the Yukon to speak about the need to protect the porcupine caribou calving grounds, located in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In fact, I ask all of us in this House to speak together to protect these grounds, as the risk to this area of being opened up for drilling increases. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world, and it is already under assault from climate change.

The Gwich'in people have traditionally relied on the porcupine caribou herd as a main source of food, tools, clothing, and trade. Caribou is not hunted for sport or entertainment. Today, it still fills freezers for elders and the stomachs of many families.

We must work together to sustain present and future generations of this herd. I encourage all MPs and Canadians to help seek permanent protection for the porcupine caribou calving grounds in Alaska.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are right when they say many Canadians want to talk about democratic reform. In fact I have heard

from many citizens in Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola this week about this very topic.

They are, to put it candidly, outraged and insulted. They are insulted by the absurd online electoral survey push poll, and outraged that there is no opportunity to provide input on either proportional representation or a democratic referendum. In fact a constituent who tried to phone in was told they were not even ready to take his phone call.

May we never forget that democracy in this great country belongs to the people and not to any political party. I implore the Liberal government to stop treating democratic reform like a circus sideshow and give Canadians the voice they deserve, with a true democratic referendum guided by a proper process.

* * *

WEST PARK HEALTHCARE CENTRE

Mr. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the house today to speak about a great institution in my riding of York South—Weston. Founded in 1904, West Park Healthcare Centre has been vital not only to my riding but across the province of Ontario.

[Translation]

West Park offers specialized rehabilitation: ongoing complex care, long-term care, and community health services that help individuals manage chronic health problems such as pulmonary diseases, diabetes, strokes, amputation, and musculoskeletal conditions arising from injuries or illnesses.

[English]

I am very proud to announce that West Park Healthcare Centre is expanding, with the addition of a new hospital building. This new facility will be 720,000 square feet, and it will provide in-patient and out-patient services

I would like to congratulate the staff, the management team, and the volunteers who continue to make this centre successful in my riding. Through this expansion, West Park Healthcare Centre will continue to be an integral part of my riding for decades to come.

* * *

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past year I have stood in this House many times asking when the government will stop hiding behind the CCAA process and actually help the more than 20,000 Stelco workers and pensioners in Hamilton.

In that time we have heard nothing from the Liberal government or from the minister. Negotiations are now taking place to lift the company out of bankruptcy protection. Having the federal government at the table to make a modest investment would help enormously. Such an investment could help ensure that workers and pensioners do not get shafted in the process. However, guess what? There is total silence again and no commitment of any kind.

Statements by Members

This last Monday I met with the steelworker leadership representing these workers and pensioners. They expressed profound disappointment at the Liberals' failure to live up to the promises made during the election. The government needs to wake up and show the leadership that workers in our steel industry expect and deserve.

Why has the Liberal government chosen to abandon Hamilton steelworkers and pensioners?

* * *

• (1405)

SIKH COMMUNITY

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 350 years ago a saint soldier, Guru Gobind Singh, was born. A master of verse, archery, and diplomacy, he stood up against any who threatened the rights of others.

However, his determination and steadfast courage to ensure that everyone should be allowed to practise their faith freely became his mission. He decided that he would create a nation of free spirits, with no race, creed, or caste, that would never bow their heads to fear or oppression but instead live as sovereigns of freedom.

In doing so, he lost his father, mother, and four young sons, but he never shed a tear as he knew generations were yet to come. He fought 11 battles, yet never one for territory. For this he created the Khalsa, an order of women and men, who as equals would stand in a crowd as beacons of hope and freedom.

Today, almost 600,000 of his people call this country home, 17 of whom sit in the House. To them we say Happy Gurburab.

* * *

POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, foreign interference in Canadian elections through unrestricted funding to third parties is not hypothetical. It happened in the 2015 election, in which substantial amounts of U.S. dollars flowed to Canadian third parties.

In recent and shocking testimony before the Senate legal affairs committee, the Chief Electoral Officer said that there is nothing to prevent foreign funding to third parties during elections even though the Canada Elections Act expressly prohibits foreign interference during elections.

Foreign interference during Canadian elections has to stop, and the government has a duty to make it stop. It is time for the government to take action to stop foreign interference in Canadian elections.

* * *

[Translation]

FAMILY FARMS

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians get ready to celebrate the holiday season and ring in the new year with family and friends, I would like to highlight the important contribution made by family farms and the agrifood

industry in general, which make it possible for us to put high-quality, nutritious food on our tables.

Many Canadians will be working over the holidays. I am sure that these dedicated families, who work hard every day on our behalf, will be able to meet my colleagues' highest expectations. By supporting farmers and artisans in their regions, my colleagues will discover unique food products and will contribute to our country's economic success.

I therefore invite all members of the House to take a moment and spare a grateful thought for these families who help us savour the happy moments we share with loved ones.

Happy holidays.

* * *

SOUTH SHORE MEDIA FUNDRAISING DRIVE

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, I rise today because I want everyone in my riding and the greater Longueuil area to know that the 15th annual South Shore media fundraising drive is happening today.

As the holiday season approaches, I encourage everyone to be generous to those less fortunate. Over the past 14 years, \$3.7 million has been raised for organizations that help the underprivileged. I want to thank the precious volunteers, the municipalities of the greater Longueuil area, the corporate sponsors, the local and regional media, the board of directors of the fundraising drive, and its chair, Jean-Marie Girard. Thank you.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, December 10 will mark 68 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is the benchmark for the fundamental human rights to which all people are entitled, no matter their race, religion, ethnicity, sex, or status.

The universal declaration was created to help heal divides left by the Second World War, but it is just as important today. World events of 2016 have been poignant reminders of how fleeting and fragile human rights are for billions worldwide. Every day, freedom of religion is threatened, movement is restricted, free speech is stifled, and conflict creates additional turmoil for so many.

Human Rights Day is an annual reminder that this terrible reality exists. This year's focus encourages Canadians to stand up for victims of abuse in an increasingly interconnected world.

Countries like Canada have a responsibility to renew our commitment to protect those very basic rights; rights that vulnerable people often cannot address themselves.

Statements by Members

I invite Canadians to reflect on what they can do to raise awareness and how they can participate in protecting and improving human rights.

Compassion never goes unnoticed or unrewarded.

* * *

● (1410)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Saturday we celebrate the 68th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by John Peters Humphrey, an academic, human rights defender, and McGill graduate, of course. The declaration was the forerunner of countless human rights charters, including our own. It affirms the fundamental right of every individual to freedom and dignity and aims to transform states sweltering in the heat of oppression into oases of freedom and justice.

[*Translation*]

International Human Rights Day is an opportunity not only to mark the progress we have made, but also to think about all the work that remains to be done. Now more than ever, we must stand together to fight extremism, intolerance like Islamophobia, and violence.

I call on all members of the House as well as all Canadians to keep Mr. Humphrey's legacy alive and defend human rights all around the world, this Saturday and every day of the year.

* * *

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and acknowledge the work our government has done to reunite families. Over the last year, I have heard many heartbreaking stories from residents of Brampton West who have been separated from their partners for extended periods due to long application processing times and confusing requirements.

Yesterday, I joined the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship in Brampton West as he announced that the processing times for spousal sponsorship applications would be reduced to 12 months from 26 months. Our government has simplified and streamlined the application process, resulting in a faster and more efficient system. The results speak for themselves. We have a government that listens and acts.

I look forward to seeing the residents in my riding and across Canada reunited with their spouses, starting their families, and giving back to our society.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are reports of people smelling burnt toast on the Liberal front bench. Late last week, the Minister of Democratic Institutions was forced to stand in the House and apologize for what was termed an "outburst". Insulting members of Parliament is not an outburst, it is outrageous.

Recently, at a Senate committee, the Minister of Finance apologized to the senators for not being prepared to answer their questions. Furthermore, the health minister and justice minister were made to pay back expenses they had wrongfully charged to Canadian taxpayers; the Ottawa minister completely bungled the selection of a new hospital site; and earlier this week, in order to avoid a walkout, the Prime Minister made his natural resources minister call and apologize to first nations chiefs.

This all begs the question, does the Prime Minister still have confidence in his cabinet and might the new year bring a new front bench?

* * *

SCHOLARS AT RISK

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, December 10 is Human Rights Day. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines our individual and collective rights. Brave women and men defend these rights in Canada and around the world each and every day.

To mark this, we are proud to host the Scholars at Risk Network. The 450 academic institutions around the world, including 15 Canadian universities, protect scholars whose lives are at risk by giving them safety, security, and a reprieve from imminent danger. This ensures that human rights are protected, academic freedom is secured, and the right to free expression is sanctified.

Today, we have five scholars joining us, along with their respective academic institutions: from Syria, Dr. Rana Mustafa, Dr. Nael Yasri, and Dr. Hanadi Ibrahim; from Palestine, Dr. Asmaa Abumumar; and Dr. Homa Hoodfar, a Canadian academic who was held in Iran. We thank them for their bravery and enduring defence of human rights.

* * *

SCHOLARS AT RISK

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here on the Hill today, an organization called Scholars at Risk is meeting to discuss the importance of protecting academics around the world who are suffering grave threats to their lives, their liberty, and their very well-being merely because of the research they do. This organization works to promote and protect global academic freedom by arranging temporary research and teaching positions at Canadian universities that value the rights of these scholars to freely engage in their work.

With this coming Saturday, December 10, marking Human Rights Day, I find it particularly timely to be highlighting the meaningful steps that this organization has taken to ensure that more than 700 scholars have found sanctuary since its inception in 2000 and that hundreds more have benefited from its referral services. This morning was pleased to join my parliamentary colleagues in meeting with this dedicated group. We will work together with the common goal of protecting and advancing academic freedom around the world.

•(1415)

THOMAS MCQUEEN

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, at the Beechwood National Military Cemetery, Canadian Air Force pilot, Capt. Thomas McQueen is being laid to rest.

When he was eight years old, Thomas dreamed of being a fighter pilot. He designed paper airplanes. He went to air cadet camp, and he got top marks in school to get into training. An Afghanistan veteran, he even got to fly escort duty for Santa Claus.

Thomas loved the outdoors. He loved speed, whether on land, on water, or in the air, and he was a notable handyman. When he decided that prices were too high in the furniture stores, he built his own furniture.

He loved to make people laugh. But his real love was Caitlin. They were to be married right after Christmas.

We thank Thomas for his service to our country. We extend our condolences to Caitlin; to his parents, Tom and Edith; and to his family and friends. A good man, a proud Christian, is now flying with the angels.

* * *

VIOLA DESMOND

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, words and symbols matter. I was 4-years-old when I heard the N-word for the first time. I did not know what it meant, but the word stung.

[Translation]

Imagine how Viola Desmond felt when she was forced to leave her seat at the movie theatre.

[English]

Imagine the hurtfulness of that moment, the sting of being dragged out, arrested, and charged, the humiliation of losing her case in the courts. Her courageous act of standing up for her rights eventually led to a more just society.

[Translation]

For the first time, the image of a Canadian woman will be forever printed on a Canadian bank note. I thank the Minister of Finance for immortalizing this fight for human dignity.

[English]

Canadians of Afro-Canadian heritage are proud of what we are accomplishing. We, like all women, like Viola Desmond, strive to be fully equal, no more, no less.

Words and symbols do matter.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the outgoing vice-president to

Oral Questions

Canada today. We appreciate the good work that we all did together over the last decade. However, there are new challenges on the horizon with the United States, work that we fear the Prime Minister is not ready for.

While the new U.S. president-elect starts slashing taxes and looking out for American jobs first, the Prime Minister is doing photo ops and fundraisers. Meanwhile, there has not been a single additional full-time job created in this country in a year.

What is the Prime Minister's plan to compete and get Canadians back to work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we presented our plan to grow the economy for the middle class last year during the election campaign, and Canadians overwhelmingly supported it.

Since then we have been making record investments in infrastructure to put Canadians to work and to create opportunities for them to get to and from work with public transit. We have put more money in the pockets of the middle class by raising taxes on the wealthiest 1%, so we could lower them for middle-class Canadians. We are delivering a more generous Canada child benefit to the families that really need it by stopping sending it to millionaire families.

These are some of the many things we are doing to help Canadians.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is why it is so important for the Prime Minister to start getting serious.

In the U.S., the new administration is getting ready to slash taxes on businesses and families. It already has advantages over Canada in energy costs. Canada's competitiveness is at risk and jobs are going to go south even faster, unless the Prime Minister can get down to work.

Will the Prime Minister come back next year with a real low tax plan to keep jobs in Canada?

•(1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member opposite speaks about getting energy to markets, that is exactly what we have done by approving the Kinder Morgan TMX pipeline. That is going to allow us to diversify our energy markets and allow Alberta producers to finally get global prices for their natural resource.

On top of that, we continue to put forward growth and plans for investments that are going to help Canadians flourish right across the country.

We understand that building a strong economy and a strong environment go hand in hand, which the other party previously in government did not.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, high taxes are not creating jobs and with Trump's election, it is about to get worse.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The president-elect of our neighbour to the south has an aggressive approach to trade and protectionist policies to keep jobs in his country. That threatens Canadian jobs. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister suggested renegotiating NAFTA before anyone even asked him to.

Does the Prime Minister acknowledge that that was irresponsible?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all year long, opposition party members have spent their time criticizing the fact that we have been talking about global investment here in Canada, that I went to Davos and Sun Valley, and that we have talked to investors from around the world about investing in Canada. Decisions made by GE, GM, Amazon, and many other companies, including Thomson Reuters, indicate that we are on the right path to creating new, high-quality jobs here in Canada.

We understand what it means to be open to the world and to create jobs here. That is exactly what we are delivering to Canadians.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): And not one new job in Canada, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, we asked about cash for access and the Prime Minister said, “there are a lot of questions about these issues”. He needs to answer them.

The Liberal Party is promoting these events as a chance to discuss business and lobby the government. The hosts of these fundraisers know it. The guests know it. The Prime Minister knows it, but he also knows that this is wrong.

When will the Prime Minister finally admit that selling access to raise money for the Liberal Party is unethical? When will he commit to stopping it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what the members opposite say, Canadians can be reassured that we have some of the strongest rules in the country on political financing and fundraising. Those rules allow for openness, transparency, and accountability, which will reassure Canadians that everything is being done properly and within the rules.

That is exactly what the Liberal Party has always done. We follow all the rules and the values that underpin them.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is highly disappointing and it is actually disturbing to see the Prime Minister continue to blindly defend his actions of selling access to himself and the rest of the government. The Liberals are not even denying it anymore. They are explicitly linking government business with fundraising and raking in hundreds of thousands of dollars. Not only is the Prime Minister breaking his own ethical rules, but he appears to be breaking the conflict of interest laws.

Does the Prime Minister understand these facts and just does not care, or is the money too good to say no to?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the rhetoric and contentions of the members opposite, Canadians can be comfortable in knowing that, at the federal level, we have some of the strongest rules around fundraising and political financing across the country. Canadians can be reassured that we have always followed all the rules, and we always will, as well as upholding the principles and values under which Canadians have confidence in their government, principles like accountability, transparency and openness.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries said that no government business was discussed during these exclusive fundraisers, but that turned out not to be true.

I have a quote here that says, “There are questions about the inconsistencies in his own stories, his own contradictory statements, there are inconsistencies in what ministers of the Crown have been told to say to Parliament.” Do you know who said that? The Prime Minister himself, about the Conservatives' Senate scandal.

How can the Prime Minister justify becoming what he once criticized?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what the opposition members say, Canadians can be comfortable in knowing that, at the federal level, we have some of the strongest rules around political financing across the country.

The reality is that Canadians can have confidence in the accountability, openness, and transparency of our electoral financing system. I can assure Canadians that the Liberal Party has always followed the rules and upheld their underlying values and principles.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at those rules. The Prime Minister himself said that he wrote rules banning cash for access events. He stated:

There should be no preferential access to government...accorded to individuals... because they have made financial contributions to...political parties.

I could not agree more with the words of the Prime Minister on that one.

Access to ministers and the Prime Minister should not be based on donations to a political party. Why? Because it is unethical. Therefore, my question for the Prime Minister is this. Where was he last night?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that the rules governing political financing are extremely important and need to be followed. That is why we always follow them. The principles of openness, transparency, and accountability are necessary for public trust in our institutions. That is why we are proud that we have among the strongest rules in the country for political fundraising, and we always follow them.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): At another cash for access event. Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

On democratic reform, I know the Prime Minister got a bit confused by my question yesterday, but I do acknowledge that he again recommitted to changing the voting system before the next election. We also know that in the past the Prime Minister has expressed his personal support for a system that greatly benefits the Liberals.

My question for the Prime Minister is this. He would not unilaterally bring in a system that only helps the Liberals, would he?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is there are many, many different perspectives across this country on electoral reform. That is why I am so proud of the work that our minister and indeed the electoral reform committee, comprised of people from all parties, has done on this issue.

We are also very pleased to be engaging directly with Canadians through MyDemocracy.ca, where I encourage Canadians to visit, fill out their perspectives, and share their thoughts on how we can improve our democracy and our electoral system. MyDemocracy.ca, I highly recommend it.

* * *

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): It is not his democracy, it is our democracy, Mr. Speaker.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-29 does two things: it attacks Quebec's jurisdiction and eliminates consumer protections for Canada's bank customers. Stephen Harper tried to do the same thing when he was in office, but the courts stopped him.

Why is the Prime Minister trying to protect banks rather than the most vulnerable? Will he remove these odious provisions that attack Quebec consumers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Outremont knows full well that we are working hard to protect the most vulnerable across the country.

That is why we lowered taxes for the middle class and increased them for the wealthiest 1%. We implemented the Canada child benefit, which will lift hundreds of thousands of young people out of poverty. Unfortunately, the opposition members voted against this measure to increase taxes for the wealthiest Canadians. We are working to help the most vulnerable, including seniors and youth across the country, and we will continue to do so.

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just does not get it. His hubris is astounding. He has hosted at least 16 or 17 elite cash for access events. His cabinet has hosted over 80 shady events this year alone. They claim to be consultations, but they come with a \$1,500 entry fee. They are exclusive, whether they are in Bay Street law firms or the in the homes of millionaires.

The Prime Minister is selling access to his government. He knows it, and he knows it is wrong. When will he show some leadership and end these unethical cash for access events?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House and to be able to assure Canadians that when it comes to political financing, we have the strictest rules across the country. Even the Chief Electoral Officer stated that Canada's political financing laws are "the most advanced and constrained and transparent" in the world.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually feel bad for the members across the way, the ones not in cabinet, and the ones who actually believed the Liberal government would be different from the corrupt Liberals of the past. They believed, I am sure, the Prime Minister when he published his open and accountable government rules. They probably thought he was going to live up to those standards, and I am sure they are very disappointed.

The Prime Minister makes the House leader stand every day and repeat these pathetic talking points. It is insulting to her, and it is insulting to every member of the House.

Everyone, except the Prime Minister, can see that he is selling access. When will he wake up and put an end to these events?

• (1430)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am proud to be representing the good people of my riding of Waterloo and to do the work that this government is doing for Canadians. What is insulting is that we cannot work better together to respond to the very real challenges that Canadians are facing.

When it comes to political financing, we have some of the strictest rules across this country, and this government, this party, will continue to follow the rules.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has been asked a slew of questions about its ethics and all it is giving us in response is talking points.

Many organizations are warning that the government lacks credibility when it comes to its fundraising activities. The more the government refuses to give us honest answers to our questions, the more dishonest it proves itself to be.

Are the ministers waiting for Canadians to call for an inquiry or will they finally put a stop to this questionable behaviour and follow the Prime Minister's ethics rules?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House a number of times, the rules governing fundraising are among the strictest in the country. We follow all the rules.

Oral Questions

The Chief Electoral Officer also said that political financing laws in Canada are the most advanced, and constrained, and transparent in the world.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, serious ethical questions are being asked about the Prime Minister, his cabinet ministers, and their cash for access fundraisers, but all we get day after day are irrelevant talking points about Elections Canada finance rules.

There is government business being discussed at Liberal fundraisers, and people who pay \$1,500 are getting whatever they want: a new bank, an appointment, whatever.

When will the Prime Minister stop breaking his own ethics rules and finally put an end to his unethical shakedowns?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to remind and assure Canadians that when it comes to political financing, we have some of the strictest rules across this country. I can assure Canadians that we will continue to follow the rules.

I also know that Canadians appreciate that this government has taken unprecedented levels of consultation so that we can respond to the very real challenges that Canadians are facing.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has stated that Canadians have a lot of questions regarding the Liberals' cash for access fundraising scheme. No kidding. Yet, for all the assurances he tries to give, nobody is buying it. The Prime Minister set some pretty high expectations, and he is now demonstrating that punching above his weight was a one-time-only event.

Canadians should be asking when the “for sale” sign will be going up in front of the Prime Minister's Office, if it has not already. When will he come clean and admit that he made a promise on ethics he had no intention of keeping?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member to listen and understand that when it comes to political financing, we have some of the strictest rules across this country, and we will continue to follow the rules. Even the Chief Electoral Officer has stated that when it comes to Canadian financing, the rules are some of the strictest, advanced, and transparent in the world.

We will continue to respond to the very real challenges that Canadians are facing, and we will continue to do the good work that they expect us to do.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Ontario we have seen the Liberal cash for access scheme go full throttle for well over a decade with the Prime Minister's friends at the controls, and it is travelling at hyper-speed since the operation moved from Queen's Park to the PMO. Everyone knows it is wrong.

The Prime Minister's promise of a higher standard of transparency was only a mirage. Repeating the “strictest rules in the country” line is nothing more than a cheap Jedi mind trick. These are not the

fundraisers they are looking for. Canadians were offered a new hope, but is this cash for access scheme not more like the—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

• (1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians wanted a government that works for them. Canadians wanted a government that responds to the very real challenges that they are facing. That is exactly what this government is doing.

This government recognizes that when we follow the rules no conflicts of interest can exist, and that is why this government always follows the rules.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we launched a rescue mission to save that fun little Liberal quiz, MyDemocracy.ca, because, Houston, the Liberals have a credibility problem.

Instead of having a survey of confusing and ridiculous questions, we are suggesting adding clear and relevant questions. Here is one: Should the number of seats a party holds reflect the number of votes it actually received from Canadians? Our questions were drafted by experts and unanimously approved by the all-party committee, including our Liberal friends across the way.

Will the government come back from outer space and support our proposal and reboot their—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is another opportunity to invite all Canadians to go online or pick up the telephone and take part in MyDemocracy.ca. We want to hear from as many Canadians as possible about their values on electoral reform. We are proud that tens of thousands of Canadians have already taken part. We are proud of the Canadian political scientists who helped us draft these questions. We look forward to hearing from as many Canadians as possible before introducing legislation in this House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the survey at MyDemocracy.ca is as scientific as Harry Potter's Sorting Hat.

Will the government be innovative, challenging, or pragmatic? Personally, I would liked to have been Gryffindor. One thing is certain: the minister is Slytherin.

Oral Questions

This morning the government was asked to fix things by including the committee's questions in its e-consultation. What is positive about these questions is that they are not biased or partisan.

Will the minister take electoral reform seriously, change her approach, and include our committee's questions?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's interest in Harry Potter, and his interest in MyDemocracy.ca.

Over 22,000 Canadians participated in the survey that the committee put forward. We thank them for their participation. Now, we would like to hear from as many Canadians as possible in an accessible and inclusive way about their values on electoral reform before we move forward on this initiative. Tens of thousands of Canadians are responding. We are proud of this initiative, and we look forward to hearing many more voices before introducing legislation.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, based on his response to an earlier question, it sounds like the Prime Minister's choice of MyDemocracy.ca was a Freudian slip.

The CEO of Vox Pop Labs says that many responses to the MyDemocracy.ca survey will be rejected; not only responses unaccompanied by personal information but also any that do not meet the test of what he calls "a series of screening measures...to ensure that the...dataset [is] consistent with unique respondents". To be clear, the screening test is proprietary and therefore opaque.

When the final survey results are released, will the minister let Canadians know how many responses were excluded from the results and for what reason?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure all Canadians that we are open to hearing from as many voices as possible before introducing legislation. I can assure all Canadians that providing personal information is completely optional. I can assure all Canadians that we will incorporate all feedback into the final result, whether Canadians have chosen to incorporate their personal information or not. As always, we will be open and transparent about all of this.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the minister seems to have trouble answering questions, maybe I could make it a little easier for her by putting it in the form of a multiple choice question, like her so-called democracy survey.

Who ultimately chose the questions that were to be included in the Liberal survey? She could press one for experts, press two for academics, press three for her political staff, or press four for the magical democracy fairy.

Will the minister finally be honest with Canadians and simply admit that this is nothing more than a Liberal distraction tactic?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud that tens of thousands of Canadians are engaging in a conversation about their democratic reform.

We are proud to be a government that is open to hearing from Canadians before introducing legislation in this House. We are proud

that the initiative MyDemocracy.ca was developed in collaboration with Canadian political scientists.

We look forward to hearing from many more voices before we introduce legislation in this House.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has told us that she wants to consult Canadians by launching a survey to determine the respondents' age, gender, nationality, and what kind of voter they are. Oddly, she never talks about real things. Do Canadians want a referendum? Do Canadians want proportional representation or first past the post? Do Canadians want regional representation?

If the minister did not create this survey, can she tell us who are the geniuses who rigged the questions?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, MyDemocracy.ca is about empowering as many Canadians as possible to be part of this important conversation.

MyDemocracy.ca is based on the values that are at the heart of our democratic system. MyDemocracy.ca asks these questions based on the research that exists out there, based on best practices out there. Indeed, the very committee the member opposite participated on responded in its report that because there is no perfect system, the best way to have this conversation with citizens is through a values-based approach.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been a member of Parliament for over twelve and half years, and I cannot recall a time when a minister or a government initiative has been mocked so relentlessly as this minister and this survey. Does the minister not realize that the reason she and her government are being ridiculed is because the survey in itself is ridiculous?

The minister appointed a panel of so-called academic experts to help her design the survey. I can see why, because it gives the minister a chance to blame yet another group of individuals for her own failures.

Why does the Prime Minister not simply do the right thing and appoint somebody who knows what they are doing to this important file?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for twelve and half years of service to his constituents and to Canadians.

I am sure that he can agree that we all wake up every day hoping to make this a better place for all Canadians. We can all agree that we are all working towards creating a healthier democracy. That is what I am committed to. That is what we are committed to on this side of the aisle. We are thankful that tens of thousands of Canadians see the merit in our approach and are engaging.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, carfentanil is a devastating drug, a hundred times more powerful than fentanyl.

It has hit Canadian streets, and people are dying in British Columbia and Alberta. It is so deadly that first responders are overdosing when they merely enter a room in which it is airborne. Yet the government refuses to declare a national public health emergency or repeal Bill C-2, as experts have called for to save lives now.

Can the minister tell us, what is she waiting for? Must more Canadians die?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the member opposite, I am extremely concerned about the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the opioid crisis, which is the cause of hundreds of deaths across the country.

I can assure the member opposite that my department and I and our government are working on this matter every day. I am working with my colleagues, including the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, on this file. We are making sure that first responders have the resources they need.

This very day I was in communication with the Minister of Health for British Columbia to discuss making sure that all resources are being made available to respond to this crisis.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister ignored his provincial counterparts' request for months, but now he is finally going to sit down with them to have a friendly chat about money for health care. It is really not what they asked for. It is clear that the premiers are not backing down from demanding that the 6% annual increase be reinstated.

I am asking the Prime Minister if he plans to keep his election promise to work with the provinces and not to impose his terms on them.

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been my pleasure to work with my counterparts across the country over the past number of months to discuss how we can make sure that Canadians have access to the health care they need.

I am very pleased that the Prime Minister will be speaking with the premiers across the country about health care tomorrow evening, and then the Prime Minister will ask me to continue to work with the health ministers across the country to make sure that we invest in health care in a way that will transform the system and ensure that Canadians have access to the care they need.

● (1445)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many residents in my riding of Davenport who have been waiting upwards of three years to be reunited with their spouses and children. This has led to significant economic impacts, to broken families, and to an enormous amount of stress.

We know that the large backlogs and unacceptable processing times are the result of the former Conservative government's cutting of immigration levels and resources.

Can the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship please update the House on what he is doing to accelerate bringing families together here in Canada?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that yesterday, we reduced the processing times for spouses and their families from two years to one year.

A special thanks to the young officials whose tiger team led to a radical improvement in the processing guidelines for our new system, and I can tell the House that we will harness their skills to improve our performance in other areas.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Canada Border Services Agency is very concerned that violent drug cartels will extend their reach into Canada now that the visa requirement for Mexicans has been lifted. CBSA believes that Mexican drug cartels will send their operatives over the border with ease and recruit airport and marine employees with ties to Mexican crime rings.

With drug overdoses in the news every day, can the minister tell us how he plans to fix this mess made by the Liberals' political decision to lift Mexican visas?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CBSA has worked very closely with the immigration and citizenship department to ensure that we have a strong system in place to facilitate appropriate, legitimate travel between Canada and Mexico and at the same time to ensure the safety and security of Canadians.

Canadians can be absolutely assured that every reasonable step has been taken to make sure that this arrangement works successfully both ways.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not what they are saying in an internal report. The CBSA sees Mexican drug cartels picking up the baton from China on fentanyl shipments into Canada.

The Liberals' ill-advised decision to lift Mexican visas on a whim is now coming home to roost, and we will have tragic consequences.

How can the minister assure Canadians that murderous Mexican drug cartels will not have easy access into Canada to supply our streets with more deadly drugs?

*Oral Questions***LABOUR**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to that kind of fearmongering, in fact what that memo shows is that CBSA has done its homework. It has worked assiduously with all its partners in Canada and in Mexico to make sure that the border arrangement works effectively and that Canadians are indeed safe.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about another area where there is a lack of planning in the government's immigration policy. The funding for Liberal-sponsored Syrian refugees is about to run out, and months ago, in advance of this, I asked the minister how many of these refugees had found full-time jobs and how many they were predicting to do so.

He has already had this question in committee, and I will ask it once again. How many Syrian refugees have found full-time employment?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in terms of funding, the hon. member should know that just recently, last month, we initiated \$18.5 million of additional funding, half of which is going to language training and half of which is going to settlement areas.

The member should also know that this is a long-term investment. When refugees come from a terrible civil war without language or education, it takes a while for them to become fully operating Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is code for "I don't know and I don't care". He should care, because in order to have—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre and others will want to hear the question.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

• (1450)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple question. It is one that ensures the success of both Syrian refugees and Canadian taxpayers. They should be planning for this. He should be able to answer it.

How many of the refugees have found full-time employment?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been working with the provinces to plan this since day one, and the settlement agencies and many Canadians. As I have said, this is a long-term investment.

Somewhat less than half of the refugees currently have full-time employment, but 90% of the government-assisted refugees are in language training, and many of them are making terrific progress toward gainful employment.

This will be a successful long-term investment for Canada, and the children always do extremely well.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 4,600 financial professionals and accountants working for the public service have been fighting for pay equity for years, but tomorrow they have to go before the Public Service Labour Relations Board to defend themselves against a government that is trying to limit their case before they have even had a chance to be heard. This is why we need proactive pay equity legislation now.

This government claims to support pay equity, so why is it using its lawyers to fight a pay equity claim against its own employees?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of Canada's world-class public service. We are encouraged by recent progress in negotiations. We remain committed to bargaining in good faith with public sector unions in negotiating deals that are fair for public servants and fair for all Canadians.

We have a strong mandate to implement an ambitious agenda focused on the middle class. We know the important role our public service will play in delivering on those commitments. We look forward to continuing those discussions.

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[Translation]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is just a few weeks away, and for many Canadians who live from paycheque to paycheque without a cushion, getting the money they are entitled to feels a lot like an overdue Christmas present.

Whether they are waiting for a tax debt to be sorted out or a new Canada child benefit calculation, families in my riding are finding it hard to make ends meet because the Canada Revenue Agency backlog is doubling case processing times.

What will the minister do to ensure these families enjoy a merry Christmas?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me an opportunity to remind the House how important it is to invest in middle-class families and make sure that nobody falls through the cracks.

One way we are doing that is through the Canada child benefit. As our colleague said, that money is going a long way toward making real change for the families of nine million Canadians across the country and ensuring that benefits and services are meeting people's needs and expectations.

*Oral Questions***CONSUMER PROTECTION**

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-29 is a bad bill that implements bad measures from a bad Liberal budget. That is a fact.

However, it gets even worse. This bill contains a constitutional virus, since it attacks the Quebec Consumer Protection Act, which falls under provincial jurisdiction. The Supreme Court said so in 2014, and yet the government is bulldozing ahead anyway. We are heading for a big constitutional fight. Canada needs this like it needs a hole in the head.

Why is the Liberal government interfering yet again in provincial jurisdictions?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our budget contains several measures to strengthen the middle class.

We have also made improvements in the area of consumer protection. It is very important to have rules that work all across the country, and that is exactly what we did with respect to consumer protection regarding the banking sector.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is forgetting something. In 2014, the Supreme Court was clear: the Consumer Protection Act falls under provincial jurisdiction. However, the Liberal government is moving forward anyway.

At the National Assembly of Quebec, the Premier of Quebec said he was seriously considering challenging Bill C-29. The Liberal government is moving forward anyway. We are heading toward a constitutional battle. Lawyers will fare quite well, but the government is moving forward anyway.

Will the minister do what needs to be done and get rid of the flawed clauses in Bill C-29?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the banking sector falls under federal jurisdiction. We know that it is very important to protect consumers in the banking sector. That is precisely what we have done. We have made things better for Canadians across the country when it comes to protection in this sector.

* * *

• (1455)

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, neonicotinoids are a valuable tool for agriculture. Farmers have used these chemicals safely and effectively for decades, and they rely on them. Without consultation, and with virtually no scientific study, the Liberals announced that these chemicals will no longer be available to producers. Now we hear that decision was not based on science, but, in fact, came down from the PMO.

The integrity of our agriculture system is critical. How can that be maintained when decisions such as this are not being based on science, but on the whims of one or two of the Prime Minister's hired help?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes matters of health and safety very seriously, and

Health Canada reviews pesticides on a regular basis. As part of that scientific review, Health Canada found that a particular pesticide, imidacloprid, can be found in concentrations up to 290 times of what is an acceptable risk in water. Given this risk, Health Canada is proposing a phase-out of agricultural uses for imidacloprid.

There is a proposal. It is evidence based. It is sensitive to the realities of farmers while proposing steps to protect the environment.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fully one in eight Canadian jobs are linked to international trade. Stronger and more strategic foreign direct investment initiatives will help ensure that Canada is recognized as the best location for international investment.

We know that the Minister of International Trade has been very busy opening new international markets for Canadian businesses, with her efforts at CETA and the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, but could the minister inform the House what she is doing to attract job-creating investments for Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that now is the time for partnerships and prosperity, now is the time for Canada to be the world's location of choice for investors.

Strengthening our national brand and attracting international investment are key elements of my mandate. That is why I am delighted that Canada is dedicating \$218 million to support the creation of a new investment promotion agency to increase the investment that will create jobs and growth for middle-class Canadians.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Statistics Canada's release was more bad news for Alberta. Last month, unemployment in Alberta rose to a staggering 9%, the highest in a quarter century. The report also highlighted that 14,000 construction jobs were lost last month. The Liberals talk about building stuff, but the people who build stuff have lost 14,000 jobs. What am I missing here?

Could the minister please tell Alberta's struggling families when they can expect the Liberals to do something to actually create the jobs we need now?

Oral Questions

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all understand the difficult times that Alberta families are going through. That is why, in co-operation with the province, we approved three pipelines that will create more than 22,000 jobs. Also, with the support of the municipalities, we have approved more than 125 projects, with a combined investment of more than \$3 billion for Alberta communities. We believe that these investments will create jobs for all Canadians, including Albertans.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I rose in the House to ask the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs a question, to which she replied “it is not a situation I am well aware of.”. In fact, I have brought this file to the attention of the minister three times in the House, and I have written a letter to her, which remains unanswered.

It is her responsibility to do her job. Out of respect for the students of NORTEP-NORPAC, who travelled from Saskatchewan to be here today, will the minister answer my question? Will her government help NORTEP-NORPAC?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for helping to arrange the meeting with the students from this program with my department and my office earlier today.

The member can rest assured that I have asked my office to continue working with her and the students, but also the program's administration, on a path forward with all possible partners.

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STATISTICS CANADA

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election and recently with the census, Canadians showed their belief in supporting good quality data from an independently trusted source. The data collected by Statistics Canada helps everyone—the private sector, governments at all levels, not-for-profit groups, and researchers—to make better decisions, and it is the cornerstone of this government's commitment to evidence-based decision making. Could the minister update the House on how he is ensuring the independence of Statistics Canada?

• (1500)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for that very insightful question. It was my honour on day one, on behalf of this government, to reinstate the mandatory long-form census. That was a very important government announcement.

Yesterday, I was pleased to also table legislation to amend the Statistics Act to reinforce the independence of our statistical agency, because let us make no mistake about this: ideology will no longer trump good-quality data.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, KPMG released the findings of its audit on the Nunavut Planning Commission. The findings were troubling. Victor Tootoo, who was the chief financial officer of NPC, was also the president of two companies to which the NPC was charging hundreds of thousands of dollars. I know the Liberals do not understand conflict of interest, but on this side of the House we do. How is the Liberal government going to respond to this blatant conflict of interest?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too am looking into this matter. In terms of the Nunavut Planning Commission, there is much work being done, including new members of the commission, and as well, we are working hard on Nunavut devolution.

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[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden is in town. He will meet with the Quebec premier. What a great opportunity for the Canadian government to join him and to make him see that Quebec's forestry regime is compliant with the terms of free trade. What a great opportunity to increase pressure with concrete gestures to protect our industry. No one wants another sellout of the industry with a devastating agreement.

Will the government immediately offer loan guarantees to our forestry industry and commit to ensuring that free trade will continue?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are still committed to protecting Quebec's forestry regime and we will continue to include it in all negotiations. We are confident that the Canadian forestry industry operates in accordance with international rules.

I was pleased to speak to Luc Blanchette, the Quebec minister of forests, wildlife and parks, two weeks ago. I look forward to meeting with him again this afternoon, together with the Quebec minister of economy, science and innovation, and the Minister of Natural Resources.

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CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a letter dated November 29, Jean-Marc Fournier reminded the minister of high finance that “the federal Parliament cannot decide in a peremptory manner that provincial laws do not apply”.

Nevertheless, the Liberals voted against—

The Speaker: Order, please.

I mentioned this week that ministers must be referred to by their proper titles.

I would ask the hon. member to finish his question.

Government Orders

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals knowingly voted against our amendments to Bill C-29, which would have solved this problem. They had the letter. The Liberals chose to protect the banks by attacking all of Quebec.

How many \$1,500 tickets did it take for the Liberals to sell Quebec's consumer protection to the banks?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our budget contains many measures to improve the situation of middle-income Canadians.

We also decided that it is very important to modernize and improve consumer protection for Canada's bank customers. That is what we did. It is important because the banking sector falls under federal jurisdiction.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Now I believe the hon. opposition House leader has the usual Thursday question.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask if the government House leader could share with the House what the business will be for the remainder of this week and for next week.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the rest of today, we will debate Bill S-4, on tax conventions.

Tomorrow, we will call Bill C-25, the business framework legislation, followed by Bill C-30, regarding CETA.

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

Monday and Tuesday we will proceed with Bill C-31, an act to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine. In the days following, we will put Bill S-4 at the top of the Order Paper so that we can pass it before the Christmas recess.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

**TAX CONVENTION AND ARRANGEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2016**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-4, An Act to implement a Convention and an Arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and to amend an Act in respect of a similar Agreement, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has two minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do want to take this opportunity while I am on my feet to particularly thank you for your involvement in hosting a

great Christmas event yesterday for the children on Parliament Hill. My daughter was much more excited about meeting you than Santa Claus.

Just briefly, in my final few minutes, I will summarize what I have been talking about on this important bill. Bill S-4 would implement a tax treaty between Canada and the Government of Israel, Canada and the Government of Taiwan, and Canada and Hong Kong. It is important that we take this time to reflect on the importance of trade liberalization, in general, and certainly the benefits that have come to Canada and will continue to come to Canada as the result of our commitment to open trade.

I have called on the government to continue with what it has been doing, which is moving forward with the kinds of trade deals that we began under the previous government, but also to move from inertia from the continuation of these things to actually starting new initiatives when it comes to trade. We need now, more than ever, leaders who are prepared to recognize and speak to the benefits of trade.

I spoke about the importance of understanding the relationship between trade and our strategic interests, and how our relationships with the countries that are identified in this legislation are particularly important, because of the strategic dynamics that are at play—the kind of relationship we have with Taiwan as a democracy in the Asia Pacific region and certainly the relationship we have with Israel as a democracy in the Middle East.

Our desire to pursue stronger commercial ties reflects Canada's economic interests but also reflects our values and the benefits of working together, in particular at a commercial level, with countries that share our values.

We are pleased to support this bill and hope to see it pass.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on this very important subject.

I wonder if he, like me, became suspicious when he read the bill's title, which refers to preventing income tax evasion. Does he really believe that this bill and its scheduled conventions will fight tax evasion?

Granted, perhaps the information-sharing agreements between signatories could be of some use in that regard. However, the language used in these conventions is much weaker than what is usually found in international information-sharing agreements.

Does my colleague have any faith in the title, which says that these two conventions for the avoidance of double taxation will be enough to prevent fiscal evasion?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I think this bill is an important step in the right direction. That is why our party will support it.

Government Orders

[English]

It is a step in the right direction. Certainly, the measures undertaken will make a significant and positive difference in combatting tax evasion. If the member has proposals for further enhancing co-operation between the countries identified here with respect to security and enforcement, those would potentially be good proposals. However, the provisions that are here are positive and absolutely worth supporting in light of the impacts they will have.

• (1510)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a fine bill from the Senate. Taiwan is our 12th largest trading partner. It is a democratic jurisdiction that we need to support. We do a lot of trade and we need to find ways to build relationships to ensure Canadians can not only do business in Canada but in Taiwan as well, and eventually use the value chains that have been created into China to ensure we build relationships.

This type of agreement would not only allow Taiwan, Canada, and our citizens to truly benefit, but also China. A successful Taiwan is a successful China. This is why I am pleased to support the bill. I am pleased to hear that a lot of members in the House agree. I hope the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan can also agree.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member made some very good points, especially about the Taiwan-China relationship. It is interesting how there are fundamental differences with respect to not only the kinds of systems that exist in those countries, but also in the way that the People's Republic of China views Taiwan. However, significant trade and commercial activity happens between those countries as well.

With respect to our relationship with Taiwan, it is important for Canada to deepen that partnership not only for our economic interests but also because of the benefits that come strategically from having stronger partnerships with other democracies within the Asia-Pacific region. That is important for China because of the potential commercial bridge that exists there. It is also important because of the way in which we can, through these partnerships with other like-minded Asia-Pacific countries, work to set the terms of trade in the Asia-Pacific region in a way that reflects our values, international human rights, labour rights, environmental rights, and these sorts of things.

Incidentally, I have always been a strong supporter of the trans-Pacific partnership, which in the first round did not include Taiwan, but could potentially include Taiwan in a future round. Whatever form that co-operation takes, it is important that we emphasize the importance of collaboration among those democracies in that region.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, as a follow-up to the previous question about this important trading partner in the Asia-Pacific region that is Taiwan, could my colleague expand a bit on the fact that Taiwan could be a stepping stone for Canadian businesses in the Asia-Pacific region, not only with China but with Canada's other trading partners in the region, particularly given the intellectual property regulations that are in place in Taiwan but not in China?

Could the member tell us more about Taiwan being a potential economic stepping stone for our businesses in the Asia-Pacific region?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises a very good point. It is not that we should never or can never trade with countries that do not share our values or respect universal human values, but it is certainly much easier and, to a much greater extent, beneficial to be able to prioritize trade with those countries where there is a commonality in values, and also where we are able to work from similar rule of law standards. That is what makes trade easier with places like Taiwan, as well as other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. They have similar intellectual property standards to us when it comes to human rights, labour rights, and protecting the environment. My colleague is quite right that it is particularly important, easier, and also beneficial to us economically and strategically to engage with those types of countries in particular.

• (1515)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend and colleague has recommended I pose a question. Not wanting to disappoint him, I have a question for the member.

When we talk about the issue of taxation policies, which is a very important aspect of trade agreements in principle, and when we look at the countries in question today, Israel, Taiwan, etc., it is important that we recognize it further advances and formalizes an important aspect of an agreement that is already in place. By doing that, we reinforce those trade connections between Canada and other specific countries. I see that as a good thing. We have to recognize that Canada is in fact a trading nation and we are very dependent on world trade.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my friend from Winnipeg North on the benefits that have come to Canada through trade. We are a trading nation. The benefits that come from that are not always obvious or are taken for granted in our political debates. However, the Conservative Party has really led the way in demonstrating the benefits of trade and in signing and negotiating new trade deals. As I said during my remarks, it is good to see some of the continuation of that policy in certain respects with regard to trade.

At the same time, we are not seeing nearly as strong a willingness on the part of the government to really defend the importance of trade. We see the Liberals completing some of the things that were started under the previous government, but we will wait to see whether there is actually a willingness to start new initiatives. It is at least encouraging to hear some of the words that have been said about this bill. Again, whether we will see actions follow from that on new initiatives remains to be seen.

Government Orders

We strongly affirm on this side of the House that, yes, Canada is a trading nation and indeed must be a leader in speaking out about and demonstrating the benefits that come from open trade.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, very quickly, I would like to ask the same question I asked my Liberal colleague earlier, who did not seem to think that conventions for the avoidance of double taxation can potentially facilitate tax evasion.

According to its title, the bill will fight tax evasion. However, let us look at the Canada-Barbados tax agreement. Taxation levels in Barbados are very low, and the agreement we have with that country is used by certain individuals to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

Does the member see any danger with our 92 conventions? Could some of them potentially facilitate tax evasion?

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to comment specifically on the deal with Barbados. It is not what we are debating in front of us, and, honestly, I do not know the details on that agreement.

In general, though, sometimes we get this perspective that jurisdictional competition is necessarily a bad thing. I do not think we should assume that jurisdictional competition with respect to tax rates is always a bad thing. In fact, often it can be a very good thing. If jurisdictions are competing to offer a more efficient combination of public services and lower taxes, then many economists would tell us that this leads to better service delivery and a more optimal combination of services and taxes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House at second reading stage of Bill S-4. The bill passed third reading in the Senate on Monday. It was sent to us, and it is important that we debate it here in the House.

I understand that the government is rather eager to pass Bill S-4. If it receives royal assent by January 1, the two tax conventions that are listed in the bill, specifically with Israel and Taiwan, will come into effect. The ultimate goal of those conventions, as other members have said in their speeches, is to avoid double taxation. When you pay taxes in one jurisdiction and repatriate money that has already been taxed by another jurisdiction, it goes without saying that Canada does not tax that income a second time.

The bill contains two conventions. The one with Israel is in fact an update, since we have had a convention with Israel since 1975. We are simply updating it today, adding new OECD standards based on its model agreement for the avoidance of double taxation. The bill therefore aims to bring the previous convention with Israel in line with current OECD standards.

The second convention in the bill is completely new. We have never had this type of convention with Taiwan. It is something that did not exist before, which is rather positive.

The bill also includes a technical change to the Canada-Hong Kong Tax Agreement to clarify the situation of the convention with Hong Kong to make it parallel to that of Taiwan. These two

territories have special status with respect to China. Since we are adopting a convention with Taiwan, we have to update the terminology used in the description of the convention with Hong Kong to ensure that it is identical to that of Taiwan.

I will not spend too much time on the convention with Hong Kong except to say that we have to be careful in this case because according to one expert who testified on the matter on Monday at the Standing Committee on Finance, the proposed change in the convention with Hong Kong could be interpreted as a reopening of the tax treaty. In a way, we might agree that the current convention with Hong Kong is not in force because of the inaccurate terminology. This could be looked at more closely. I believe that the technical change for ensuring consistency with the Taiwan convention is entirely appropriate.

I will also mention that we will support Bill S-4, introduced in the House today. It comes to us from the Senate because, traditionally, tax conventions come from the Senate. Last year, we saw this a number of times. As hon. members know, there are 92 tax conventions in Canada. Currently, some are being negotiated, while others are in line to be ratified, like the ones we are talking about today.

Traditionally, bills on such conventions originate in the Senate. They are subsequent to negotiations between the jurisdictions. I cannot use the term “country” in this context, because we are talking about Taiwan. We have to be careful about the words we use. I know that we could make diplomatic mistakes with the status of Taiwan.

• (1520)

We need only think of what happened last week when the U.S. president-elect put his foot in his mouth on this issue. In diplomacy, we must pay attention to the words we use.

To summarize, these conventions are negotiated between two authorities, and that can take some time. In Taiwan's case, among others, negotiations were lengthy. We were discussing it back when the Conservatives were in power. This convention was finally signed in January 2016 by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Ottawa and the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei.

This was done intentionally so that this arrangement would not be negotiated nation to nation, which could be perceived as a diplomatic faux pas. China could have believed that we recognized Taiwan as a separate state. We had to be careful and that is why it was the two offices that negotiated the Canada-Taiwan agreement, by following the instructions of their own governments, of course. These negotiations lasted a long time, and the agreement was finally signed on January 21, 2016, if my memory serves me correctly.

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Nearly a year later, the government is now proposing to implement it. The Parliament of Taiwan ratified it fairly quickly in February 2016. It has taken us a little longer. I tried to find out why, but the government has not yet explained why it is only bringing this forward in December 2016. The government is saying that this is practically a national emergency because if the arrangement is not ratified before the end of December, it cannot be implemented until January 1, 2018. The reason is that the text of the arrangement stipulates that the arrangement will take effect on the first day of January in the year following its ratification. That is why the government is saying that it is urgent that the arrangement be ratified so that it can take effect on January 1, 2017.

As the parliamentary secretary mentioned, the convention with Israel has unfortunately not yet been ratified by Israel's parliament. We will see whether it can be ratified before December 31 so that it too can take effect before January 1, 2017.

We are going to support the bill because of these two agreements, but we have serious reservations regarding the tax conventions. I spoke about the risk associated with tax conventions when I asked my colleagues questions. I wanted to comment on it further because, in this case, the disparity between the tax rates of the countries and authorities with whom we are ratifying conventions for the avoidance of double taxation and our own are not necessarily problematic.

Thanks to the research done by the Library of Parliament staff, whom I would like to thank, we were able to find out the specific tax rates of individuals, businesses, and trusts in the two jurisdictions in question, Israel and Taiwan. They are very similar to those in Canada. Tax rates are a bit lower in Taiwan, but Israel has more progressive tax rates, which means that they are a bit higher than ours, so there is not necessarily a problem in this case.

However, tax conventions can be dangerous when they are signed with low or no tax jurisdictions. Indeed, there are countries that require no income tax to be paid whatsoever and that take part in this tax competition that puts downward pressure on tax rates. It is a serious problem for our society, and one that needs to be resolved. We need to pay particular attention to those countries. In this particular case, there is no problem.

• (1525)

However, as I was saying earlier, we have a tax treaty with Barbados. One of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois raised this issue a few months ago and moved a motion to have this tax treaty with Barbados reviewed. That treaty is of the same nature as the ones we are studying today and very similar to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development model, a convention adopted in 1980, and similar to the ones we are studying today. There are a few differences, because at the time, the OECD model was a little less detailed, but it is essentially the same model used today.

What might suggest that the tax treaty with Barbados is perhaps being used for the wrong reasons is that, in 2014, Barbados ranked second in terms of Canada's foreign investments abroad, after the United States of course, which is our largest trading partner given its proximity and the fact that our administrations are similar from a

legal standpoint for both corporations and individuals. It goes without saying that the U.S. is our most important economic partner.

It is surprising, however, that according to Statistics Canada figures, Barbados ranked second in 2014—and not only in 2014, since Barbados was also near the top of the list in 2015, in third place. It also ranked second in 2013.

There is reason to wonder why the second largest recipient of Canadian foreign investment is Barbados, a tiny Caribbean country that has no major economic activity to speak of. It does raise questions.

Looking at the numbers, one cannot help but wonder what is going on there, what could possibly attract so much Canadian investment in Barbados, and whether an investigation is in order. However, there is no need to dig very deep to find out why Barbados is the number two destination for all of our foreign investments in the world. The main reason is that we have an agreement with Barbados to avoid double taxation.

That allows companies who decide to take advantage of this agreement to send money from their subsidiary in Barbados to Canada and then declare to the Canadian tax authorities that they have already paid their 0.5% tax in Barbados. As a result, they do not pay taxes in Canada because, according to the agreement, when a party pays taxes in another country and brings the money back to Canada, there is no second taxation.

As I said earlier, there is no problem with Taiwan and Israel. In other cases, however, there are huge issues because we allow companies to pay a lot less in taxes than what they would pay if taxation levels were similar to Canada's.

That is why it is with a note of caution that I support Bill S-4 today. I want to highlight the problem and raise a red flag for the government's benefit. The parliamentary secretary did not seem to know what the problem was when it was raised by my colleague—he did not seem to know what the problem was or want to consider it. Unfortunately, the Liberals voted against a motion to review the Canada-Barbados tax treaty. I would like to remind my honourable colleagues of that, and I call upon the government to at the very least commit to reviewing the 92 conventions we have with other governments around the world, because problems could arise.

If today we say yes to a treaty with Taiwan to avoid double taxation and if, a few years later, Taiwan decides to modify its regulations to become a competitor in the race to the lowest tax rates, then maybe our conventions would need to be reviewed.

That is the crux of the message I wanted to send the government today. It should start taking a close look at the tax situation in every country with which we have a convention because there could come a time when such conventions are used to subvert the very ideals underpinning them.

Government Orders

• (1530)

The title of the bill mentions preventing tax evasion. We have to ensure that these conventions stand the test of time as tools to prevent tax evasion, not to facilitate it. In some cases, they facilitate tax evasion.

I hope there will be at least one mechanism that enables the government to examine and monitor the tax situation in the jurisdictions with which we have tax conventions. It would be very disappointing if the government did not commit to monitoring the situation in those jurisdictions because such neglect could lead to serious problems. We know that tax evasion is an extremely serious problem, and it is definitely one of my priorities as the national revenue critic.

This is a problem for every country in the world and every person on the planet seeking better government services. The government's role is to provide services to citizens, but when companies and individuals have more and more ways to avoid paying their fair share, our societies pay the price. The honest ones who pay their fair share end up having to pay more every year. They have to contribute more because some taxpayers decide to play by different rules and avail themselves of the services of unscrupulous tax experts who have no ethical qualms about trying to make their clients pay as little tax as possible. Sometimes they use questionable schemes that the Canada Revenue Agency disputes, thankfully. More often than not, it turns out that these schemes are perfectly legal.

These conventions to avoid double taxation are one of the components of the Income Tax Act that make tax evasion legal. There are many other ways to review our policies and legislative measures to fight tax evasion. The government should make this bill and this file a priority instead of talking only about investments. We are told repeatedly that \$444 million has been invested in fighting tax evasion.

If tax evasion continues to be completely legal in some cases, tax experts will be able to defend their cases before the courts by saying that they obeyed the law and that there is no problem. The Canada Revenue Agency will challenge this by holding that they did not obey the spirit of the law. The tax experts will win and manage to find new ways every time to get around our tax measures and ensure that their clients do not pay their fair share in society. That is unacceptable.

It is the issue of the day, and I would like to see the government take it more seriously, not only by investing money to find the guilty parties, but also by making the necessary effort to make tax evasion as difficult as possible for the dishonest people who engage in it.

There is something relatively positive in these conventions that is not necessarily something we want to see, and that is a tax information exchange. For example, in this convention with Taiwan, it is good that a section of this agreement talks about a tax information exchange, but the best solution would have been a tax information exchange agreement that was separate from the convention on double taxation. This is a much more robust mechanism for exchanging information, even though any such exchange is on request, which is a major drawback. In fact, the government has to have its suspicions before it can request

information from the jurisdiction with which it has an agreement. It is not an automatic exchange. I know we are heading toward an automatic information exchange, but that is not in the bill and it is something we would like to see in the future.

We would like to see more investments, legislative measures, and information exchanges that are truly effective and allow for information to be obtained in real time. We would like to see a shift from on request to an automatic exchange.

• (1535)

I would be pleased to answer my colleagues' questions.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for his rather interesting speech.

During the debate and in his speech, he talked about risk a number of times. Bill S-4 applies to current treaties that have already been signed. I believe that if we intend to sign treaties with other countries we will.

I question the sincerity of his concern since he is looking at this bill through the lens of countries with which we have no agreement.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I gladly go back to the issue of risk and potential danger.

There are two treaties before us. The one with Taiwan is brand new since we started from scratch. The one with Israel is only an update to apply the OECD model. That being said, there is a potential danger. I remind my colleague that we have 92 similar tax treaties.

Of course, I keep mentioning the ones that we often hear about, the ones that seem problematic. Therein lies the potential danger, and that is why I recommend that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance establish a mechanism to monitor the tax situation of the countries we sign conventions with. That would ensure that, over time, treaties like the ones with Taiwan and Israel remain reasonable and do not facilitate tax evasion like others do.

I want to emphasize that there is a potential danger and encourage the government to closely monitor the situation in every jurisdiction to make sure that our tax treaties do not defeat the purpose of this bill.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member across the way talked a great deal about tax evasion and avoidance, and even at one stage referenced the government providing literally hundreds of millions of dollars to deal with the issue. It is important to recognize that this government takes tax avoidance and evasion very seriously, and the budget clearly demonstrates that.

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When we look at the trade file, we can talk about the investment agreements with Mongolia and Hong Kong that have been signed in the last year and we are debating the Ukraine and CETA agreements today. Those are some of the most obvious ones. Then there is Bill S-4 itself, which deals with the taxation policy, along with trade.

My question to the member is this. I thought I heard the member say he supports the bill. Does he not recognize that the bill is important and that there would be value in passing the bill in a relatively timely fashion so we can put in place the measures encompassed in this legislation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, the member's question gives me an opportunity to talk about the importance of these two tax treaties, which we support because they are beneficial to Canadians, unlike other similar treaties.

These are indeed important opportunities, and more opportunities will open for Canadians and the jurisdictions that sign these treaties with us. They can do business here, and we can do the same in their respective jurisdictions.

As I said earlier, Taiwan is a launching pad for Canadian businesses in the Asia-Pacific region. We could say the same about Israel and other countries, like Japan, which is very advanced. Also, Taiwan's regulations are similar to Canada's, especially when it comes to the protection of intellectual property, which is almost non-existent in China. Taiwan has put a lot of effort into getting Canadian businesses to use it as a point of entry into other areas of the Asia-Pacific region. It is an exemplary democratic presence that we want to encourage with economic exchange and potentially with trade enhancing treaties such as this one.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for showing an interest in an issue that may seem rather dry at first glance. Before I ask my question, I would like to say that I initiated a discussion with the people of Trois-Rivières on tax havens with the help of the parliamentary tools that are available, and it is one of the issues on which I received the biggest response. Although people may not fully understand how tax havens work, they know that companies that use these tax havens are not paying their fair share of taxes and that Canadians are the ones who will have to compensate for that, if they want to ensure that there is continued funding for existing public services.

My question about the bill before us is this: when there is a reciprocal agreement that the same company will not be taxed twice, should the agreement not contain some safeguards that say, for example, that the tax rate must be the same or that any discrepancy must be previously set out in the bill?

That way every citizen would feel as though the company that is bringing its profits back home paid its fair share of taxes somewhere.

• (1545)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, my colleague raised an excellent point about such agreements. I have to say that my constituents in Sherbrooke are very concerned about tax evasion. They think it is outrageous that some companies and individuals, rich ones, typically, can hire cunning tax experts to help them bend

the rules. KMPG was a pretty high-profile example. Individuals paid the company \$100,000 to figure out a tax arrangement under which they would not have to pay tax on income earned from their funds in the Isle of Man. Such shameful situations anger my constituents.

Solutions may be put forward to equalize tax rates, thereby ensuring that companies pay their fair share. Those mechanisms are under review, and this is probably a good approach because companies that use tax shelters also use our infrastructure, our roads, and our airports here in Canada. Our taxes pay for all of that, but they use their wealth to avoid contributing.

They benefit from our infrastructure and our society, but they pay virtually no tax. We need to speak out against that every chance we get. Our constituents in Trois-Rivières and Sherbrooke are speaking out. That is why the government should pay very close attention to this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak on Bill S-4.

At first glance, members might ask why a bill dealing with international tax treaties and measures would be of much importance. On the face of it, Bill S-4 does not appear to have much to do with economic growth, but if we look at it a little, the thrust of the bill is entirely consistent with our government's commitment to growing the middle class and to help those looking to join it.

Canada is a trading nation and improving economic growth in our country is highly dependent on international trade and investment. Removing barriers to incoming business and capital is essential to these efforts. Let me reiterate, our government has been relentless in its efforts to produce economic activity and has made historic investments in infrastructure.

In addition to the investments made in budget 2016, the Minister of Finance recently announced the creation of an infrastructure bank, which will help to leverage federal government commitments even further.

Our government recognizes that to further grow the economy, we need to attract investment and talent to our country. International tax competitiveness is a key element of Canada's economic performance that we must not overlook. A tax agreement with other jurisdictions, including Taiwan and Israel, is an important part of attracting new investments and talented individuals, boosting economic growth, and creating jobs.

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While large-scale tax measures generally get more attention in terms of their efforts on Canada's international competitiveness, there are many other components that can be easily integrated into the tax system and strengthen Canada's tax advantage.

Tax treaties with other countries and jurisdictions play an important part in the goal of making Canada's tax system as efficient as possible, and thus more competitive. Canada currently enjoys the benefits of a network of bilateral double taxation conventions currently enforced with 92 foreign jurisdictions, one of the largest such networks in the world.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

There is an ongoing need to expand and modernize this network, and we are continually working to secure additional agreements and update existing ones. These treaties of mutual benefit to both signatories and to their respective taxpayers provide clarity on the rules relating to cross-border trade and investment, and remove barriers to augmenting them.

Furthermore, these agreements help to combat tax avoidance and evasion through the exchange of information that permits our government to uncover income that may be concealed elsewhere. It is very important, and our government has spent a lot of time and energy on this, ensuring that Canadians have a tax system that they can have confidence in and that all Canadians and Canadian corporations are paying their fair share.

To these ends, Bill S-4 implements a double taxation convention and a double taxation arrangement recently concluded and publicly announced with the State of Israel and with respect to the jurisdiction of Taiwan. Bill S-4 also adds an interpretation provision to the legislation that implemented the Canada-Hong Kong double taxation agreement, for greater certainty.

Relief from double taxation is desirable because of the harmful effects double taxation can have on the expansion of trade and the movement of capital and labour between countries. Double taxation conventions require countries to clarify the respective jurisdiction to tax income and provide certain forms of relief from double taxation. There is currently no double taxation arrangement between Canada and Taiwan, Canada's fifth-largest Asia-Pacific trading partner and 12th overall in 2013. This means that Taiwan is one of the few remaining of Canada's larger, and I would say one of the most important, trading partners to enter into our tax treaty network.

The bill also implements a revised double taxation convention with the State of Israel. This replaces an existing tax treaty that was signed here in Ottawa in 1975. The revised double taxation convention has been updated to make it consistent with Canada's current tax treaty policy.

• (1550)

This revised double taxation convention with the State of Israel builds upon strong, multi-dimensional, bilateral relations, as evidenced by our close political, economic, social, and cultural ties.

Underlying the strength of the Canada-Israel bilateral relationship is a breadth of personal connections between the two countries. There are approximately 20,000 Canadian citizens living in Israel

and many Canadians, of course, have family in Israel. The Canadian Jewish community, which stands at around 350,000, acts as an important bridge between Canada and Israel. These informal ties have led to significant co-operation in business, philanthropy, and tourism.

Canada and Israel have a number of bilateral agreements in place, including the air transportation agreement from 2015; a renewed and funded science and technology agreement; the Canadian Space Agency and Israeli Space Agency memorandum of understanding for space co-operation, dated 2005; and the 1975 convention.

On the trade side, Canada-Israel merchandise trade totalled approximately \$1.4 billion in 2015, comprising \$342 million in Canadian exports to, and \$1.2 billion imports, from Israel. Israel was Canada's forty-fourth-largest export destination worldwide in 2013. In that year, it was Canada's forty-third-largest source of imports globally.

Even though Israel's trade numbers with Canadian may not be in the top 10 or top 20, I would still certainly say, after having the honour of visiting the State of Israel this past summer, that expanding trade and investment ties between Canada and the State of Israel is very important.

What Israel has done with venture capital funding, specifically in Tel Aviv, is very impressive. Its venture capitalists are world-renowned. There are a lot of exciting things happening in the State of Israel that Canada needs to look at and emulate.

With respect to Bill S-4, the intention of this convention signed with the State of Israel on September 21 is to contribute to the elimination of tax barriers to trade and investment between Canada and Israel and to help solidify the economic links between the two countries. It is consistent with the government's commitment to seek new investment and trade opportunities for Canadians and to promote foreign investment in Canada.

As with the double taxation arrangement with Taiwan, the convention with the State of Israel generally follows the pattern of other double taxation conventions already concluded by Canada. Accordingly, it generally follows the format and language of the OECD model tax convention on income and on capital.

Most countries, including Canada and Israel, tax their residents on their global income. Additionally, when a resident of a country derives income from sources in another country, such as from a business located there, it is typical for the source country to subject that income to tax.

The convention recognizes this international taxation dynamic and sets out in which circumstances and to what extent Canada and Israel may tax the earnings of one another's residents and non-residents.

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The convention also implements the current internationally agreed standard for the exchange of tax information upon request, as developed by the OECD and, therefore, allows Canadian tax authorities to obtain information relevant to the administration and enforcement of Canadian tax laws, and assists them in the prevention of international tax evasion and avoidance.

Bill S-4 would also reduce double taxation and encourage investment by reducing the withholding tax. It would provide for a maximum withholding tax rate of 15%, in the case of the State of Israel and the jurisdiction of Taiwan, on portfolio dividends paid to non-residents. This would help encourage and foster innovation and trade between Israel and Canada, and Taiwan and Canada.

For dividends paid by subsidiaries to their parent companies, the maximum withholding tax rate is reduced to 5% in the case of the State of Israel, and 10% in the case of the jurisdiction of Taiwan.

Again, these measures would encourage and facilitate trade and investment and increase ties between Canada and Israel, and Canada and Taiwan.

The bill would also cap the maximum withholding tax rate on interest and royalties at 10% and on periodic pension payments at 15%.

The provisions of the convention and arrangement contained in the bill are an excellent example of our government's efforts to create a more equitable and competitive tax system.

• (1555)

Bill S-4 would allow us to continue to grow our economy and create good middle-class jobs. It would allow for more predictable and fairer tax treatment of cross-border transactions and help the government to combat tax avoidance. We look forward to securing additional agreements such as these, and I encourage all members to support this legislation to help Canada become a more competitive jurisdiction for international business and investment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. The issue of fixing our tax regimes with other jurisdictions that people move back and forth between is something that we need to do. Here we are doing it with Taiwan and Israel.

I am a little confused about this bill being described as an act to prevent fiscal evasion. I do not see efforts within the bill to deal with fiscal evasion. It is a serious problem internationally, and a larger vision for Canada would be to make sure that we are getting a fair deal for Canadian citizens by dealing with the offshore financial arrangements that put us at a disadvantage, for example, the Canada–Barbados treaty agreement. It certainly was a substandard agreement for Canada that has allowed a lot of money to flow offshore that should have been taxed here.

In terms of whether or not to support this legislation, it is necessary, as it would clean things up and make them more equitable for dealmaking between Taiwan and Canada, and Israel and Canada. But I would like to hear my hon. colleague speak to the larger question of the vision of the current government for dealing with international tax evasion and tax havens.

• (1600)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, parts 1 and 2 of Bill S-4 include provisions dealing with the issues my hon. colleague mentioned: part 1 deals with Israel, and part 2, Taiwan.

I sit on the Standing Committee on Finance and I am proud to state that I was a member of the committee when it presented a motion on tax avoidance and tax evasion so the committee could to examine those issues. It is something that is paramount to our government. We have invested \$444 million over five years to ensure that the CRA has the resources and tools to ensure that all Canadians and all Canadian companies, organizations, and foreign subsidiaries operating in Canada are paying their fair share; that Canadians have confidence in the tax system; and that the revenues coming into our coffers are then used to fund programs that Canadians value and are dear to their hearts.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I heard my colleague talk about the State of Israel.

For the purposes of the treaty, what is Israel? Here is a example: is a settler in the occupied territories in Israel? If so, is that settler covered by the arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation?

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, this type of treaty encourages greater links between Canada and the State of Israel, and greater investment and trade flows between Canada and Taiwan. That is what is important and what we need to focus on within this bill. It would allow Canada and Israel to continue to create stronger links between the two entities, and that is very important.

I had the pleasure of visiting the State of Israel this summer. It was a learning experience, indeed. I was in Ramallah as well, and it Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It was an eye-opening experience and a learning experience, and I am the better for it.

Bill S-4 would allow our government to move the needle forward in creating a strong economy for Canadians and strong middle-class jobs. Overall, it is a win-win for us.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Timmins—James Bay talked about the Canada–Barbados tax treaty, which is similar. What safeguards will be put in place so that we will not see recurring what we have seen happening with the Canada–Barbados trade agreement? We are seeing a \$5 billion leakage from the Canadian economy, which could be paying for things that we need, including pharmacare and services that Canadians demand. Maybe the member can tell us what safeguards will be put in place to protect Canadians.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, to my hon. colleague, please look at part 1 and part 2 of the legislation and you will find the answer there.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address the questions to the Chair, so I would suggest that the member not use the word “you”.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

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[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vaughan—Woodbridge for sharing his time with me.

I am pleased to rise in the House to address the important matter of Bill S-4. As members will know, this bill implements a convention and an arrangement on double taxation that were recently signed and announced. The convention was concluded with the State of Israel, and the arrangement with Taiwan.

Canada now has 92 tax treaties in force, and it continues to work on developing other such treaties with other jurisdictions. Bill S-4 builds on Canada's ongoing efforts to update and modernize its network of tax treaties, which helps prevent double taxation and tax evasion.

Indeed, Canada currently has one of the world's largest networks of tax treaties. This is an important feature of Canada's international tax system, a feature that is key to promoting our ability to compete. At the same time, the system needs to ensure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. We do not want certain foreign and domestic firms to be able to take advantage of Canadian tax rules to evade taxes, or for certain wealthy individuals to turn to foreign countries to hide their income and avoid paying taxes.

Every time that happens, workers and small businesses in Canada end up having to pay more taxes than they should have to. It is not right. The Canada Revenue Agency needs information from foreign countries in order to identify and discourage the hiding of income.

To that end, the convention and the arrangement on double taxation in Bill S-4 implement the current international standard on tax information exchange on request established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, thus enabling Canadian tax authorities to obtain the necessary information for the administration and enforcement of Canadian tax laws, while helping them prevent international tax evasion.

Here at home, the Government of Canada continues to work to keep our tax system up to date and competitive, so that Canada can remain a leading player in the global economy. It is essential to take measures in support of a more competitive tax system in order to foster conditions that allow Canada's entrepreneurs and industries to excel, thus clearing their path to success.

Clearly, having modern tax conventions, such as those contained in Bill S-4, is a key component of that goal. Canada remains committed to maintaining a tax system that will continue to help Canadian businesses in their drive to be world leaders, while ensuring that everyone pays their fair share of taxes.

The tax conventions complement our government's broader commitment to implementing a more competitive tax system that will raise the standard of living of all Canadians. The convention and arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation set out in Bill S-4 directly support and encourage cross-border trade in goods and services, which in turn helps Canada's domestic economic performance.

Moreover, every year, Canada's economic wealth depends on foreign direct investment, as well as the entry of information, capital,

and technology. In short, the convention and arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation set out in Bill S-4 provide individuals and businesses in Canada and the other countries involved with predictable and equitable tax results in their cross-border dealings.

I would now like to talk about two things that this bill proposes to do, namely reduce withholding taxes and prevent double taxation. Withholding taxes are a common feature of the international taxation system. They are levied by a country on certain items of income earned in that country and paid to the residents of the other country. The types of income normally subjected to withholding taxes would include, for example, interest, dividends, and royalties.

Without tax treaties, Canada usually taxes this income at the rate of 25%, which is a set rate under our own legislation for income tax, more specifically, the Income Tax Act. Withholding tax rates in other countries are often as high or even higher.

● (1605)

Since one of the main functions of a tax convention is to divide the powers of taxation among the signatory partners, the conventions contain provisions that reduce and, in some cases, eliminate withholding taxes that could be applied by the jurisdiction where certain payments originate.

For example, the convention and the arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation in Bill S-4 provides for a maximum withholding tax rate of 15% on portfolio dividends paid to non-residents in the case of the State of Israel and Taiwan. The maximum withholding tax rate for dividends paid by subsidiaries to their parent companies is reduced to a rate of 5% for the State of Israel and 10% for Taiwan.

Withholding rate reductions also apply to royalty, interest, and pension payments. The convention and the arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation covered by this bill caps the maximum withholding tax rate on interest and royalty payments to 10%, and the maximum withholding tax rate for periodic pension payments to 15%.

The other issue I want to talk about is double taxation. Double taxation at the international level happens when taxes are collected on the same taxable income for the same period in at least two jurisdictions. The convention and arrangement regarding double taxation in Bill S-4 will help prevent double taxation so that any given income is taxed only once.

Generally speaking, the Canadian tax system applies to the income earned by Canadian residents anywhere in the world. However, foreign authorities can also invoke their right to tax any income earned in their jurisdiction by Canadian residents. Canada usually gives a credit for foreign tax paid on that income. This duplication of taxes paid in the jurisdiction where the income was earned and in the taxpayer's country of residence can have unfair negative consequences for taxpayers. No one should have to pay taxes twice on the same income.

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Without any convention or arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation such as the ones provided for in Bill S-4, that is exactly what happens. Both countries could claim taxes on the income without providing the taxpayer with any measures of relief for the tax paid in the other country.

In closing, the convention and arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation proposed in the bill will provide certainty and stability and create a favourable climate for trade, to the benefit of taxpayers and businesses in Canada and in the partner countries.

What is more, the convention and arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation proposed in the bill will strengthen Canada's position in an increasingly competitive global trade and investment environment.

Those are the reasons why I ask my colleagues to vote in favour of the bill.

• (1610)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have to say I mostly agree with him when he says that no one should have to pay taxes twice on the same income. I think once is plenty, given current tax rates. However, citizens wonder if everyone contributes their fair share into the common treasury that pays for the services we need.

When we sign a treaty on the avoidance of double taxation, do we make sure that both countries' taxation levels are similar, even if "similar" is rather imprecise?

Does my colleague not believe that we should establish benchmarks and say that if a partner deviates from the benchmark by a certain number of percentage points, the agreement is nullified because it ends up undermining one of the partners?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, certainly, every time we reach an agreement with any country, we need to consider the current status of both countries. We cannot conclude a single agreement with the rest of the world and think that it would always work the same way.

I think we have tax agreements because they allow us to exchange information so we can determine who is trying to evade the local tax laws. It is important to do this. I agree completely that it might not always be perfect.

However, the goal is to find those who are abusing the system, not to destroy the system because people are abusing it, and I think we need to look at it from that perspective going forward.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I am tempted to ask him why we are debating Bill S-4, when the government is regulating things well enough through the regulations. For instance, in the case of Barbados, the regulations make it easy to avoid taxes. There are currently 22 tax havens with which we do not have a treaty, but the government treats them as though we do.

If the government is running everything through regulations, why bother with Bill S-4?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, Bill S-4 implements two treaties. For reasons unknown to me, those treaties are being implemented by a bill, which is perfectly fine.

In that regard, I do not see how Bill S-4 is problematic.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was in Israel on a parliamentary trip this summer and saw enormous potential for investment through venture capital and some of the items the member discussed, such as royalties. The movement of money between our two countries could help stimulate growth and the jobs we are looking for.

How significant is this in terms of non-tariff trade barriers, and how could that help venture capital move between our two countries?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, any time we have a new treaty to help our relations on fiscal policy and investment policy, it does help, with our relationship with those countries, to build out our economy and theirs.

We are one planet, and I think we should see it that way. We should work as best we can to work as a team within the bounds of what we find acceptable in each place.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the issue of tax treaties is interesting and actually hits close to home for me, because my wife gets an income from another country, with which we have a tax treaty.

One of the issues that comes up, though, is the difference between employment income and pension income. I wonder if the bill accurately reflects the situation where in some countries they tax one's employment income but not one's pension income. The alternate takes place here. We do not tax income, because it is being taxed in another location, but if pension income is not being taxed in the home country, it can be taxed here.

Does the member know which way we are going on this particular treaty?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Speaker, I do not know the answer to that question. I read through what I could, and I know that pensions were specifically addressed, but I do not know the specific details and cannot answer in a helpful way.

However, I know that Bill S-4 will be a positive bill for us in working with these other countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak at this stage of the debate on Bill S-4. Before I get into the meat of the matter, I would like to thank the people of the provincial riding of Chauveau for honouring me with their trust and launching my wonderful career eight years ago to this day. I thank the people of Chauveau, whom I now represent to the best of my ability here in the House of Commons as the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

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We are at second reading of Bill S-4, which, as the title suggests, is a Senate bill. This is basically a technical, not to say mechanical, bill about the application of certain trade agreements with Taiwan and Israel. To be precise, it is about a convention and an arrangement for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion for people who do business in Canada and Israel or Canada and Taiwan.

As people keep saying during this debate, no one wants to pay taxes twice on the same income. Once is enough and sometimes even more than enough. A second time is unnecessary and can even make investors less keen. International trade and free trade agreements between our country and other parts of the world contribute to growing our country's economy. It is therefore important to have agreements that facilitate these exchanges. This bill seeks to facilitate the process for the two partner jurisdictions. I will come back to the benefits of free trade between different countries.

Let us look more specifically at what is going on in this bill with regard to Israel. Bill S-4 seeks to update an agreement that was concluded many years ago in 1975. A lot has happened since then. That was more than 40 years ago. In any international dealings, especially international trade, it is appropriate to comb through the previous piece of legislation to ensure that it meets modern standards and is adapted to the new realities that investors face in Canada and abroad.

For Israel the agreement dates back to 1975; for Taiwan, it is an entirely different story. A tax convention was drawn up by the previous government, but it had to be updated by Bill S-4, which has already been passed by the Senate. It is important to know that if the House of Commons does not pass the bill before the end of the fiscal year, December 31, the process will be delayed by one year. This could negatively impact our economy and trade between Canada and Israel and between Canada and Taiwan next year. That would mean one less year to stimulate our economy, which is not a good thing.

Furthermore, I would like to state that the Canada-Hong Kong Tax Agreement Act, 2013 is also affected by Bill S-4, which we are studying today.

As I was saying earlier, this bill is extremely technical. I read a little of it to ensure that it made sense, and I noted that all aspects were examined in great detail. To be honest it is rather well written. This kind of agreement is often a bunch of gibberish and can be difficult to deal with.

About ten years ago, when I was a journalist, I did a story on the Hon. Lawrence Bergman, who was the Quebec minister of revenue at the time, and who drafted laws concerning income. Those laws are really something. They are very thick documents that are technical in the extreme, so much so, that you cannot follow them. However, the Hon. Lawrence Bergman, who was a notary, took great pleasure in reading every word of the bills he introduced. Some would say that it was his work and that it was his duty to do a good job.

● (1620)

We understand that when it comes to more general laws. However, the details of trade agreements or agreements affecting income tax

returns can be a very sensitive subject. That is why we need experts to draft these laws. That is exactly what happened with Bill S-4.

A few days ago, a parliamentary committee examined the issue. We were able to speak to experts, to those who helped draft the bill. We did our best to leave no stone unturned. We are not perfect, but we did the best we could. There were concerns on this side of the House.

Yes, these are direct agreements to avoid double taxation for those involved in trade between Canada and Israel and Canada and Taiwan. Taiwan is a territory that is central to the potential economic development that could occur under the trans-Pacific partnership agreement, if somehow everything goes well and this government supports the agreement that we signed a year and a half ago. It is at the heart of the economic development resulting from Canada's trade with its partners and hundreds of millions of customers.

We asked questions about the consequences this could have on Japan and China, two major trading nations in the Asian economy. The officials we spoke with assured us that everything would be done properly, that Bill S-4 would have no negative consequences on potential trade with Japan and China. That is a good thing.

However, I did not get an answer to one of my questions. That is unfortunate, but that will not stop me from supporting the bill. It is always a good idea to examine the potential and the economic impact of every piece of legislation we are voting on. My question was quite simple. I asked if they had measured the economic impact that these new agreements could have on Canadian production.

The agreements were considered from a legal and political standpoint to make sure that diplomatic relations between the three countries—Canada, Taiwan and Israel—would carry on. The economic impact, however, was not assessed. Still, let us be confident that our investors and our business people will better be able to take part in rich and dynamic economic activity abroad, which is good for Canada's economy. That is very important for us.

We need to consider these things when examining a bill. We need to understand the real impact this will have on the economy, on businesspeople, and on those who will be directly affected, in other words, people who do international trade between Canada, Israel, and Taiwan.

Let us now look more carefully at what is really involved with these two jurisdictions. As the members know, Taiwan is a major economic player. It is known as one of the four Asian tigers. Yes, it is important that our country have strong economic relationships with all of them, and it does. Obviously, and as everyone knows, Taiwan exports a great deal and has limited natural resources compared to our magnificent and huge country, but it is doing well globally. In fact, it is nothing short of spectacular and impressive, economically speaking.

Imagine how many thousands of items we have held in our hands in our lifetimes that say, “Made in Taiwan”. Yes, we trade with Taiwan, but trade has to be a two-way street. There may have been some flaws in the previous agreements that might have led to double taxation. That is what we call a spoke in the wheels. That is the case for Taiwan.

For Israel, look at the deep, sincere, productive, and globally inspiring ties that exist between Canada and Israel. We know that this state was born in controversy after the second world war. Everyone knows it. The day after its creation, Israel was already at war. That is why I say it was created in controversy. I am not saying it was right or wrong, but obviously when a state is created one day and invaded the next, one might call that a rocky start. However, without rewriting history, everyone knows that today, Israel is the democratic state in the Middle East that can inspire all the other countries. Israel is our friend and ally. Canada is a friend and ally to Israel.

● (1625)

We know that Israel's population is eight million. It is the 38th-largest economy in the world, second only to the United States in terms of start-ups, brand-new companies with big potential and definite risk.

People go on and on about Israel's outstanding economic performance. Despite being the perpetual target of neighbouring enemies' hostile ambitions, Israel continues its extraordinary advance on all fronts and in all economic sectors.

I had the privilege of visiting this magnificent country in 2009 at the invitation of a charity very familiar to the member for Mount Royal, CJPAC. I would like to thank the group for inviting me. I went with my former colleagues from the National Assembly, and I learned so much about this magnificent democracy, an eternally optimistic country that is an inspiration to us all.

Like everyone else, I was impressed because anyone who visits Israel is impressed by its vitality and surprising agricultural capacity. Let us not forget that things can be hard to grow in that part of the world. It takes a lot of hard work because it is basically a desert. However, thanks to hard work and engineering together with Israeli ingenuity, a country that many thought of as basically a pile of sand is a place that creates jobs, wealth and remarkable agricultural output.

It seems, and I see my colleagues nodding, that dairy production is impressive. It is even said, and this may be a bit of folklore, that Israeli cows produce the most milk in the world. I know this because I have spoken with local farmers who told me that if the cows do not produce they are sent out into the desert. Members believe I am

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kidding. In some way, this illustrates the extraordinary will of the Israelis to develop the full potential of their country, which should inspire all of us here, in Canada, to develop our full potential in an orderly way.

In some areas, such as the environment, they do not have to take lessons from anyone. They are leaders in solar energy. Some will say that is obvious because it is always sunny in that country. Naturally, that does help. Nevertheless, they do not have a lot of water in Israel.

Israel is a world leader in water conservation, water desalinization, and water recycling. All that potential is extraordinary. We could talk at length about the economic vitality of this fascinating country.

Israel is a leading nation in research and development, in terms of the R and D-to-GDP ratio. Of course, there are bigger economies. We need only think of our American friends, who invest a lot more money than Israel in R and D. Still, a country like Israel, with a population of 8 million people, has the best R and D-to-GDP ratio in the world. That is inspiring.

I will digress a little bit while we are on the subject of to-GDP ratios. I remind members that Canada had the best debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7 when our government left office, and that allowed the current government to make a few foolish economic decisions. Still, the fact of the matter is that we left the house in order.

Let us return to the subject of Israel, a country where high technology is front and centre. Beyond the capacity to take advantage of its natural resources, when a country puts its most brilliant minds to work, then that country really shines because it is generating pure wealth. Israel is such a country, a high-tech hub where what does not yet exist is being invented and created. Microsoft, Intel, Appel, Google and all the other high-tech communications corporations have highly specialized and developed research facilities. That is where the action is, where things happen.

In closing, what is happening in Israel is inspiring and must be acknowledged. We especially need to recognize that these people are able to fully realize their potential, particularly when it comes to natural resources. They managed to draw from their arid land a tremendous amount of potential, and the potential they are drawing from their minds—which are anything but arid—is just as amazing. That is why Canada needs to be friends with Israel.

● (1630)

Here is one last interesting figure: Israel has the best ratio of scientists to workers in the entire world. In Israel, there are 140 scientists for every 10,000 workers. That is the best record on the planet, and it explains why these people are such great leaders in research.

Israel is our friend, and we should do everything we can to make sure that trade with that country goes well. Bill S-4 will help with that.

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Let us now talk about the importance of free trade. I think that it is important to talk about free trade when it comes to international relations and international trade. The government and the official opposition agree on the principle of free trade. We sometimes disagree, are divided, or have different views on some aspects of it, but overall, we agree that free trade is the future and will drive economic development.

We cannot talk about free trade without remembering the epic battle that took place in the House of Commons and across Canada about 30 years ago in 1986, 1987, and 1988 under the leadership of the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney. At the time, Canada had entered into negotiations that were difficult at first but that produced an extraordinarily successful result, and that is the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

The facts are the facts. We must remember that, in 1983, the man who gave us the free trade deal, Brian Mulroney, was against free trade. During the 1983 Conservative Party leadership race, John Crosbie, a Newfoundland MP running for the leadership, said that he was in favour of free trade. Mr. Mulroney, a Montreal businessman originally from Baie-Comeau, said it was not a good idea because it would be like an elephant sleeping with a mouse. Guess which one would crush the other. That was Brian Mulroney's analogy. I feel like I am channelling him here.

Mr. Mulroney, an intelligent man capable of recognizing when his opponent landed a good blow, was inspired by John Crosbie and said that Canada would do free trade. France even recognized his extraordinary leadership just a couple of days ago by inducting him into the Legion of Honour. I had the privilege of attending the event. What a great moment. The current Prime Minister, the member for Papineau, toasted him graciously.

This goes to show that Canadians have no political stripes. When great Canadians are honoured, we all win.

Sorry, I went from Quebec City to Ottawa via Sept-Îles. I went on a little detour. Since we were talking about Brian Mulroney, I could be even nicer and say that I went from Quebec City to Ottawa via Baie-Comeau.

On September 13, Brian Mulroney delivered a wonderful and very interesting speech at the University of Calgary. In his speech, he talked about free trade's track record over the past 30 years. I will quote from that speech:

• (1635)

[*English*]

“The statistics alone speak to the success of the FTA. Trade volumes more than tripled in less than 20 years – from \$235-billion...[to \$800 billion today]...Trade exploded into the largest bilateral exchanges between any two countries in the history of the world”.

[*Translation*]

We are more than just good friends with the Americans. We are also the Americans' best trading partner. We are also their biggest competition. We should be proud of that.

[*English*]

In the two hours or so, \$250 million in goods and services will be exchanged by Canada and the U.S. This is more than \$1 million every minute of every hour of every day, more than \$2 billion in total each and every day of every week of every month of every year.

[*Translation*]

All that to say how important trade is between our two countries. That is why we need to support and promote free trade. We also know that we signed the trans-Pacific partnership just a year and half ago, and that agreement will also help create wealth. We should also support that. Other negotiations are under way, and we should encourage them because Canada is an export country.

I went to Vancouver for the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. To make a long story short, I was on the 27th floor of the hotel I stayed at. I had a magnificent view of the Vancouver harbour, and I counted no less than 12 container ships bound for Asia stacked full of merchandise. That is what it means to create wealth. When our goods and services can be exported overseas and other countries buy them, that means money coming into Canada. Let us hope that Bill S-4 will help create jobs and wealth.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I commend my friend from Louis-Saint-Laurent on his excellent speech.

He mentioned my former MNA for D'Arcy-McGee, Lawrence Bergman, his former colleague. I just want to say that I completely agree with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. Mr. Bergman is a man of great honesty and integrity, and intellect.

I liked what my colleague said about Israel, the Silicon Valley of the Middle East. My colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent surely knows that the mayor of Montreal, Denis Coderre, and the mayor of Toronto, John Tory, just got back from a mission in Israel. Some Israeli companies are setting up their head offices in Montreal and Toronto.

How does my colleague think we might contribute to increasing trade with Israel?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, the best way to boost trade between Canada and Israel is to continue being Israel's best friend and ensuring that the relationship is mutual, but also to allow individual interactions. When we travel, visit places and meet people, we are able to improve our interaction.

These fine speeches in the House are nice. It is nice to allow our businesses to export and to welcome scientists and Israelis here in Canada, but it is much better when we can have direct interactions.

Speaking of Montreal mayor Denis Coderre's meeting in Tel Aviv, without getting too personal, I will just say that the mayor of Montreal and Mayor Tory attended Cirque Éloize, a Quebec-Canada production. Mayor Coderre took the time to say hello to my son, Jean-Philippe, who is an artist and circus performer for Cirque Éloize.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

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We too believe that it is a good idea to support this bill and to have this sort of agreement with Israel and Taiwan. However, when it comes to the fight against tax evasion and tax havens, it is important to include automatic tax information exchange provisions in agreements signed by Canada.

Does my colleague not believe that it is a good idea to include automatic tax information exchange provisions in the 92 existing agreements and in future agreements so that this sort of exchange does not just occur by request only, as is currently the case?

• (1640)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure of working with the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on the issue of physician-assisted dying, as well as other issues, and her comments are always very relevant, particularly in this case.

Right now, in article 25, on page 52, there are five paragraphs describing the types of information that will be exchanged to prevent tax evasion. Canada cannot resolve the problem of tax evasion on its own. Every country in the world must work together.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague with interest, and I can see how knowledgeable he is on this topic.

In his speech, he talked about the things that need to be taken into account in a treaty. I have two questions for him.

First, do we need to take into account Israel's borders? Are those living in the Israeli settlements part of Israel or not? I did not get a clear answer to that question earlier.

Second, my colleague talked about how urgent this treaty is. However, in 2009, when the Conservative government entered into treaties with 22 tax havens, it did so via regulation, never by means of a bill such as Bill S-4, so in my opinion, there is no urgency here.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I am not an expert in that field, but I will do my best to answer these pointed questions.

Who can do business with Israel and Canada? According to Bill S-4, those with an Israeli passport, and that is it.

As for the fact that we are proceeding with a piece of legislation instead of making a regulation or an order in council, the experts we heard in committee told us that with this specific kind of treaty, since it dated back to 1975 in Israel's case and there had been a few agreements with Taiwan over the last few years, we needed to take a legislative approach.

I am not a legal expert, so I will not go into too much detail, otherwise I might start talking nonsense and make a fool of myself. Some would say it is a bit too late for such concerns, but that would be a lie, a misrepresentation of the truth. I will simply reassure this House that we asked that question in committee, and the legal experts told us that in this specific case an order in council would not suffice, that a bill was necessary.

As I said earlier, Canada cannot resolve the problem of tax evasion on its own. All 162 countries of this beautiful earth must work together.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I am certain that my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent will say that the treaty is

available. It clearly states that a resident of the State of Israel can use the treaty. There is a definition in the treaty. Since 1976, it has generally been the practice of governments to present this to the House of Commons.

My question is on free trade. My colleague was correct in saying that, in the beginning, Brian Mulroney was against it, but that he supported it later. The same thing happened with our party. First, we were against it, then we supported it. We agree with the official opposition that it is very important to have free trade agreements with as many countries as possible.

Does my colleague believe that the other members of the House who do not share this opinion today will change their minds?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, under the Conservative government, Canada went from 14 to 43 free trade partners, including the European Union, which has 28 states, \$500 million people, and \$12 billion in trade. With respect to South Korea, we reached an agreement that gave us access to 50 million people and \$1.7 billion in trade. That creates wealth for Canada. We have not talked about the trans-Pacific partnership, which includes 10 new countries.

Yes, we must support free trade. Canada, with its modest population of 35 million people, and by extension clients, falls short. Modern technologies make it possible to trade with countries around the world. We must profit from our ingenuity, natural resources, and our work ethic so we can sell our goods around the world. A lot of money comes here from abroad and creates wealth, which we must all manage in a serious and rigorous manner, contrary to what the current government is doing.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I particularly appreciated hearing my colleague share some of the background in terms of our party and the whole free trade issue. I do not remember the 1988 election perhaps quite as well as he does.

Because the member has been aware of and involved in this debate for a long time, I want to ask him about the global trends in terms of debates around protectionism and maybe a rising anti-trade sentiment in certain quarters. Canada is a nation that has benefited significantly from trade. Our previous prime minister was a strong leader, not only domestically, but internationally, speaking out about the importance of economic liberalization and free trade.

What role could Canada play now in this emerging climate? What role should our government be playing in terms of trying to counter some of this emerging protectionist sentiment that we see around the world?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague. Maybe he was very young when this occurred in 1988, but I can assure the House that now this young man is very bright, articulate, and very good. I appreciate that every time he rises in the House he has something to say that is very well documented.

Government Orders

We talked about the rise of protectionism. He is right and we must be aware. As an exporting country, Canada must be very aware of what is happening all around the world, in the U.S., or in Europe. This is why we have to be careful. We have to have good relationships with the U.S., with European countries, but also let me remind everyone that in election years every political party is against free trade. It is a trademark.

Let me remind the House that President Obama before getting elected as president, talked about NAFTA saying, “I’m the one that’s driving, I’m the one that’s driving the car and those two others are in the backseat”. The two others he is talking about are the president of Mexico and about “Obama, president of Canada”. He talked about us as a president of Canada.

This is just to say that during an election year, people talk tough. After that, they talk about business.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Aerospace Industry; the hon. member for Trois-Rivières, Rail Transportation; and the hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière, Ethics.

Resuming debate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to give a different twist to the debate that I have been listening to all afternoon and try to relate it in part to my constituency.

Companies in Winnipeg manufacture all sort of wonderful things. Two of the things that come to my mind are windows and buses. Some of the best windows are manufactured in the city of Winnipeg. Some of the best buses in the world are manufactured in the city of Winnipeg. Many of the employees who produce those windows and buses are my constituents.

Canada is very dependent on exports. We export all sorts of products that are manufactured in communities throughout our country. In virtually all regions of this country some form of manufacturing is taking place. When I think of how important the trade file is to Canadians, I get a better understanding when it is brought down to the level of the people who work in factories throughout our country.

The Minister of Finance held round tables throughout the country and I was able to participate in one of them. At one of the discussions the issue of the Canadian dollar came up and whether it was better for our manufacturing industry if the dollar is high or low. I would suggest that depends on the manufacturer. For example, window manufacturers in Winnipeg gave me the distinct impression that it was better for them if the dollar is low because of where the material comes from, which is Canada. The company that manufactures the very best buses in the world as far as I am concerned is called New Flyer Industries Inc. and its employees are my constituents. The parts for the buses quite often come from all around the world, which is not unique. For New Flyer, a low dollar is not a positive thing because it has to buy the parts it needs from countries around the world.

Why am I using these companies as examples? It is because policies and price factors need to be taken into consideration, the importance of taxation for example, in what we are debating today, and trying to level the playing field. There are other things that need to be taken into consideration beyond that, however.

It is important that we recognize the value of trade but in many ways we also need to recognize the very real nuances that impact the bottom line. That is really what Bill S-4 is about.

We have great trade links today with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Israel. We do a great deal of trade with these three countries but today illustrates that there is always room for improvement. If Bill S-4 gets passed, Canadian industries will benefit from it.

This should come as no surprise. This government has been more aggressive on the trade file than the Conservative government before us and I will demonstrate that shortly.

• (1650)

To indicate how important trade is, I would say that Canada is a trading nation, and we are very much dependent on world trade. I expect that it will continue to be a priority for this government for a number of good reasons, but there is one that comes to mind. If we look at the last budget that we presented, we see the focus of that budget, in good part, was on Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of the middle class. Good solid trade and a foundation that allows us to expand upon that will build upon Canada's middle class. Many of the jobs, both direct and indirect, that can be generated would assist Canada's middle class and provide those jobs into the future. Therefore, it is really important that we get this right, because if we have a healthy middle class we will have a healthier economy. By having a healthier economy, we will continue to move forward overall as a society. It would be difficult to do so if we did not have trade.

The specifics of the bill we are debating today can be broken down into three parts. The main purpose of this enactment is to implement a previously publicly announced convention concluded with the state of Israel, and an arrangement concluded with the jurisdiction of Taiwan. It also would amend the Canada-Hong Kong Tax Agreement Act of 2013 to add greater certainty and interpretation provisions.

The sheer number of trade and investment agreements we have entered into over the years is a fairly impressive list. One of the things that I truly appreciate about the Library of Parliament is its research capability and the manner in which it is able to present such high-calibre and high-quality documents. Let me extend a compliment to those individuals who work for our parliamentary library. I posed a question to it with respect to how many trade and investment agreements we have, where they are, and when they were entered into. In looking at it, I did a quick count. We are talking about a dozen trade agreements with a number of countries, many of which have been highlighted during the debate.

Government Orders

I look at this as a positive. Whenever we can get into trade arrangements, it helps us build a relationship with those countries. There are a couple that have been signed but not implemented, and they will not be implemented until we have the opportunity to have that debate and that vote. The two that I am referring to are the Canada-European Union comprehensive economic and trade agreement, better known as CETA, and the Canada-Ukraine trade agreement. I am very proud of the efforts of this government with respect to both those. Although they may have been started years ago, the CETA agreement in particular, it was this Minister of International Trade who was able to pick up that file. To give the impression that it was a foregone conclusion, that it was something that would just happen, is not truthful, because we as a government have had to invest a great deal of resources, ministerial time, and dependence on our bureaucracy, those highly qualified individuals in particular, to assist us in negotiating on behalf of all Canadians. I am pleased that we were able to get that signature in place on October 30 of this year.

● (1655)

It was not that long ago that the newly elected president of Ukraine delivered a speech to the House of Commons, and he talked about how he wanted to further the relationship with Canada in regard to trade with Ukraine. He put a challenge out to us to attempt to get a special Ukraine trade agreement. That was only a few years ago. When we look at what we have today, we see that it was back on July 11, 2016, that we actually had that deal signed. Again, we appreciate the efforts put in by the Conservative government at the time. I am so grateful that we had the opportunity to sign it, and we are anticipating debate to come, and hopefully, passage. How wonderful that would be.

There are some agreements still being debated; at least, discussed with Canadians. I am thinking of the trans-Pacific partnership, best known as the TPP. We understand where both the opposition parties stand on that issue. We have taken a position that we want to continue to work with Canadians and other stakeholders to see where we are going on that particular vote. I anticipate that in due course we will see more direction coming from the government, after thorough consultations to allow Canadians to have the opportunity to provide some input. The reason we are being so thorough, specifically on the TPP, is that we made a commitment to Canadians that we would be very thorough.

I listed three trade deals, two that are very close, and we are not too sure what is going to happen with the third one. We also have another dozen trade deals that have actually been implemented.

Then, if we look at the investment agreements, this is where we would find it very interesting. I found it interesting, just reading through. There is an investment agreement between Canada and Hong Kong. The bill we are debating today deals, at least in part, with that through the taxation issues. If we continue to go through it, we see there is a Canada-Israel agreement that was signed also. I am trying to quickly find it.

I know there is the Thailand one. It was signed on January 17, 1997. The Hong Kong agreement was signed on February 10, 2016. The Canada-Israel agreement was not actually an investment agreement. It was a trade agreement, and there is a difference, and

that is why I had trouble finding it. That trade agreement with Israel was signed in July 1996.

I am not going to remind members who was in government and who was not. We have a very good sense that there have been political parties on both sides of the House that have recognized the value of trade. However, I want to emphasize that this government, specifically, has seen the value of trade, and we have acted accordingly. We have been exceptionally aggressive at pursuing all sorts and forms of trade with our counterpart countries. That is best illustrated by the two trade agreements I referenced.

We have also had investment agreements signed in the last 12 months. I could make reference to either the Hong Kong one or the one with Mongolia.

● (1700)

It was not that long ago that we had other legislation brought into the House. Many members might recall the world trade agreement, the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, that was introduced to the House through Bill C-13, and I was pleased to see that passed. Remember, that particular agreement from the World Trade Organization represents well over 100 countries around the world. Again, this is an agreement that this government brought forward. There is a certain number of countries that have to sign on to have it implemented, and we saw that as a high priority, brought it to the House of Commons, and passed it through.

It does not stop there. We also have an agreement on internal trade, which again is something that has been debated in this chamber. We have seen this government take a very positive approach, not only to say that it is important that we further trade opportunities abroad, but it is also important that we look at ways to take down trade barriers between provinces. This is something that we constantly hear about. There is room for improvement to make the system better, and if we talk to the Minister of International Trade or other ministers related to internal trade here in Canada, we will learn it is an important issue. Again, we recognize how important it is for Canada as a whole.

I started off by talking about the constituents I represent in Winnipeg North, and I want to emphasize that I represent a mostly working-class riding. Often I have been invited over the years to take tours of different facilities. I made reference to, for example, New Flyer Industries as one of those companies. I have been afforded the opportunity to meet with many of my constituents who, with their amazing skills and hard work, manufacture all sorts of products out of the city.

I have stood in this chamber and talked about the importance of the hog industry, which is of critical importance to the province of Manitoba. It has derived many benefits through trade agreements.

All of these jobs that I referenced are direct jobs, but there are many thousands more indirect jobs that are a direct result of having and developing industries that actually export.

Government Orders

It does not have to be a manufactured product. Many colleagues of mine, particularly from the Ontario caucus, boast about how technology is being developed and ideas are being developed. I know that there is a fairly significant industry of ideas being generated in the province of Ontario and other provinces that also reach out beyond Canadian borders and provide good-quality jobs. I say all of this because I truly believe that, if we collectively recognize the value of trade, we will do that much more.

I am very proud of the fact that we have a Prime Minister who is very well received in virtually all countries around the world where there is an expectation that, as a relatively new government, we are going to be able to bring Canada back on the international scene. There are many ways that people will pull for attention. For me personally, I am hoping we will see the government continue to push on the trade file, because it is so very important.

● (1705)

I understand that my time has expired. I might be able to expand on that in the question and answer period.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we in the NDP support the harmonization and simplification of tax legislation. We do not want to see companies paying double tax.

When I heard the member say that they were supporting this bill, it was going great until I heard him starting to talk about the middle-class tax break and how they are helping the middle class, because two-thirds of Canadians are not getting the benefit from that. In fact, people earning \$45,000 or less get nothing. That made me nervous, actually. We were fine with this until we heard that.

In 1980 there was a tax agreement with Spain, Korea, Austria, Italy, and the tiny island of Barbados. It profoundly changed Canada. We have the biggest economic leakage in Canadian history happening right now through that tax haven.

The member for Winnipeg North, I know, comes from a riding where the median income is close to what it is in my riding, which is about \$25,000 a year, and it may be lower. A lot of those people do not get anything from their middle-class tax break. Way more than two-thirds of Canadians, and about three-quarters of the people in his riding, get nothing from the middle-class tax break.

Does my colleague think that the government should propose amendments to the Canadian tax code to prevent tax cheats from using our lenient laws to avoid paying their fair share of Canadian income taxes?

As I said, we know that \$5 billion to \$7 billion are being lost through this treaty with Barbados that is supposed to be fair.

We know that we are entering into an agreement with Taiwan and Israel, and it should be a great agreement, but we thought that in 1980, when we signed a similar deal with Barbados.

How are we going to make sure that this is not going to be history repeating itself? We know that \$5 billion to—

● (1710)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is questions and comments. If the member would like to make a speech, maybe he could make arrangements to get added to the list.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the middle-class tax cut and tried to disappoint my constituents. I think it is important that the member acknowledge that the middle-class tax cut, which is a super-fantastic thing, because over nine million Canadians will benefit from it, is one aspect of a very progressive budget.

I can assure him that many of my constituents who have children, and many of my constituents who are seniors and rely on the guaranteed income supplement, will be receiving literally hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of dollars more. That does not even deal with the middle-class tax cut. It is all part of the budget. There is a net gain for my constituents, and I am very proud of that fact.

With respect to the question the member posed regarding trade and tax evasion, I share the concern about individuals who choose to avoid paying taxes. I am very proud of the fact that we have a minister responsible for revenue who has allocated, I think, close to \$400 million, and please do not quote me on that, to fight tax evasion. I see that as a good thing.

If we take it all together, I would highly recommend that the member reconsider his position on the budget, because the majority of his constituents will benefit.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, certainly these are important issues. I might recommend to him a fact-finding trip to Taiwan and Israel in the month of February. I know I would certainly be prepared to pick up the slack in this place.

I want to ask him about the trade initiatives of the present government. We are seeing legislation come forward that kind of follows through with and implements things that were begun under the previous government.

We are pleased to see the bill come forward. We are pleased to see the continuation, the following through, of that, but we hope, as well, to see the present government undertake additional new initiatives on trade.

We are seeing the Canada free trade deal next week, which is something that was begun under the previous government. We have had CETA, again negotiated under the previous government.

Could the member tell us whether there are additional new trade initiatives the present government is undertaking? We are pleased to see the continuation of those things, but we would also like to see actual additional proposals, because it is so important that we continue to move forward with this trade agenda well into the future.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I can understand why the Conservatives are a little nervous about this issue. According to the parliamentary library, there are 12 trade agreements. I could list off the countries or I can provide the information to my colleague across the way. I think what makes the Conservatives nervous is that they did not quite get the job done on CETA.

CETA was actually signed off by our minister, who did an outstanding job in finalizing it and getting it across the goal line. The Conservatives used to count that as 28 trade agreements. If we use their math, it would mean that they are actually being outperformed by this government. We did in less than 12 months of action what took the Conservatives more than 10 years. I know that they will be a little sensitive. They do not like to be outperformed.

Even if they look at the bottom line of trade deficits and so forth, one of the things the Liberals have consistently done is deliver trade surpluses. The best case in point is the multi-billion dollar trade surplus Mr. Harper inherited, and he turned that into a deficit. We are hoping in time to turn Mr. Harper's path toward ongoing trade deficits into a more positive light. It might take us a while.

We understand the importance of trade agreements. We will continue to push for trade agreements. I have a personal favourite, that being the Philippines. We have a bit of an agreement there. I would love to see something more, but that is more a personal thing.

I can assure the member that we have a very aggressive government that will continue to look for opportunities that will expand Canada's trading opportunities. If that means an agreement, an association, or just looking at side agreements and working with our provinces and different stakeholders, we are prepared to do that.

• (1715)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the member used this favourite Liberal phrase, "did not get it done". He should not let the foreign affairs minister hear him use that phrase. It might bring back some bad memories.

I want to follow up on the member's comments about CETA. I think the member knows that we negotiated it. It was gift-wrapped and given to the government, and through various shenanigans and the Liberals' attempt to put their stamp on it, we almost lost that deal. In the end, certainly, we were very happy to see that completed. It is in Canada's best interest.

We are in a not bad place when it comes to trade. If the Liberals are trying to compete with us on trade, they are going to have a hard time doing it. Hopefully it is an effort they will undertake, and hopefully they will try to learn policy lessons from us in other areas.

The member spoke as well about the deficit. He knows that we had a balanced budget at the end of the previous government's tenure and that the debt-to-GDP ratio went down under Stephen Harper from about 34% to 31%. Projections are that they will go up to 38% now under this new finance minister.

The government talks about its economic record. Since the member brought up deficits, I wonder if he will use this opportunity to tell us when the current government will bring us back to balanced budgets. I have asked this question many times and still have not had an answer. I know that the member for Winnipeg North will be able to concisely drill down and give us the response to that question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the CETA comments. I wonder how the member would feel if I were to present him with a half-knit sweater for Christmas and package it up.

We honestly recognize that the Conservatives did do some work on CETA. We have acknowledged that.

Private Members' Business

We had leaders in Europe who had a very difficult time and it was off the tracks. If it were not for a very aggressive Minister of International Trade, working with the parliamentary secretary and a Prime Minister who was prepared to pick up the discussions and carry it over the goal line, we would not have that agreement. That is the reality.

It was signed off by this government. It does not mean that we cannot share in the glory, because at the end of the day, Canadians and Canada's middle class will benefit from it.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion is carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Finance.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it you would find the unanimous consent of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

• (1720)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

The House resumed from November 14 consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be honest that when this topic came up, I never thought it would be something I would discuss here in the House of Commons. I know that when my parents watch this debate, whom I discussed this with a last night, they too will be surprised by some of the information I am going to be sharing.

Private Members' Business

I would really like to thank the member for Peace River—Westlock for introducing such a timely motion. Currently, in the status of women committee, we are studying violence against young women and girls. Through that study, I have learned more than I ever expected to learn. I think it is really important for all Canadians to know about this important topic relating to pornography and the necessity of the health committee's studying the effects of pornography.

I will start with a little story. I am just going to go off the cuff on this. There is a member I sit with on the status of women committee who will laugh at the fact that I am telling this story. It is a little embarrassing. I will start with a commercial called *The Boys*. I will ask everyone in the House to go home and watch this advertisement for some underwear made by an Australia company. The underwear's name is Bonds.

I first viewed this commercial on my flight back from some work I did on the status of women file. It was one of the award-winning commercials for underwear. On Air Canada, during this nice flight, I was watching this commercial. It has two testicles, and they are talking about how comfortable, and sometimes uncomfortable, underwear is.

I found the humour absolutely hilarious, because it is the type of humour that anyone who ever watched *Seinfeld* would appreciate. It was a little off the cuff, a little, "Oh my goodness, I cannot believe they said that", but at the same time extremely witty.

The first thing I did when I got home was to say to my husband, "You have to watch this commercial. It is absolutely hilarious." The commercial has two segments, part one and part two. I believe there may be a part three, as well. I allowed my son, who is 13 years old, to watch it, because I recognize what is appropriate and inappropriate. I also think parenting is very important.

After watching part one and part two of these commercials, the next thing that came up was pornography, as we were on an automatic loop. It was of two young girls and a young man. I will let members know that we could not run faster to that channel changer so we would not show our 13-year-old son what was playing next.

It was one of those embarrassing moments when we sit and wonder how we got to this from an underwear commercial that is playing on television in Australia 24 hours a day. How could pornography follow this?

At the status of women committee, we are also studying the algorithms involved. I see the parliamentary secretary here, and she, too, would understand the things that we are studying and how algorithms are a huge part of our study of the issue of violence against women and girls. We looked at algorithms this week and how when people put certain things in a search engine, there are crumbs that will show what people have watched in the past and then send that person to something on the web.

Of course, in my home, the first thing I said was, "Who is watching pornography? How did we possibly get this coming up after watching part one and part two of the commercial?" I had to ask every single person, and everyone said they did not watch it.

The first thing I did was to go to my iPhone and do the exact same search. I can promise members that not once has the word "pornography" been put in the search engine in my iPhone. I kind of look at it as a safe place, because there should not be any crumbs leading to this. The third thing that came up after viewing part one and part two of this commercial was pornography. Somehow it is being linked.

The reason I am talking about this is that I understand, from all the studies that we have done, that a huge majority of young boys have already watched or come across pornography by the age of 11.

In this regard, I would really like to thank the member who has moved this motion for the work he has done with the *Over 18* documentary, which really focuses on the pornography industry and its effects.

• (1725)

While we were watching this documentary in the House of Commons last month, there was a young boy from Ontario, I believe, in the documentary who talked about the fact that every single day he was watching pornography. He was not just watching one or two segments; he was watching it sometimes up to five times a day.

His parents found out about this, and the first thing they did was have a discussion with him about pornography, because they had noticed a huge change in their son's behaviour. They are stating that they watched a huge deterioration in their son's behaviour toward his sisters, the fact that he had become much more violent with them, and it became much more of a violent situation. It was quite unbelievable for these parents that they were having to discuss healthy relationships and sex with their young son. I believe he was 11 or 12 years old at the time.

In this documentary, *Over 18*, they also talked about the desensitization of pornography and the effects that it has on healthy relationships. The week before last I was at a breakfast with a professor who has done tons and tons of work around this country and around the world on pornography and the effects of pornography. Some of the things she talked about included a discussion she had with a 12-year-old who asked if strangling while having sex was right, because he understood that was normal. Things like violent relationship stuff at the age of 12 is now being introduced to our young children.

I am a mother of five. I have two young girls and three young boys. I am very concerned with what we are seeing. When we talk about pornography, what is happening to healthy relationships?

I think this study is very timely, especially when we see the effects of pornography on our young children, our families, and our relationships, especially since it has not been studied for over 30 years, and we have now been introduced to the Internet. Thirty years ago, pornography would have been something as simple as a *Playboy*. My husband shared stories of coming across *Playboy* magazines many years ago when he was at a friend's house or something like that. Those are the things 14- or 15-year-old boys would get their hands on.

Private Members' Business

Now the pornography is much greater and much further into the craziness, where we are seeing violent behaviour toward young girls and women and even young boys as well, and we have to recognize the effects it is having on relationships.

During the study of violence against women, we had a witness by the name of Jane Bailey. She said there is absolutely a correlation between pornography and violence against women. If we are to continue wanting to make sure that we have a world of equality, a country where there is no violence, a country where women and children are treated properly, we need to look at pornography as a huge issue.

I am a mom, and any parent in this chamber today or anyone watching would be concerned. It is really important that, as parents, we know what is on the Internet. We recognize that companies like Google, Twitter, and Facebook are doing as much as they possibly can to remove some of these horrible images off the Internet, but we need to do more. We need to do more because pornography is desensitizing normal healthy relationships.

A normal healthy relationship is something we can always discuss, and we see that it expands and changes all the time. However, when pornography is there and we know that over 80% of our young boys are watching pornography, what will it do to them when it comes to having a healthy relationship?

Those are some huge concerns I have, so I think this is most timely and that we should be studying this in the health committee. I also urge the status of women committee to make sure this is very important in the report we will be doing about violence against women, because we need to see the correlation between pornography and what it is doing to our country, to our young boys and girls, and to our families. We see that abuse occurs because of that.

I appreciate all the work that the member for Peace River—Westlock has done on this to bring it to the committee and to the House of Commons so that we can have a conversation about it and make sure that we recognize what is healthy and what is unhealthy. As a parent, whenever I come across pornography, I recognize that it is extremely unhealthy.

Once again, I thank the member for bringing this forward. I recognize that many members are nodding their heads and that they understand this really important topic.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in favour of Motion No. 47, which calls on the Standing Committee on Health to examine the public health effects of violent, degrading, and sexually explicit online content.

Such an examination would reinforce Canada's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It would also help achieve the goals of the 2013 agenda for sustainable development, which include eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls and ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

[English]

In 1983, then minister of justice Mark McGuigan appointed lawyer Paul D.K. Fraser to head a committee to examine current issues related to pornography and to recommend legal and social reforms. In 1985, the committee issued its report.

In that pre-Internet world, cyberbullying was not even imagined. In its report, the Fraser committee made 108 recommendations. They were based on the principles of the equality of women and men, that society must protect children, and that human sexuality and sexual relationships reflect an inherent mutuality and respect.

These recommendations remain as relevant today as they were 30 years ago. They serve as a foundation for addressing the issues we now face. The Internet brought a whole new world, including instant access to information and communication and worldwide connectivity. However, it also made it possible for criminals to target, isolate, and harm people through the modern-day crime of cyberbullying.

[Translation]

Cyberbullying occurs when people use computers, cell phones, and other devices to embarrass, humiliate, torment, threaten, or harass someone else. It usually happens over a long period of time. The frequency and intensity often increase over time, and the victim feels increasingly degraded and powerless.

Cyberbullying can take many forms, from the sharing of one humiliating photo to a constant stream of hateful text messages. It can also lead to tragic consequences. The harmful effects of cyberbullying are especially troubling when children and teenagers are the victims.

The suicides of Amanda Todd in British Columbia in 2012 and Rehtaeh Parsons in Nova Scotia in 2013 are examples of the tragic consequences of cyberbullying. Amanda was barely 17 years old when she died, and Rehtaeh was only 15. Those two teens were at opposite ends of the country, but they were both victims of toxic, traumatic, and prolonged cyberbullying. They were both harassed and humiliated to death. Their suffering and their senseless deaths confirmed the urgent need to put an end to cyberbullying.

Almost one in ten Canadian teens says they have been the victim of online bullying on social networking sites, and 18% of Canadian parents say they have a child who has experienced cyberbullying. A vast majority of Canadians want to see action to deal with cyberbullying.

According to a 2012 survey, 90% of Canadians would like to make it illegal to use electronic means to coerce, intimidate, harass, or cause other substantial emotional distress.

Our government has heard the concerns of Canadians and is taking the necessary action to put an end to this problem.

Private Members' Business

• (1735)

[*English*]

The Prime Minister mandated the Minister of Status of Women to work with experts and advocates to develop and implement a federal strategy against gender-based violence.

As a result, in June, our government established the advisory council on the federal strategy against gender-based violence. The advisory council serves as a forum to exchange views, promising practices, and research on issues related to gender-based violence. The advisory council members represent a range of sectors and bring a diverse range of knowledge, skill, and areas of expertise, including expertise in prevention, survivor support, justice, and other systemic responses.

Over the summer, the minister and I held 13 round tables across Canada on a wide range of issues related to gender-based violence. In July, a round table on youth and online gender-based violence took place in Toronto. This round table explored the influence of social media on GBV with a particular focus on youth.

Stakeholders discussed actions our government could take toward preventing and addressing different forms of online GBV among youth, and on the specific experiences of at-risk populations. Stakeholders at the event included young people under the age of 24, anti-violence researchers and advocates, and representatives from front-line youth and feminist organizations, and from industry organizations engaged in media and online safety.

These round table discussions brought forward a range of effective approaches to address online GBV and its impact on youth, to name just a few: the need to look at root and systemic causes, including patriarchy, sexism, racism and capitalism; the importance of challenging the separation of online violence and real life violence, where online violence may be seen as less serious than other forms of violence; the imperative of taking an intersectional approach, which is all-inclusive; and the need to be youth centred, as these are among the most vulnerable.

[*Translation*]

The women's program under Status of Women Canada continues to fund projects to end violence against women and girls and to prevent and eliminate cyber violence. A Safe City Mississauga project supports inter-community networks of girls who act as ambassadors in schools and youth groups in order to come up with the best ways to end cyber violence.

Another project by victim services in Toronto brings together women and girls, school boards, police officers, employees of digital enterprises, and other local stakeholders to improve data collection, knowledge exchange, and the coordination of programs on cyber violence, especially to address sexual violence against young women and girls.

Our government understands that gender-based violence is a major public health issue here and around the world, an issue with lasting consequences for the victims, the families, and society. We are resolved to protect the health and safety of the entire population, including by preventing violence of any kind and supporting victims.

Public Safety Canada is working in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's National Child Exploitation Coordination Centre, the Department of Justice, and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, a registered charity, to implement the national strategy for the protection of children from sexual exploitation on the Internet. This will make it possible to investigate and identify Internet predators, to make the public more aware of this reality, and to fund other research on the sexual exploitation of children.

[*English*]

Today's generation is the first ever to have such easy access to worldwide communications. As a government, we must remain steadfast in ensuring they are not also the first generation to be harmed by easy access to the worldwide web.

Motion No. 47 is a way to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the health effects of online violence and degrading, sexually explicit material, and an important stepping stone toward preventing and eliminating online crimes. This is why I am pleased to support the motion.

• (1740)

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's topic of conversation might be a little bit awkward for some. I am going to talk about sex, but I am not talking about sex between two people who have consented as adults. I am talking about sexual acts performed for the sake of entertaining a remote audience.

I am talking about pornography, which is an industry that targets young people to get them hooked on their product as children in order to profit from them for life. I am talking about an industry that produces a product that portrays violent, degrading, and dehumanizing acts toward women. I am talking about a product that plays a significant role in shaping the development and attitudes of our nation's young people.

We no longer exist in the year of 1985, a time when those who wanted to access pornographic materials had to enter a public place and pay for said materials. In the digital age, there is no store clerk to verify a user's name. In fact, many children are not even looking for pornography when they stumble across it for the first time on the Internet. This is 2016, and where there is Wi-Fi, there is access to pornography. The videos that are often accessed, however, are not the so-called miracle-of-life educational videos. The videos that are most often accessed nowadays are, in fact, violent in nature.

The material I refer to often goes by the label "hard core". These videos are graphic, exploitive, dehumanizing, sadistic, aggressive, and altogether violent. They are humiliating. They routinely show men ignoring consent and performing sexual acts on women against their will. These videos are readily available and easily accessed by children during school hours and at home. This is deeply concerning, because there is a growing body of medical research that has shown that early age exposure to sexually explicit material is harmful to the development of young people.

Private Members' Business

Exposure to sexually explicit material does the following. It influences youth's sexual values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour. It shapes youth's expectations of relationships and love. It incites youth to experiment sexually before they are ready or prepared, and also gives them expectations of body image, which are often unrealistic. It can lead to compulsive behaviour and addiction. It feeds the demand for sex trafficking and sex workers, and lures youth into a field that they would not otherwise enter. Most alarmingly, it shapes the attitudes of boys and men toward women, and it blurs the boundaries of consent.

The average age of first exposure among boys is at the age of 12. This is often before they have hit puberty, or have had the opportunity to receive proper sex education or an understanding of consent. In fact, many young people are reporting that pornography serves as their primary source of information with regards to sex. This is extremely frightening, given that 90% of mainstream sexually explicit content features violence against women, and in fact goes so far as to normalize it.

It comes as no surprise then that young people who watch violent pornography are significantly more likely to hold a negative attitude towards other genders. They are also more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviour, including non-consensual violent acts toward women. Several studies have shown that youth who view pornography engage in higher levels of delinquent behaviour and, due to higher incidences of depressive symptoms and decreased emotional bonding, often lack in their social development.

Lois Roth, director of the Caribou Child and Youth Centre has noted that, "Positive messaging about gender and relationship equality, consent and respect, are undermined by this mainstream industry, which promotes and endorses sexual and physical violence."

The issue of pornography is not just an issue of physical security for women and girls but of the mental effects and brain development of our nation's young people. Viewing pornography can shift a young person's psychological and emotional perception of other genders, and it further creates a flawed perception of what it looks like to be in a healthy sexual relationship.

Viewing pornography causes women to go from being a sister, a daughter, a niece, a neighbour, a person, to being little more than just an object. Women become a hair colour, an age, a body type, a breast size, or simply a living sex toy.

● (1745)

Because of the quantity of pornography that is consumed by individuals, the values that are taught in school and at home are simply just not enough. They become overwhelmed.

Dr. Victor Cline, a researcher in psychology, stated that in the scientific world, the question of pornography effects was no longer a hot issue, that the scientists and professionals were no longer pretending not to know.

Everybody knows that pornography can cause harm. It can also change people's sexual appetite, values, and behaviours. It can also condition people into deviancy and cause addictive behaviour.

The president of the Australian Medical Association also noted that there had been an increase in sexually transmitted diseases and violent practices which were not the norm and were accompanied by the availability of porn. This was resulting in physical and mental harm in youth.

In Canada, we prohibit young people from access to alcohol or tobacco because of the negative impact on their healthy development. We delay their ability to access these substances because they have not reached the age of majority, the time when our society considers youth capable of making a fully informed decision. Therefore, why are we allowing pornography then to go unregulated when it too has a negative impact on the development of our young people?

Ph.D. Gail Dines likens the lack of regulation of pornography to "standing outside a convenience store handing out cigarettes" to kids.

Surprisingly, Parliament has not studied the impact of sexually explicit content since 1985, well before the Internet existed. That is over 30 years, as my hon. colleague has already pointed out. During this time, there have been huge advancements in terms of how pornography has evolved.

The worldwide revenue from porn is estimated at \$57 billion, which is more than Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo or Apple. The mainstreaming of pornography increases daily. This is having a significant impact on how boys grow up perceiving women and thus treat them during adulthood. One in three women in Canada will experience sexual assault in their lifetime.

One in three women will be harassed, inappropriately touched, taken advantage of, or forced into sexual acts against their will. In addition, one in three of these women will be under the age of 16. These are women and girls in Canada, our daughters, our granddaughters, our nieces, and our sisters.

It took a generation of feminists to legalize pornography in North America. Pornography was seen as a positive force for the liberation of a woman's sexuality. Four decades later, a new generation of feminists is now fighting against the negative impact that pornography is having on their lives.

It is truly scary how many boys do not understand that "no" does in fact mean "no". At the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which I am a part of, the mother of Rehtaeh Parsons explained to us how one of the boys that raped her daughter did not even understand that what he did was in fact rape. He felt that it was just simply appropriate sexual behaviour with a peer. That peer committed suicide.

We need to understand the impact that pornography is having on our young people. We need to change the attitudes and behaviours that are fuelling violence against women and girls.

As policy-makers, we have a shared responsibility to take a stand for the health and the well-being of all Canadians. We have a particular obligation to ensure the healthy development of our children.

Private Members' Business

Today, I respectfully ask my colleagues from all sides of the House to support Motion No. 47. Together we can help ensure that women and girls are treated with dignity instead of degradation, as human beings instead of objects.

• (1750)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and contribute to this critical debate. Before being elected, I had the honour of serving on the board of a local organization in my constituency, called Saffron Centre, that works on education as well as on counselling regarding violence against women. Therefore, this is an issue that is very important to me and, I think, to all members in the House, and it speaks to this critical problem of violence against women.

I think there is consensus across parties about the importance of addressing this issue through new strategies and perhaps new legislative mechanisms. This could be a major project of this Parliament, that we not only pass this motion, which by all indications is going to pass with flying colours, but that we also use the resulting study to move forward with some legislative changes that would make a real difference in countering violence against women.

We have the desire to confront these issues in the House. It is so important, in the context of confronting violence against women, that we think about what I would call the sources of false belief that contribute to violence against women. Why do people do bad things, in this particular case in the way that we are talking about? It is probably because in many cases they have false beliefs about those actions. They think that what they are doing or would do is okay. Perhaps they think it is normal. Perhaps they think it would make them happy.

Therefore, when we talk about countering violence against women, we have to really dig into learning what the sources are of these false beliefs and how we can counter them.

Much of the discussion about responding to violence against women, but also other kinds of social ills, talks about the importance of education. Education certainly is very important, but if we have education happening on the one hand, and people developing false beliefs as a result of something else happening on the other side, then there is a kind of push and pull effect. Therefore, we need to deal with positive education, but also the countering of misinformation, and looking at the sources of that misinformation.

I would argue as well that, underneath all that, we need to pay attention to the development of character, because people's tendency to accept false beliefs versus true beliefs is ultimately going to be shaped by their character.

When we talk about the origins of false beliefs, I actually think we have a problem in language, because when we speak in English about education, it always, necessarily, has a positive connotation. We have a word to describe providing people with true, useful, and good information, the process of providing that information being education. We do not really have a corresponding word to describe when people, by viewing images that present distortions or by receiving false information, come to absorb and believe things that are not true, which have an injurious impact on their well-being and

on the community. We do not really have a word for this latter phenomenon. One might call it mis-education though, the opposite of education. It is not ignorance. It is absorbing information that is wrong, but coming to believe it, whether through viewing movies or reading books or whatever the source of information might be.

When I think about this distinction between education and mis-education, I think of a quote from C.S. Lewis that I quite like, and I mentioned it at the status of women committee before. He said that education without values is about as useful as making people into clever devils.

Right now, we have a crisis of sexual violence on our university campuses. This should be troubling for the obvious reason, but also because these are supposed to be hubs for the most educated people, for our current and future leaders. However, in the presence of so much education, there is also this huge problem of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

It should give us pause if we think that education about positive consent is the full solution. It is part of a solution, but we need to also look for what the sources are of false belief, because this is the reality that often happens to young boys today. Their first exposure to sexuality is viewing violent pornography at a very young age, often before they have even reached their teenage years.

• (1755)

Over the course of their teenage years, they have viewed significant amounts of violent pornography. They have come to develop these false beliefs about what is okay, about what is normal, about what will make them happy. Yes, they have teachers and authority figures who tell them "consent, consent, consent", but so much of their formative sexual experience has told them something completely different.

If we just provide the positive education side and do not respond to this mis-education, this shaping of perceptions and beliefs from a false, negative direction, then we will really be missing a critical part of the battle. If we want to address violence against women, and I think all of us in this House do, then we have to ask what the opportunities are for us to provide good and true information about consent. On the other hand, how do we respond to these sources of false belief that are really a central cause of the violence against women we see?

This is what this motion asks us to do. It asks us to start by undertaking a study at the health committee about these impacts. Again, I hope either hon. members though private members' business or the government, will be prepared to take the next step after the study and look for legislative responses.

I want to say that part of the reason we likely have not addressed this up until now is that there are some very legitimate concerns about civil liberties when we talk about possible restrictions on pornography that we might put in place. It is important to have that discussion, because civil liberties are important and need to be protected in the context of any action we take in this respect.

There are a few points I want to make specifically in my remaining time about civil liberties.

Private Members' Business

The first point is that civil liberties always entail exceptions for children. We do not allow children the same liberties we allow adults. That is because it is important that people, before they are able to exercise their full freedom in the interest of themselves and the wider community, have some degree of personal formation, a sense of the way the world works at a basic level, before they are prepared to fully manage their own affairs. That is fairly obvious, and that is how the world operates on so many other fronts.

For the law to step in and look for ways to protect children, or at least to make sure that children are not accessing certain kinds of material without the awareness or oversight of their parents, I think is a legitimate activity of the law. We are talking about something different if we are talking about adults. The reality is that there is a formative process of absorbing these false beliefs about the relationship between violence and sex that often starts very, very young. In fact, it often starts well before the age of legal consent.

The second point I want to make on civil liberties is that I think we need to recognize the potentially addictive and choice-distorting nature of pornography.

Very often we put restrictions on people's liberty to do certain things if we recognize that, for instance, in the case of drugs, the consumption of a drug will limit the ability to make choices in the future. It can lead to a level of addiction that will make it very hard for them to make a different choice that will be better for their well-being and happiness.

When we talk about the interaction of children with something that is potentially addictive, that is where we can get into a real problem. We can see many of these cases where young boys, before they really have any sense of what they are getting into, go through this process of finding themselves addicted and developing these false beliefs that will have negative social repercussions.

Finally, very briefly, as quickly as I can say it, our intellectual foundations, when it comes to rights, are connected with a deeper conception of justice. That a person has a right to a thing is necessarily rooted in a concept of justice in terms of what is owed them in a good society. We need to start from a place of what a just and good society looks like if we are going to have a coherent conversation about how we apply rights in this case.

•(1800)

Very clearly, a just and good society is not one in which very young boys are getting pornography addictions that are shaping their attitudes about violence against women as they grow older. Again, I look forward to supporting this motion, and I hope that it leads to strong next steps to confront this significant problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Accordingly, I invite the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock for his right of reply. The hon. member has up to five minutes.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak once more to my Motion No. 47.

I want to start by acknowledging the support from the members of all parties, and expressing my appreciation for that support as it has been shown throughout this debate. It was encouraging to hear the

speeches from members in each party. Many points they raised were points that I had wanted to include in my initial speech, but I just did not have the time to do so.

For example, my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill discussed issues around consent and youth education. The parliamentary secretary noted the staggering 342% increase in reports of child sexual abuse online over the four years at Cybertip.ca. The members for Abitibi—Témiscamingue and Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot both spoke about the health impacts of sexually explicit material on an increasing number of young men who are developing erectile dysfunction.

Since the last hour of debate, the support for Motion No. 47 has grown. There are now over 50 organizations from across Canada that support Motion No. 47. Just yesterday, I received a letter of support from the Colchester Sexual Assault Centre, which is coincidentally based in the riding of the chair of the health committee. The executive director wrote, "Unfortunately, online pornography has become the main source of sex education for our youth, and research has shown the damaging effects on personal sexual development and relationships. While we believe there is no simple solution to this epidemic, it is a necessary first step to help address the pervasive impact of sexualized violence in our community and culture."

Dr. Kim Roberts, a professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, who is a researcher on child development and memory and also a consultant on the thousands of cases of child sexual abuse, wrote to MPs in support of Motion No. 47, stating, "The issues in this topic are not simply moral. They are very real consequences of exposure and/or participation in sexual activities before it is appropriate for children. Further, the way that sexual content is presented does not project the ideals of equality in sexuality. As a child victim grows up, they see themselves as someone else's property to be manipulated as they wish."

In a letter of support from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, the organization responsible for Cybertip.ca, executive director, Lianna McDonald, wrote, "Numerous studies have examined how viewing violent pornography that depicts the dehumanization of women can harmfully shape children's development of values about healthy sexual relations. These are not just statistics, these are our children, the ones growing up with these distorted views of healthy relationships and the ones growing up to be treated as a body instead of a person. It is our job to teach them otherwise."

The Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation in Edmonton wrote, "We think it's important to understand the multiple health impacts and to create prevention initiatives and support programs to assist Canadians of all ages who want help to stop viewing violent and sexually degrading materials. Research will enable all of us to better understand and create appropriate responses."

Adjournment Proceedings

During the first hour of debate, one of my colleagues from the NDP asked why I had not tried to introduce this directed motion at the health committee instead of debating it here first. One of the reasons I introduced Motion No. 47 in this chamber is that I believe that it is such an important issue that it warrants the attention of this House and all MPs. I also believe that the impact of strong, all-party support for Motion No. 47 will resonate across our country at provincial and municipal levels and significantly increase awareness about online sexual violence from coast to coast to coast.

In fact, inspired by Motion No. 47, in the past month the Alberta School Boards Association voted strongly in favour of integrating education on the harmful impacts of pornography into the provincial curriculum. A Manitoba MLA made a statement in the Manitoba legislature on sexual violence online. Three municipalities in British Columbia, the City of Victoria, the City of Colwood, and the District of Highlands, formally passed resolutions in support of the study.

Boys and girls are not born with the idea that violence and degradation are a normal part of sexual activity. They are taught by a multi-billion dollar industry that sexual violence is normal and acceptable. This has to stop.

• (1805)

I have a daughter and a son, and just like all members of the House, I want to see them grow up and develop attitudes of respect instead of objectification, of affection instead of coercion. We can do better for all youth.

I look forward to working with stakeholders, parents, my colleagues, and those on the health committee to find solutions that foster the healthy development of youth, increase child protection, and reduce violence. I again thank my colleagues for their support of the motion.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me explain why I asked for this adjournment debate.

A high-frequency train has been a very big dream of the people of Trois-Rivières and also, I am sure, of the people in my colleague's riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain. We get excited just hearing those three words because the last time a passenger train came through Trois-Rivières was on January 15, 1990.

VIA Rail has proposed a project involving a high-frequency passenger train that would travel along a dedicated track on the north

shore of the St. Lawrence, and everyone is anxiously awaiting news on this subject.

When I asked the question in the House, I was dissatisfied with the answer that I got because I was told about the many investments that the government has made in VIA Rail but none of them had anything to do with the high-frequency train, and that is the project that I really want to focus on. In fact, the only figure I was given had to do with an assessment that is being conducted on the feasibility of providing funding for this VIA Rail project.

In response to this same question, on November 21, 2015, the Minister of Transport stated in an interview with *La Presse* that he was closely monitoring Via Rail's high-frequency rail proposal on dedicated Via Rail tracks. On September 9, 2016, 10 months later, he declared before the Canadian Railway Club that he was still studying the VIA Rail project. On October 21, 2016, I asked a question in the House, and I was told that the government was continuing its study. On November 17, at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, I again asked the minister the question, and I obtained the same response: the government was still studying the project.

In light of the fact that \$33 million was allocated to the study of this project, a study that was already under way in 2015, my question is very simple.

When does the government intend to finalize its report and provide funding for the VIA Rail high-frequency rail line, which would pass through a corridor on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River and end in Trois-Rivières, in order to service not just the people of Trois-Rivières, but all of Mauricie, with a train station that we are all anxiously awaiting? Having the train pass through the area is also an important change in the economic profile of the entire Mauricie region.

Imagine the day when one can travel from Trois-Rivières to Montreal or Quebec City in under 60 minutes several times a day. Everyone knows that Mauricie is becoming increasingly important and is already well known for its quality of life. Trains are such a comfortable way to commute that anyone could go work in either big city, and I am absolutely sure my colleague and I would often see each other on the same train to Ottawa for work.

When will it happen?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1810)

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Trois-Rivières for the opportunity to share our government's vision for the future of transportation in Canada and how passenger rail in particular fits into that long-term view. Building a national transportation system that is fluid in its operations, organic in its connection to Canada, and responsive to meeting the needs of our society and economy are critical to increase growth and better service. That is why our government allocated \$3.3 million to support a comprehensive assessment of VIA's high-frequency rail proposal. VIA Rail proposes to reduce overall operating funding requirements from government and reinvigorate services in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor by investing in dedicated passenger rail service. I know that my friend the parliamentary secretary for finance, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, is very excited about that. VIA believes that dedicated tracks would allow it to set schedules and frequencies to satisfy demand for passenger rail service by Canadians while providing a potentially greener mode of transportation.

I recognize the interest expressed by the people of Trois-Rivières, among many other Quebeckers and Canadians alike, with regard to VIA's high-frequency rail proposal. They can be assured that ongoing dialogue and consultations will remain an integral part of the process going forward. We are very interested in VIA Rail's proposal, as it aligns with this government's vision for the future of transportation in this country. The proposal offers a range of potential benefits: relieving congestion, boosting economic development, delivering a more efficient and sustainable rail transportation system, and reducing Canada's transportation-related environmental footprint.

We are committed to laying the groundwork for a transportation system of the future for Canada that will be safer and more secure, innovative and green, and sensitive to the needs of the traveller. VIA Rail's proposal is one of several options being considered for the future of passenger rail in Canada. Our government will take the time to not only carry out an in-depth assessment of the proposal but also fully consider other options available for delivering a safe and efficient intercity passenger rail service in Canada over the long term.

I can assure the member opposite and Canadians that this government has already begun its assessment of VIA Rail's high-frequency rail proposal. We look forward to communicating further with Canadians on the outcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, in his answer, the member touched on a number of major principles that I agree with, of course. However, he did not say anything about a deadline.

If one person gives another a contract to conduct a study, the report is expected on a specific date. The date can be postponed for any number of reasons, such as needing a bit more time. However, there is still a deadline. In the government's case, it cannot tell us what the deadline for this study is.

Am I to assume that they keep postponing the study because they want the project to be funded by the proposed infrastructure bank, which would likely lead to higher costs for passengers than if it were among the major government-financed infrastructure projects?

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank the member opposite for raising this subject, a subject of interest to him and my good friend from the riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

Our government's long-term vision for Canada's transportation network is a future where alternative and green modes of transportation are more widely used, a future where air, rail, and transit are more integrated and seamless, a future where the Canadian travelling experience is better and more affordable.

VIA Rail's high-frequency rail proposal offers promising benefits that would put us on track, pun intended, to meeting these goals. We will work diligently to determine the best approach for passenger rail service in Canada in a way that best fits into our vision for the future of transportation.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am taking part in this adjournment debate to draw to the attention of the House a growing scandal that is undermining Canadians' trust in our democratic system all because of the old Liberal Party culture when it comes to political financing.

I can say that the more time goes by, the more opportunities we will have to ask the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to enforce and oversee the guidelines in the document "Open and Accountable Government", written by the Prime Minister himself.

This evening, I have the opportunity to discuss values and ethics and reiterate my concerns over the new Liberal MPs who are being forced to accept this old Liberal culture being imposed on them by Liberal Party veterans because ethics is a value that is undeniably lacking in this Liberal government's judgment.

I think the Liberals like to walk a fine line between conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest. That is unacceptable to our Canadian democracy.

The purpose of this adjournment debate is specifically to ensure that there is no appearance of preferential access and that no preferential access was given to individuals or organizations that might have donated to the Liberal Party at one of their cash for access events.

Over the past several months, since the Liberals came to power, the scandal around the Liberal party's shady financing schemes continues with new events that are shocking to honest citizens who cannot afford to pay for privileged access to Liberal ministers.

Let me put this in context. It all began with the relocation costs of two employees and friends who work in the Prime Minister's Office. Their move cost Canadian taxpayers \$200,000.

Adjournment Proceedings

We happened to get wind of a number of cocktail parties that cost \$1,500 to get into, but guests could eat canapés, drink some good wine, and while they were at it, have privileged access to ministers in order to talk secretly about matters and issues that have to do with the portfolios of those ministers.

Just two weeks ago, we learned about a \$1-million donation made by a wealthy Chinese man who made Canada a place where not only are ministers for sale or for rent, but so is the Prime Minister. In exchange for a huge donation, he just might get the opportunity to invest in our Canadian economy however he likes.

Let us talk about another scandal, one that the Minister of Justice denied in the House till she was blue in the face. A co-chair of the Liberal Party fundraising campaign and co-founder of a company that produces marijuana saw his share price double in one week because of leaks from a Liberal task force that was supposed to be confidential. The minister refuses to launch an investigation to determine whether any of the members of that task force leaked any information.

Not only are this government and its Prime Minister irresponsible, but they are undermining our democracy by playing favourites to those who have the means to pay for the luxury of special treatment in true Liberal style.

Since the Liberals are unlikely to vote in favour of our motions calling on them to put an end to this ethical scandal and take their ministerial duties seriously, I want to know what the government plans to do put an end to this Liberal scandal.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased to listen to my colleague opposite.

However, this evening, let us talk about what Canadians and the constituents of the riding of Lévis—Lotbinière, who sent my colleague to Ottawa, are really interested in. They sent him here to talk about real issues: employment, the economy, and our youth.

I know that the member for Lévis—Lotbinière is also concerned about the economy, employment, and our youth. Therefore, I will remind him of what our government has done to help not only the people of his riding, Lévis—Lotbinière, but also all Quebecers and Canadians.

• (1820)

[English]

Our government came to Ottawa just over a year ago with a bold plan to strengthen the middle class and to help those working hard to join it. I do know that people in the member's riding are working hard to join the middle class. They appreciate having a government that is standing up for the middle class and working for Canadian families.

We are moving forward on the understanding that with Canadians working to their maximum potential, they can build a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. I know people are working hard in Lévis—Lotbinière as well as in my riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain. They expect their government to be on their side when they are young, when they are seniors, when they work, when they care for their families, for seniors, and when they retire.

By doing so, they are building a better and stronger Canada for today and for future generations.

I know the member for Lévis—Lotbinière not only cares about this generation but future generations as well. That is why I was saddened to see that he and his political party, the Conservatives, voted against every measure we put forward to work for the middle class, even when it reduced taxes for the middle class, which benefited nine million people. Nine million Canadians are paying less taxes today because of the government. That is the first thing we did, working for the middle class.

It saddened me and it saddened people in his riding. I know people living in his riding. Actually, my mom lives in his riding, and she was disappointed to see the member vote against measures that would help the middle class.

Then we went on to the Canada child benefit, a program that is benefiting families across Canada, nine families out of 10. Let us think about that. Nine families out of 10 are better off because of the Canada child benefit. We are lifting about 300,000 children out of poverty. Let us think about a program in our lifetime that has done so much to reduce poverty for children. This government has done that. Again I am saddened that the member for Lévis—Lotbinière vote against this measure.

Let us talk about the CPP expansion, which is historic. The member will remember, when he retires one day, and he will be proud to have seen us vote to expand CPP. This is going to benefit generations to come. His children and grandchildren will benefit from the government's actions.

These are the matters about which Canadians care. That is why they sent us to Ottawa, to work for them, not to discuss trivial issues but to work for Canadian families and to grow our economy. That is why people are proud when they watch us from their homes. They are wondering what their members of parliament are doing for them. They know that on this side of the aisle we focus on what matters. We do not just focus on what is right but what is important for Canadians, and I could go on. We did even more for seniors.

Our government will remain committed to working on things that matter to Canadians. Whatever they may say, we will work for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear an answer concerning the Liberal ethics scandal, so I will try again.

The media reported this week that the Prime Minister's agenda is quite busy for reasons that are difficult to justify, which often prevents the opposition from asking questions to be addressed by the Prime Minister.

My question is the following. Will we, on this side of the House, also have to pay \$1,500 to have access to the Prime Minister and to ask him legitimate questions and obtain proper answers to shed light on Canadians' future?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member for Lévis—Lotbinière, but I am convinced that the people watching at home are wondering what we are talking about here in Parliament.

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Are we talking about real issues that affect Quebecers and Canadians? I know a lot of people from Lévis—Lotbinière, and they are concerned about the economy.

When I travel around Quebec, people ask me to grow the economy. They want to know what we have done to grow the economy. I will tell the House what we have done. We have made historic investments of \$186 billion in infrastructure to improve the quality of life of Canadians. That is what Canadians want us to talk about.

The people of Lévis—Lotbinière who sent the member to Ottawa to work expect him and all of his colleagues to talk about real issues that affect them. People are concerned about public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure. That is what people want us to talk about in Parliament. Parliament belongs to them, and they expect us and those on the other side of the House to work for Canadians.

I can tell the House that we are going to continue to do just that.

● (1825)

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 31, I asked the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to tell us what was happening with the financial assistance promised to Bombardier.

The minister replied at the time that the government was working closely with the company and that it understood the importance of Bombardier to the aerospace industry. He said that the government has been clear and that it was not a matter of if but how it wanted to make this investment. More than a month has passed, so has he come up with an answer?

Bombardier is one of our flagship companies, and we must help it. Bombardier is a major employer in my riding. The company was founded by Joseph-Armand Bombardier, in Valcourt, a city that is just on the other side of the border of my riding.

Every morning many people from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot head over to Valcourt for work. I myself have had to go to Valcourt to record community television programs. Those programs are actually doing an excellent job keeping the viewers in my riding informed. Ever since I was a little girl, every time I go to Valcourt, I am always impressed to see the mountains of shipping crates containing snowmobiles and watercraft ready to go, sitting in the plant's yard.

In my riding, there is a company called Roski Composites in Roxton Falls. In 1963, Mr. Bombardier created a division called Roski Ltd. to supply parts for the Ski-Doo assembly line. In the early 1970s, Roski was tasked with producing and assembling the first generation of Sea-Doo personal watercraft. During that period, Roski produced the full series of Bombardier sailboats.

As it developed expertise in large-volume manufacturing of composite parts using contact moulding technology, Roski diversified by being one of the first Canadian and even North American companies to make large-scale use of liquid resin ingestion and high-pressure moulding technology.

In the mid-1970s, Roski helped design the Montreal metro by producing its car linings. During that same period, in order to pave the way for the 1976 summer Olympic Games in Montreal, the division designed and provided the city with composite parts for the Olympic Stadium, the Olympic Basin, the Complexe sportif Claude-Robillard, and the Maurice Richard Arena.

In 2015, Roski Composites expanded its facilities with a view to diversifying and producing larger composite parts, such as in-ground pools, windmill parts, outdoor furnishings, tanks, boats, and parts for recreational vehicles, buses, and train cars.

As hon. members can see, Bombardier is important to my riding's economy. We must keep all the jobs there.

With the description I just provided of Roski Composites, hon. members can appreciate how proud I am to have such a company in my riding and how anxious I am to secure the survival of that company through support for Bombardier.

I will repeat my question: what happened to the help that was promised for Bombardier?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the concerns of the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot regarding Bombardier's recent announcement. I want to begin by thanking my colleague for accommodating my schedule today. She did me a favour and that was very generous of her.

As the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development stated, our thoughts go out to the workers and their families affected by Bombardier's announcement. We, as a government, understand the challenges that they are going through. The Government of Canada and Bombardier have a shared interest in contributing to a strong aerospace sector in Canada.

The aerospace sector is an engine for innovation, economic activity and highly skilled employment, making significant contributions to Canada's socioeconomic well-being. In 2015, the aerospace industry contributed more than \$28 billion to Canada's GDP and hundreds of thousands of high-quality jobs to the Canadian economy.

While Montreal is the third largest aerospace hub in the world, however, it is important to recognize that Canada's aerospace industry extends across the country, as my honourable colleague pointed out. In fact, Canada's aerospace industry is comprised of nearly 700 companies of all sizes located in many regions that are integrated into local and global supply chains.

Anyone familiar with the aerospace industry knows that innovation is integral to its success. Aerospace is one of Canada's most R&D intensive industries spending more than \$1.9 billion annually and dedicating more than 20% of its activities to R&D.

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To put this in perspective, aerospace manufacturing R&D intensity is five times the manufacturing sector average. The aerospace sector punches above its weight.

Canada ranks third globally for civil aircraft production and second in the production of business aircraft. Canada ranks third globally in aircraft engines, but first in both turboprop and helicopter engine production.

Bombardier's most recent innovation is the world's most advanced commercial jet, the C Series. Bombardier is clearly a leader in innovation, and this will result in future growth and more of the highly-skilled jobs that Canada needs.

This aircraft has been a game-changer in using new engine technology and materials to be greener and more fuel efficient. The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development has expressed publicly his desire that federal support for Bombardier be focused.

We want to ensure the benefits of long-term stability of the company and the aerospace industry in Canada, including economic benefits for Canadians, better jobs, and stronger communities.

● (1830)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, employees need more than the minister's thoughts. They need action.

On October 31, the minister told me that the job losses clearly had nothing to do with the discussions they were having with the company with respect to its request for \$1 billion in assistance. Nevertheless, we saw what happened with Aveos. Without financial help from the government, 1,800 workers lost their jobs. That cannot happen again.

The jobs at Bombardier and its contracting firms, like the one I mentioned earlier, are crucial in my riding. We cannot afford to lose even one. It is a matter of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot's economic health.

When will the government take action?

● (1835)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to once again reassure my hon. colleague that job losses have nothing to do with our discussions with Bombardier. We stand squarely behind the company. That is why we are continuing to collaborate with Bombardier and the aerospace industry to contribute to its sustained growth.

Current discussions with Bombardier focus on the benefits of the long-term stability of both the company and Canada's aerospace industry. That is why, in October, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development announced up to \$54 million in funds for a project under the technology demonstration program to support Bombardier and its 14 industrial and academic partners.

The project will help develop new technologies such as advanced systems architecture, control systems, and aerodynamic systems with significant potential for broad-based and long-term economic benefits for Bombardier and all of Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 6:36 p.m.)

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