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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 22, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 22, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “The Impact of a Pan-Canadian Carbon Pricing Levy on PBO’s GDP Projection”.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership”, done at Santiago, Chile, on March 8, 2018. An explanatory memorandum is included with the treaty.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s responses to 19 petitions.

* * *

DIVORCE ACT

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-78, an act to amend the Divorce Act, the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act and the Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act and to make consequential amendments to another act.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, a charter statement on Bill C-78, an act to amend the Divorce Act, the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act and the Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act and to make consequential amendments to another act.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in relation to its study of the main estimates 2018-19.

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights entitled “Improving Support for Jurors in Canada”.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 62nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 62nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The 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.

Routine Proceedings

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations, and I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following: “That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, in keeping with wide support for the notion that debate ought not to be curtailed for bills aimed at amending the Canada Elections Act and the Parliament of Canada Act, a proposal brought forward by the Liberal Party on April 10, 2014, and supported by the current Prime Minister, and more recently presented to this House by the NDP House leader on May 4, 2018, no motion pursuant to Standing Orders 78 or 57 may be used to allocate a specified number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments”.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

• (1010)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC) moved that the 23rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented on Monday, March 6, 2017, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, I have been away for a week. I believe I have 10 minutes at this point. Is that the speaking slot, or is it 20 minutes?

The Speaker: The member has 20 minutes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, then I will be twice as eloquent. If we multiply that by the longer length of time, we may well find four times the benefit that we would have had if I had had only 10 minutes to speak.

Let me start by welcoming the minister to the House. I see her here today. If I am right, this is the first time she has been back since her pregnancy. It is a delight to see her here. If I may say, she is looking radiant. It is that new mother glow. I have some knowledge about this because our daughter gave birth eight weeks ago. My wife and I spent the break week in Creston, B.C., visiting Daphney and little Eowyn, who at this point is eight weeks old. It does indeed impart new life to grandparents, but especially to the mom.

The minister is juggling something no minister has done before, being a new mom and running a portfolio, and if that were not enough, introducing a doorstopper of a bill. Therefore, we are glad she is here to take personal charge of it again. This is the kind of thing that warrants having the minister's personal attention, so I am very glad to see that she will be here to take personal charge of the bill during the course of our debate in the House, and that which will follow subsequently in committee.

Let me start by drawing attention to the large physical size of the bill. A number of commentators have asked whether this is an omnibus bill, as it is so large. We know there has been endless discussion about omnibus bills and whether or not they have their place. I thought Kady O'Malley had good insight in her column on the subject, where she said that it really is all on one general area of subject matter. Therefore, it is not an omnibus bill in the sense that

budget implementation acts tend to be omnibus bills. It does not deal with a whole range of unrelated subjects, as they are all related to the electoral system.

However, it does deal with many detailed aspects of that legislation. I want to take a moment to explain why we can have in this portfolio, in a way that we cannot really in any other portfolio, a bill of this enormous size. I do not have my reading glasses with me, but I see 245 pages plus almost 100 pages of assorted notes.

The reason we have such a large bill, which is not an omnibus bill as it deals with one subject area, is that in electoral law, unlike every other area of law, there is no regulatory power. What would normally happen in any other area of government activity is that the minister would be empowered to pass regulations to deal with various aspects of the implementation of the law, the highly technical aspects. This is not done with electoral law for the simple reason that the minister is an interested party. No matter how hard an individual minister may try to be objective, he or she is elected as the partisan candidate of a party and has the partisan interests of his or her party in mind, as do I, and as does every single member of the House of Commons, except I suppose someone elected as an independent, and even that person has an interest in how the electoral law is written.

This means that there is enormous detail in the law, which means that it is critical to have adequate time to study, look at, and implement the legislation, and go through it with a fine-tooth comb, to some degree in the House but particularly in our committee work, in order to make sure that all of the technicalities work. Being involved in the procedure and House affairs committee, which deals with our electoral law, I can say from long experience, as the longest-serving member of that committee, that we must have intimate knowledge of the regulatory aspects of our legislation, in a way others do not, to understand in detail how it works.

• (1015)

I will give one example, among many: understanding the details of handicapped or disabled people's access to polling stations. This is a highly technical matter, which would normally be dealt with at a purely administrative level. It has to be dealt with by our committee. We have to interview and bring back the Chief Elector Officer and his subordinates to work with them on this. That is the kind of thing we need to deal with in detail. That is the kind of thing that is in the bill, and for that reason, a great deal of detailed attention is needed.

I will stop at this point and allow others to speak.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a question or comment, but if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent that this debate be now adjourned.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

That the debate be now adjourned.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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

PENSIONS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and honour to stand here on behalf of the residents of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford to present a petition. The petitioners call on the government to end the corporate theft of workers' pensions. They recognize that Canadian workers rely on their pensions and benefits so that they can live and retire with dignity. They recognize that Canada's inadequate bankruptcy laws allow failing corporations to take the money that was intended for employees' pensions and benefits and to use that to pay off CEOs, banks, and investors instead. Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to fix our bankruptcy laws to stop corporations from putting shareholders, banks, and creditors ahead of their employees and retirees when they file for bankruptcy protection.

[*Translation*]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table in the House a petition signed by my constituents in Jonquière regarding automatic registration for the guaranteed income supplement.

The federal government recently announced it was launching a process to automatically register seniors for the guaranteed income supplement, but this process will not apply to everyone who is eligible upon reaching the age of 64.

The guaranteed income supplement is an important federal government program because it provides low-income seniors who collect old age security with extra income, which enables them to continue to receive care at home, receive specific care, or sadly, in some cases, buy medication. That is why I am tabling this petition in the House, on behalf of the people of Jonquière.

• (1020)

GENETICALLY MODIFIED SALMON

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to table a petition signed by dozens of people across Quebec and even from outside the province. The

petitioners point out that in early August 2017, roughly five tonnes of genetically modified salmon was sold in Canada.

The petitioners say that this salmon likely ended up on our plate without us even knowing it. They also say that Canadians are concerned about the lack of information about where GMO salmon is sold.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban the sale and breeding of genetically modified salmon in Canada until labelling standards to warn consumers are put in place and independent safety and environmental studies have shown GMO salmon to be safe.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1616, 1621, 1623 to 1625, and 1627.

[*Text*]

Question No. 1616—**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:**

With regard to the Canada C3 Expedition: (a) was the vessel certified to carry passengers, as per regulations under the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, prior to the expedition; (b) if the answer in (a) is affirmative, was the certification approved in writing by the Minister of Transport; and (c) on what date was the vessel certified?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to part (a), the vessel was certified to carry a maximum of 12 passengers, 28 expedition personnel, and 20 ship's crew as per regulations under the Canada Shipping Act, 2001.

With regard to part (b), the vessel was issued a Special Purpose Ship Certificate by DNV-GL, the delegated authority on behalf the Minister of Transport.

With regard to part (c), the vessel was certified on May 11, 2017.

Question No. 1621—**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:**

With regard to the Policy on Legal Assistance and Indemnification, as it applies to incidents or matters which occurred on or after January 1, 2016: (a) how many requests for legal assistance or indemnification for Crown servants have been approved, broken down by year; (b) how many of the Crown servants in (a) are, or were at the time, ministers or ministerial exempt staff; (c) what are the total costs, to date, for all approved legal assistance and indemnification cases; (d) what are the costs, to date, for all approved legal assistance and indemnification cases, referred to in (b), (i) in total, (ii) broken down by each case; and (e) how many approvals have been granted under section 6.1.8 (exceptional circumstances) of the Policy, and, of those, how many are cases referred to in (b)?

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

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the policy on legal assistance and indemnification as it applies to events that occurred on or after January 1, 2016, the Privy Council Office is not able to produce and validate a comprehensive response to this question on behalf of the government in the time allotted.

Routine Proceedings

In addition, in processing parliamentary returns, the government applies the Privacy Act and the principles set out in the Access to Information Act. With respect to some elements of the question, a response could disclose personal and solicitor-client privileged information.

Question No. 1623—Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:

With regard to the government issuing diplomatic passports, since November 4, 2015: (a) what is the total number of diplomatic passports that have been issued to individuals who are neither elected officials nor employees of the government; and (b) what is the list of individuals referred to in (a) who have received a diplomatic

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), during the period of November 4, 2015, to April 5, 2018, IRCC issued a total of 33,044 official passports classed as diplomatic or as special. Of these, 6,749 were red diplomatic passports and the remainder were special passports, green in colour, which are issued for regular official travel.

The passport program processes travel documents, including diplomatic passports, which are issued through the integrated retrieval information system, or IRIS. IRCC is unable to determine how many of the 6,749 diplomatic passports issued during the specified time period were issued to individuals who are neither elected officials nor employees of the government, as IRIS does not track data by category, such as public servant, elected official, family member, private citizen, etc.

Passport legislation stipulates which individuals are eligible for a diplomatic passport. The Diplomatic and Special Passports Order states in section 2(m) that “immediate family members of the holder of a diplomatic passport may be eligible for a diplomatic passport if they are travelling with, or proceeding to join that individual abroad. For example, a diplomatic passport would be issued to the spouse and children of an ambassador being posted to a Canadian mission. Section 2(l) states that “a private citizen may obtain a diplomatic passport if that individual is duly nominated as an official delegate of the Government of Canada to an international conference of a diplomatic character. Subject-matter experts (e.g. scientists, academics) are sometimes named as part of Canada’s delegation to an international conference in order to advise government officials and facilitate discussions with other States. These are the only two scenarios when an individual who is neither an elected official nor an employee of the government would receive a diplomatic passport.”

IRCC cannot issue a diplomatic passport to anyone who does not meet the criteria specified under the Diplomatic and Special Passports Order.

With regard to (b), as per the Privacy Act, IRCC is unable to disclose the names of people who are not public servants or elected officials.

Question No. 1624—Mr. Chris Warkentin:

With regard to the government’s market debt surpassing the \$1,000,000,000,000.00 mark: in what year will the market debt return to less than \$1,000,000,000,000.00?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the new Borrowing Authority Act enacted in November 2017 to promote transparency and accountability to Parliament, budget 2018 marked

the first time the government reported on its combined market debt. The Government of Canada combined market debt includes both the government’s market debt, which consists of all outstanding treasury bills, bonds, and retail debt issued directly by the Government of Canada, as well as any market borrowings by agent crown corporations. Increases or decreases in combined market debt are driven by the financial requirements of the government and its agent crown corporations. On a year-over-year basis, combined market debt generally increases when the government and its agent crown corporations have financial requirements and decreases when there is a net positive financial source.

As reported in budget 2018, the government’s combined market debt is projected to be \$1,066 billion at the end of 2018-19. This amount includes estimated government market debt of \$755 billion and an estimated \$311 billion in market borrowings by agent crown corporations, but does not include any assets—for example, \$93 billion of liquid financial assets in Canada’s exchange fund account as of April 5, 2018—that may be purchased using the proceeds of market debt.

The 2018-19 year-end projected level of outstanding government and crown corporation market debt is not expected to surpass the current Parliamentary-approved maximum stock of \$1,168 billion and, based on the budget 2018 fiscal outlook, is not projected to decline below \$1 trillion within the current five-year planning horizon.

Question No. 1625—Mr. Pat Kelly:

With regard to the Canada Revenue Agency’s processing times for various common interactions with corporate taxpayers: (a) what is the median processing time for delivering Notices of Assessment for corporate income tax returns; (b) what is the maximum processing time for delivering Notices of Assessment for corporate income tax returns; (c) what percentage of Notices of Assessment for corporate tax returns exceed 30 days to deliver; (d) what percentage of Notices of Assessment for corporate tax returns exceed 60 days to deliver; (e) what percentage of Notices of Assessment for corporate tax returns exceed 90 days to deliver; (f) what percentage of Notices of Assessment for corporate tax returns exceed 120 days to deliver; (g) what are the respective processing times and percentages in (a) to (f) with respect to reviews of corporate income tax filings; (h) what are the respective processing times and percentages in (a) to (f) with respect to adjustment requests, objections, and appeals, respectively; (i) on a year over year basis since 2010, is the percentage of cases in (a) to (h) which exceed 12 weeks to deliver increasing or decreasing and by how much; (j) how many employees at the Canada Revenue Agency are assigned to take telephone inquiries by corporate taxpayers; (k) on average, how many telephone requests from corporate taxpayers does the Canada Revenue Agency receive each business day; (l) what is the median time corporate taxpayers spend on hold when calling the Canada Revenue Agency; and (m) how much of the new funding for the Canada Revenue Agency provided by Budgets 2016, 2017 and 2018 has been allocated to client services, including telephone inquiries, adjustments, objections and appeals, respectively, for corporate taxpayers?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to parts (a) to (i), while the CRA does apply service standards relating to the issuance of corporations' notices of assessment, it does not track them in the manner described in the question. The CRA's goal is to issue a notice of assessment within six weeks of receiving a digital corporate income tax return and within 16 weeks of receiving a paper corporate income tax return. The CRA aims to meet this standard 95% of the time.

With regard to part (j), while the CRA does provide a telephone line for business inquiries, call agents are not assigned in the manner suggested in the question. For this reason, the CRA is not able to provide a response in the manner requested.

With regard to parts (k) to (l), while the CRA does have information regarding overall call volumes and wait times in general, the information is not tracked in the manner described in the question. For this reason, the CRA is not able to provide a response in the manner requested.

With regard to part (m), through the Resolving Taxpayer Objections initiative, budget 2016 provided the CRA with funding for client services. Budget 2016 allocated \$4.6 million for objections and appeals on an ongoing basis to resolve regular income tax and commodity tax objections for both individuals and corporate taxpayers. The CRA is unable to isolate the portion specifically related to corporate taxpayers. In addition, budget 2016 allocated \$85,000 for the 2016-17 fiscal year and \$80,000 on an ongoing basis for adjustments to corporate income tax returns. Client service funding announced in budget 2018, which does not include funding for the objections and appeals program, has not yet been allocated to the CRA.

Question No. 1627—**Mr. Mark Warawa:**

With regard to the statement by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour in the House of Commons on March 27, 2018, that religious groups "were contacted and they know that they could very well apply for grants", in relation to the 2018 Canada Summer Jobs program: (a) what is the complete list of religious groups contacted; (b) for each group in (a), what are the details of the contact, including (i) date, (ii) method of contact (email, phone, letter); and (c) of the groups contacted in (a), (i) which ones signed the attestation, (ii) which ones were awarded funding under the 2018 Canada Summer Jobs program?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), as part of its regular outreach and engagement with stakeholders, Service Canada contacted a range of employers to promote the 2018 Canada summer jobs program.

Examples of strategies that were undertaken by Service Canada to contact these employers include email blasts, including reminders, to members of Parliament, past applicants, and potential new applicants across Canada; teleconferences, webinars and/or in-person information sessions held across Canada; and outreach initiatives held across Canada with various umbrella associations.

Specifically, for Canada Summer Jobs 2018, the following were carried out: emails were sent to approximately 45,000 applicants to the 2016 and 2017 Canada summer jobs program; another 1,300 organizations received emails—for example, umbrella organizations; and over 800 individuals participated in information sessions, both virtual and in person.

Members of Parliament also conducted their own outreach to organizations, which was not tracked by Service Canada.

While employers contacted as part of the outreach and engagement strategy included faith-based organizations, Service Canada did not systematically track the type and number of organizations contacted. As a result, information to develop a complete list of employers contacted, including faith-based organizations, as part of this strategy is not currently available.

With regard to (b)(i) and (b)(ii), the details of the contact made with religious groups, including the specific date and method of contact, are not available in light of the response provided in (a). Service Canada contacted a range of employers to promote the 2018 Canada summer jobs program during the period from December 19, 2017, to February 9, 2018. Examples of strategies undertaken to contact these employers, which include but are not limited to religious groups, are listed in the response to (a).

With regard to (c)(i), in light of the response provided in (a), information with respect to religious groups contacted who have signed the attestation is not available. It is also important to note that as in previous years, religious organizations were encouraged, welcome, and eligible to apply to the Canada summer jobs program. However, "faith-based" is not a category used to identify organizations as part of the Canada summer jobs application process.

With regard to (c)(ii), the complete list of employers who have been approved for Canada summer jobs 2018 funding is found on the Canada summer jobs website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding.html>.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's response to Questions Nos. 1615, 1617 to 1620, 1622, 1626, and 1628 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 1615—**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:**

With regard to the Canada C3 Expedition: (a) what was the total cost of the expedition paid for by the government; (b) what is the breakdown of costs by line item and standard object; (c) how many Canadians took part in the expedition as passengers; and (d) which Ministers, Members of Parliament, and other governmental officials participated in the expedition, and how many days did each spend on the vessel?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

Question No. 1617—Mr. Arnold Viersen:

With regard to all expenditures on hospitality (Treasury Board Object Code 0822), between February 1, 2018, and March 1, 2018, by the Office of the Prime Minister and the Privy Council Office: what are the details of all expenditures, including (i) vendor, (ii) amount, (iii) date of expenditure, (iv) description of goods or services provided, (v) file number, (vi) number of government employees that the hospitality expenditure was for, (vii) number of guests that the hospitality expenditure was for?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1618—Mr. Guy Caron:

With regard to the methods used by Statistics Canada: (a) what method did Statistics Canada use to calculate the unemployment rate and full-time and part-time employment rates in Canada in 2017-18, (i) do the current methods differ from those used in 2015 and in 2010, (ii) if the answer to (a)(i) is affirmative, that the current methods differ from those used in 2010 and 2015, how do they differ; (b) what data collection procedures did Statistics Canada use for the unemployment rate and full-time and part-time employment rates for 2017-18, (i) do the current procedures differ from those used in 2015 and in 2010, (ii) if the answer to (b)(i) is affirmative, that the current procedures differ from those used in 2010 and 2015, how do they differ; (c) what calculation methods and data collection procedures were used for the unemployment rate and full-time and part-time employment rates, respectively, in the economic regions of Gaspé-Magdalen Islands (10), Lower St. Lawrence and North Shore (19) and Restigouche-Albert (09) in 2010, 2015, and 2017-18, (i) do the current calculation methods and data collection procedures differ from those used in 2015 and 2010, (ii) if the answer to (c)(i) is affirmative, that the current calculation methods and data collection procedures differ from those used in 2015 and 2010, how do they differ; and (d) what percentage and number of senior citizens receiving a pension were included in the collection of data on the unemployment and employment rates in the economic regions of Gaspé-Magdalen Islands (10), Lower St. Lawrence and North Shore (19) and Restigouche-Albert (09) in 2010, 2015, and 2017-18?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1619—Mr. Guy Caron:

With regard to government spending in the federal ridings of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, respectively, between October 19, 2015, and today: (a) how much did the government invest in projects under the Canada Community Infrastructure Program and the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program, broken down by (i) name of the project, (ii) type of project, (iii) location of the project, (iv) submission date of the project, (v) approval date of the project, (vi) projected cost of the project, (vii) total cost of the project; and (b) how much did the government invest through the various government programs other than the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program (such as, but not limited to, the New Building Canada Fund—Quebec, New Horizons and the various Canadian Heritage funds), broken down by (i) name of the project, (ii) type of project, (iii) location of the project, (iv) submission date of the project, (v) approval date of the project, (vi) projected cost of the project, (vii) total cost of the project?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1620—Mr. Kevin Sorenson:

With regard to the Canada 2020 Health Innovation Summit on March 27 and 28, 2018, in Ottawa, broken down by department, agency, Crown corporation, or other government entity: (a) what is the total amount spent by the government on registration fees for the event; (b) what is the list of individuals who had their registration fees paid for by the government; and (c) what is the list of ministers, exempt staff, or other government employees who accepted free entry or registration to the Canada 2020 event?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1622—Mr. Kevin Sorenson:

With regard to lawyers employed or retained by the government, and broken down by department and agency for the 2016-17 fiscal year: (a) what are the total amounts, paid to employed lawyers for (i) salary, (ii) overtime, (iii) pay in lieu of leave, (iv) travel expenses, (v) membership dues, (vi) clothing expenses; (b) what are

the amounts, paid to outside counsel retained to act for the government (i) in total, (ii) with respect to law firms paid \$100,000 or more, broken down by law firm; (c) how many lawyers are employed in each occupational group and level; and (d) how many lawyers were appointed to positions, broken down by occupational group and level during the 2016-17 fiscal year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1626—Mr. Pat Kelly:

With regard to the court's finding of malicious prosecution of Tony and Helen Samaroo of Nanaimo, British Columbia: (a) what, if any, disciplinary action has the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) taken with respect to the defendants; (b) what are the steps in the CRA's disciplinary process for employees; (c) with respect to each step in (b), what are the behaviours or actions which warrant the step; (d) with respect to each step in (b), how many instances of the behavior in (c) must a CRA employee demonstrate before advancing to the next step; (e) with respect to each step in (b), how many of CRA's employees have been disciplined for each year between 2016 and 2018, inclusively; (f) with respect to each step in (b), what recourse or appeal mechanism is available to a CRA employee accused of the behavior which warrants the step; (g) what is the CRA's usual or most frequently employed disciplinary measure for employees found liable for malicious prosecution; (h) what is the CRA's most frequently employed disciplinary measure for employees found to have provided inaccurate responses to taxpayers calling a CRA call centre; (i) what is the CRA's most frequently employed disciplinary measure for employees found to have issued incorrect assessments; and (j) what is the CRA's most frequently employed disciplinary measure for employees found to have produced incorrect audits, erring in either arithmetic or law?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1628— Mr. Bob Zimmer:

With regard to expenditures or contracts with Zgemi Inc., since November 4, 2015, and broken down by department, agency, Crown corporation or other government entity: (a) what are the details of each expenditure, including (i) vendor, (ii) date and duration of contract, (iii) amount, (iv) description of goods or services provided; and (b) did the president or any employee of Zgemi Inc. discuss any business dealings with any Ministers, exempt staff members or government officials in India in February 2018 and, if so, what are the details, including (i) parties involved in discussions, (ii) nature of business discussed, (iii) date, (iv) location?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed from May 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for having to ask about the time I had available to me a few minutes ago. We switched between two different items, and I was not sure whether I had 10 minutes or 20 minutes. I have since confirmed with the table, and I see you signalling as well, that it is 10 minutes this time. I will adjust my speaking matter accordingly.

Earlier I took a few moments to congratulate the minister on being back in the House and being a new mom. It was wonderful to see her. I think everyone is as pleased as I am.

I want now to dwell on an issue on which I think the minister and I may not yet be on the same page. I am hopeful that I will be able to convince her and her House leader, through my words, of the merits of the position I am going to put forward. This is an argument as to the importance of electoral law and the detail involved in it and the importance of not rushing through debate on it.

In my remarks a few moments ago, I pointed out that our electoral law is unusual in that items that would normally be dealt with through the regulatory power, that would be written up through orders in council or ministerial orders and put on the books that way, having the force of law but not having been debated in the House, are, in fact, debated in the House and in committee. Because of the unique nature of electoral law, we are all interested parties. If the government, which is ultimately represented by only one party, were to have charge of those rules, it might very well change the rules in its own interest. Therefore, this law, unlike other laws, has never been moved from its original position of being dealt with entirely in the House.

At one time, we dealt with all legislation this way: in the House. We did not send it off to committee. We did not have regulatory powers. That all came later, with the development of what we call the bureaucratic state, or the administrative state, in the 20th century. We never moved this over for that reason. That means that we have to give this material the time it needs.

I am well aware of the argument being presented, or that I suspect will be presented, on the government side that we should move to some form of time allocation, because time is of the essence. Time is of the essence because an election is looming, a year and four months from now. The Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that we will not be able to enact that legislation and put in place the administrative procedures necessary to make it happen in the new ways that have been laid out in this bill unless it is passed very soon.

With regard to the point that we must now hurry, I will point out that, number one, it is not actually necessary to put this legislation through to have a successfully conducted election. We had a successfully conducted election that involved the true test of all elections. It involved the incumbent government being relieved of power in 2015. Therefore, this is not absolutely essential. It would be nice, but it is not essential.

It is not essential that this bill be passed in its original form. In particular, a bill that gets into this kind of detail ought to be looked at with a view to making such changes as would make it better. This is largely administrative law, detailed law, the kind of thing where slight wording changes can make a substantial difference. It is not

the sort of broad, sweeping principle we see in some shorter pieces of law, certainly in motions in the House, and in the Constitution. This is at the exact opposite end of the bell curve of potential legislation. It is detail-oriented and requires detailed study. That is part of the reason a convention has developed that one ought not apply time allocation to electoral legislation.

The other reason it ought not happen is that the devil is in the details, by which I mean not merely that there could be omissions that might occur when dealing with detailed legislation, and I am not suggesting, implying, or insinuating that this is the case here, but it can happen that provisions written specifically for the purpose of privileging the incumbent party are written into legislation.

● (1025)

That was exactly the situation a little over a year ago when we were dealing with the electoral reform issue. We were dealing with a series of hearings that were to produce legislation, and it became evident that the government had been spinning its wheels for 18 months to create a crisis, a rush, which could only be dealt with by changing the electoral system in the particular way that would benefit the Liberal Party of Canada.

There is only one system, other than the current system, that can produce a better result for the Liberal Party of Canada, which is the preferential ballot. That is the system the Prime Minister favoured. I assume he favoured it all along. He claimed to have an open mind. However, when it was all over, he said he would never consider proportional representation as an alternative to the status quo, the first past the post system, and would only ever consider a preferential system. He went on to describe the scenarios of the public policy disasters that he imagined would arise if we had a proportional system, the system that was favoured by virtually every person in the public hearings across the country who wanted change.

Creating a crisis by spinning one's wheels does not mean that the rest of the country needs to feel in crisis on order for us to pass the government's legislation. The fact is that the government could have introduced this legislation earlier. It might have been fewer than 300 pages long and dealt only with some of the subject matter, but as far back as the last election and the throne speech, the government was very specific in saying there were things that it did not like in the Fair Elections Act, the bill that passed by the last Parliament to change the Elections Act.

The opposition then indicated it was unwilling to proceed, that it thought it was wrong for us to proceed via time allocation. Now, I should say that time allocation was indeed applied. I am sure the other side will make that point. However, it was not as aggressive a time allocation as being advocated in this case. As well, if the Liberals believed that time allocation was wrong then, and they seemed very sincere about that when they were in opposition, then I have to believe that if time allocation were introduced now, they would regard that as a breach of their own de facto promise to the Canadian people that they would not impose electoral reform or new elections legislation in violation of the convention that has developed that time allocation not be introduced to make changes to the Elections Act.

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That is to say, it is not appropriate for the Liberals to say that when they were in opposition they were opposed to time allocation, that when the Conservatives were in power they abused this convention and, therefore, that the convention does not exist. I think the Canadian people, those who voted for the Liberals because they were unhappy with this sort of thing, said something to the effect that they were not happy with the Conservatives and would like to elect the Liberals because they would do things differently. I do not think Canadians would have been happy if they realized that the plan was for the Liberals to say that since the Conservatives had rolled back a convention, they could now regard it in the same way.

Whatever the Liberals said about the Conservative government trampling democracy would be true in the same measure of the Liberals now in power. Let me make this point by quoting the member of what was then Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, now Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame. At the time, in debate in this place he said:

If we are actually debating on second reading, third reading, or reports stage any changes to the Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act, time allocation and closure need not apply. It basically codifies a convention in this House, [here he was speaking to his own motion] a tradition we should respect....

He went on to say:

I hope every member of this House will agree with us that closure and, specifically, time allocation would be set aside because of something of this importance.

This was a convention that had arisen. It ought to be re-established.

Albert Venn Dicey, the great 19th century English legal philosopher, developed the idea of conventions. He said that a convention comes into force in practice when parties on both sides have respected it. I suggest that if the Liberals thought the convention was in danger in the last Parliament, they may very well be on the verge of destroying it by acting again in that way. Presumably, a convention can be removed by two parties acting in sequence.

I would like to see us not break that convention. I would like to see us re-establish the convention that time allocation is never applied to changes to the Elections Act. I hope the Liberals will come to agree with me. There is still time for them to do so.

•(1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by my colleague across the way, but surely he would recognize that the Conservatives, as an opposition party, have already concluded they do not want to see this legislation pass. It appears that the Conservatives are prepared to do whatever it takes to prevent this legislation from passing, yet it has been fairly widely debated. In fact, we have had reports and studies by the procedure and House affairs committee that this would improve democracy in Canada.

Would my colleague not recognize that in advancing democracy through this legislation, we do need to go to the tool box at times to ensure that such legislation does pass in a timely fashion and that Elections Canada will have the opportunity to implement it? If we listened to the Conservatives, this legislation would never pass and

Elections Canada would never have the opportunity to implement it. This is legislation that Canadians as a whole support.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, there has been a tendency on the part of the current government, which it has happened so often that I find it hard to believe it is not a deliberate pattern of behaviour, of not introducing important legislation for a considerable length of time, and then when it is introduced, insisting that we have to rush it through.

This happened with the assisted-dying legislation, which was dealt with far too late and created a whole series of problems, including the “elbowgate” fiasco. That was caused by government having spun the legislation so much that it was no longer possible to get it through by a court-imposed deadline unless we had a vote before a certain hour that night.

We saw the same thing with the cannabis legislation and the electoral reform legislation, and we are seeing it with this legislation as well. If the Liberals choose to try to do this sort of thing to forestall debate, obviously we on the opposition side would want to frustrate that attempt to forestall the debate that Canadians deserve on this important legislation.

•(1035)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns about the way Bill C-76 has been introduced, particularly at this moment in the parliamentary calendar. We also had Bill C-33 languish at first reading for 18 months. For a government that is all about electoral reform and attaches such importance to it, I would have thought that we would not be debating such an important bill on the back nine of the golf course. I certainly hope that the government honours its promise to allow this place to fully debate this bill.

One part of the bill that I do like is that it would adopt what my private member's bill, Bill C-279, sought to do, which is to put a hard limit on the length of elections. Many of us felt that was a reasonable amendment to put into the Canada Elections Act, because it would prevent future governments from going through another 78-day marathon campaign. I would appreciate hearing my colleague's thoughts on that particular aspect of the bill.

Mr. Scott Reid: That is a good question, Mr. Speaker. The reference of course is to the very long campaign that took place in 2015.

In general terms, it is advantageous to have as little discretion as possible with the length of a campaign, particularly as we now have moved to fixed election dates. There might be different circumstances in the event of a minority government, which can fall unexpectedly. We would want to leave enough time to adjust, for example, if an election happens over the Christmas break, which actually occurred in 2005-2006. Therefore, in general it is a good idea, but there has to be some kind of limit to it.

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One thing that does concern me, and I would invite my colleague to think about it, is the fact that in addition to the writ period, we have kind of a pre-writ period when certain restrictions are placed on freedom of speech by this bill. We are simultaneously shrinking the maximum length of the writ campaign and introducing a kind of different campaign that is much longer and did not exist previously. I am not sure what the consequences of that would be. We would want to investigate that. It is a good example of the sort of thing we cannot rush a discussion on; hence, our desire not to have time allocation.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Willowdale this morning.

I am proud to rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-76, which would empower more Canadians to vote and would ensure that elections are protected from interference. This legislation would give more Canadians the opportunity to vote by reducing the number of barriers to casting a ballot and would limit interference by ensuring the integrity of our voting process.

I would like to take this occasion today to welcome back to the House the Minister of Democratic Institutions, who has just returned from maternity leave, and to offer my congratulations to the minister.

In terms of an overview, let us turn back the clock to 2014, the year Stephen Harper's Conservative government enacted the so-called Fair Elections Act. In a blatant attempt to secure re-election, the Harper government at the time sought to impede rather than enhance access to voting. That legislation made voting at the polls more difficult and, amazingly, even prohibited the Chief Electoral Officer of this country from educating Canadians about the importance of getting out to vote.

In addition to that, the Harper Conservative government made elections longer and more expensive, in a blatant attempt to crush opposing political parties by simply outspending them. The self-serving rules imposed by the previous government should not be tolerated by any member of the House regardless of their political stripe. This is the very reason we introduced Bill C-76.

Plainly, Mr. Harper's plan backfired. Rather than keeping voters away in 2015, they came out in droves to vote him and his party out of office. In doing so, they also sent a very clear message that affronts to our democracy should not and will not be tolerated.

I recall very specifically the campaign of 2015 when engaged citizens in my riding spoke to me about what they called the "unfair elections act". They demanded change. The folks in Parkdale—High Park said that loudly and clearly to me. I heard from those constituents and communicated their concerns here in Ottawa. Our government is responding today with Bill C-76, legislation that would enable Canadians to come out and vote and prevent the manipulation of our democracy.

There are two broad categories. The first category is about access. As a fundamental principle, our government believes in the notion of making it easier, not harder, for people to vote. Unlike the Conservatives, we do not regard a larger number of people participating in elections as a threat to democracy, but a manifestation of a healthy democracy. That means giving Canadians the tools to be able to participate in our voting system.

For all Canadians, regardless of their background or their station in life, a participatory democracy means giving every Canada an equal chance to obtain a ballot and to cast a vote. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism, I take seriously the issue of access and inclusion, and I am most proud of the fact that Bill C-76 will increase the ability of diverse Canadians across a wide array of demographics to participate in our democratic process. Allow me to explain.

First, let us speak about low-income Canadians. For those who may not have the wherewithal to obtain government issued photo identification, Bill C-76 would allow them to use the voter information card as a legitimate form of identification at the polls. This will ensure that fewer voters are turned away at the polls, allowing more Canadians to exercise their democratic right to cast a ballot in federal elections, reversing one aspect of the unfair elections act.

Second, for Canadians who may not even have the wherewithal to possess a voter information card, we will reintroduce the old, pre-Harper system of vouching, which allows a registered voter to vouch for the identity of another person. Mr. Harper's legislation eliminated vouching and was strongly criticized at the time by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. In 2015, a whopping 172,000 people, particularly youth and indigenous persons, cited their lack of identification as the reason they did not vote. On this side of the House, we do not fear youth and indigenous voices; we encourage them. With this change in Bill C-76, we will re-enfranchise such people.

Third, we are taking significant steps to increase the access and participation of young Canadians. With this bill we will create a national list of pre-electors, so that Elections Canada can pre-register Canadian youth aged 14 to 17 to vote. Elections Canada will administer the list and sign up young people to receive information about voting until they reach voting age. The evidence has demonstrated clearly that once a person votes, they are more likely to continue to vote in subsequent elections. Our goal is to help, not impede, young people so that they make voting a lifelong habit.

Fourth, for Canadians with disabilities, we are taking vital steps to increase their access to and opportunity to cast a ballot. We currently have accommodations for persons with physical disabilities to vote from home.

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●(1040)

Disabilities can be both physical and intellectual. To include more Canadians in the pool of potential voters, we are expanding the provisions for voting at home for any elector with a disability, irrespective of the nature or extent of his or her disability. The same concept would apply to transfer certificates. Right now, only a voter with a physical disability can apply to vote at a different accessible polling station. Under this bill, we will extend the same accommodation to those with intellectual disabilities. This is meaningful inclusion in action.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-76 goes even further. It provides funding for important initiatives so that Canadians with disabilities can vote. This bill encourages candidates and political parties to take specific measures to accommodate voters with disabilities and reduce the barriers to their participation in the democratic process by offering financial reimbursement for their efforts.

[*English*]

Fifth, for trans and non-binary Canadians, we are taking important steps to boost voter access and participation. Under Bill C-76, requirements to indicate a voters sex on the list of electors or other documents is being deleted. Trans and non-binary Canadians will no longer be required to explain or confirm their gender identity at the polls before they are given a ballot. This type of measure will ensure that all LGBTQ2 Canadians are welcomed at voting stations and encouraged to cast a ballot.

Sixth, for Canadians abroad, Bill C-76 would restore the access to the democratic process that Stephen Harper severed. Under the unfair elections act, Mr. Harper took away the right to vote from one million Canadians who had been living abroad for more than 5 years, a decision which prompted a charter challenge all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The case was *Frank v. Canada*, which was heard on March 21 of this year.

Our government is not waiting for the court to render its decision about the charter-protected voting rights of Canadians abroad. We are acting now with this legislation to restore such rights. We are saying to the one million Canadians around the globe, in the 21st century, in an era of mobile work and mobile workers, that their right to have a say in the election of their national government should not be fettered by the international demands of their employment.

Seventh, as I said at the outset, our government does not fear citizen participation in the democratic process; we encourage it. That is why, in an effort to improve access of all Canadians, we are removing what was one of the most egregious instances of abuse on the part of Stephen Harper's previous government. Under that government's unfair elections act, it prohibited the Chief Electoral Officer of our country from educating adult Canadians about voting and the importance of casting a ballot.

Not discouraged, the Harper government prohibited the Chief Electoral Officer from doing his job, from building civic literacy and educating Canadians about why it was important to participate in our electoral system. I am as incredulous today as I was in 2014 when I first learned about this aspect of Stephen Harper's legislation. To prohibit a non-partisan officer like the Chief Electoral Officer of

Canada from informing Canadians about the merits of casting a ballot in our system of government is nothing short of anti-democratic. It was at the very core of why Canadians responded so resoundingly against Mr. Harper in the 2015 election, and why we are restoring such a basic aspect of the Chief Electoral Officer's duties with Bill C-76.

My final point on access relates to indigenous persons. It is connected to the broad measures we are taking under this legislation to facilitate more people being able to cast a ballot.

The structural changes in Bill C-76 would make voting faster and less time consuming, thereby increasing the number of Canadians likely to cast a vote. The changes include being more flexible with where one can vote at a given polling station; enhancing the use of special ballots; keeping advance polls open longer; and using mobile polls more frequently to reach those in low density, remote, and isolated communities.

The impact on access will be tangible. Many indigenous persons in our country live in more remote and isolated communities. By making this important change, we are empowering indigenous persons' voices to be heard and counted within our democratic process.

With respect to the second category, it talks about the integrity of our democratic process. The bill speaks for itself with respect to placing important limits on things like the length of an electoral campaign and the power to enforce against breaches of the act and electoral fraud.

The previous unfair elections act passed under the Harper government impeded instead of improved access to the ballot box. As a government, we believe that when more Canadians vote our democracy is strengthened, not threatened. That is why we have tabled Bill C-76, legislation that would increase access for all Canadians of diverse backgrounds to the ballot box. That is why I will be voting in support of the bill. I urge all parliamentarians to do the same.

●(1045)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right off the top, the member said something about the Conservatives not liking it when large numbers of people voted. However, under the last election, I believe an unprecedented number of people voted. It may have had something to do with the fixed election date. It may also have been because this place undertook a large study to pick a particular day of the year when most people would be home and would be able to vote. That may have had something to do with the large number of people who voted. What are his thoughts on that?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I will address that in two parts. There is no doubt that fixed election dates have been proven to demonstrate that when we pick a date that is more convenient to the masses, more people will come out to vote. I applaud that initiative. This bill retains that initiative. Fixed election dates will not go anywhere under Bill C-76.

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For my hon. friend opposite, and this has come up in repeated instances in the chamber, the reason we had an unprecedented number of people voting in the 2015 election was not because of the legislative initiatives by the previous government; it was specifically in spite of those legislative initiatives. It was in spite of the actions of Mr. Harper that people came out to vote him and his party out of office.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the 2015 election, I was out, as all my colleagues were on election day, getting voters to the polls. It was 6:30 p.m. in Vancouver, and the polls still had another half hour to go. I was standing at the doorstep of a house and through the living room window, I could see the television. Peter Mansbridge was on *The National*, and he had called a majority Liberal government. That broadcast to voters in British Columbia, while the polls were still open, the results of the election. The reason that was legal was because the previous Harper government, in 2012, eliminated a law that was put in place in 1938, which had governed every election since then. The law prohibited the early broadcast of election results so people would not know the results of the election prior to the polls closing. By the way, that prohibition was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada as being constitutional.

All of us in the House know that it completely skews the results for people in one part of the country to know the results of the election while the polls are still open. This was backed up by empirical evidence on the ground where people told me and other candidates that when they turned over the ballot boxes, they could see a clear difference in the way people voted within the last half hour of the balloting.

Why has my hon. colleague's government not restore the ban on broadcasting the election results when it clearly has a corrosive and biasing impact on elections and is so bias against voters in British Columbia and the west?

• (1050)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, that is an important question. We have the second-largest geographic territory on the planet to govern. It stretches across to three oceans. Administering an election between Newfoundland and Vancouver Island is difficult, and it always has been difficult.

However, in the digital era, in the era of social media, we recognize, and the previous government recognized it as well, that attempting to curtail people's freedom of expression, including discussing or communicating about voting results or voting likelihoods was difficult if not impossible. However, we can work on further ways that will address how voting is administered on election day to accommodate for that regionality and those time zones, such as structuring it so polling stations are open at different times on the west coast than on the east coast and in the centre of Canada. It is a challenge. We are up for the challenge.

The bill addresses the digital reality we are in right now, but there are other creative ways to address the problem my friend has raised.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to this very important legislation.

I sat in opposition when the Harper government brought forward the Fair Elections Act. It tried to give an impression that was not the reality of the legislation. We can contrast that to what we have proposed today.

Members will find that the proposed legislation has been worked on fairly exhaustively. Committees have dealt with the subject matter. In fact, I would go back to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs four years ago and up to today. Even a member from the Conservative Party talked about concurrence on a report, which was thoroughly debated by the procedure and House affairs committee, and many of the recommendations that had been raised by our Chief Electoral Office and Elections Canada. In essence, we have had not only a great deal debate inside this chamber over the last number of years on the issue of electoral reform and changes, but we have also witnessed a great deal of discussion at the committee level.

The committee heard from many stakeholders on the important issues Canadians felt needed to be acted on and incorporated in the legislation. I commend and applaud the efforts of our current minister. In that same note, I congratulate her on the birth of her first child.

However, the legislation is long overdue. I believe Canadians have an expectation that the legislation will be acted upon. Some changes will have a positive impact on future elections. I would like to think that all members of the House would get behind and support.

In listening to the debate so far, it would appear that the official opposition does not want the bill to pass, and is prepared to do whatever it takes to prevent its passage. I can appreciate the fact that opposition members are entitled to oppose the legislation, but the actions that have been proposed in the bill would make democracy better in Canada. In essence, they are opposing that.

On the other hand, my New Democratic friends seem to be of the opinion that the legislation, in most part, is good. It would appear as if the New Democrats will support Bill C-76, and I appreciate that. However, the most recent question was in regard to a specific aspect of the legislation and why it was incorporated. This is good legislation. It will go to committee and if the NDP or Green Party have amendments that would improve the bill, then the minister, the parliamentary secretary, and committee members, who are ultimately responsible to see it go through committee, would be open to those amendments. I look forward to Bill C-76 going to committee.

However, let there be no doubt. The Conservatives will attempt to manipulate even my New Democratic friends into believing we should hold off and continue to have endless debate, whether it is in the chamber or in committee. The true intent of the Conservative Party is to not allow the legislation to pass. The Conservatives can ask for committee meetings throughout the country and have endless debate inside the chamber. However, the purpose of doing that is to not see the legislation pass, and that would be tragic.

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•(1055)

Therefore, my advice to my New Democrat friends is to get behind the reforms that are being talked about in a very real and tangible way and not be manipulated by the Conservative opposition. I would say that to the Green Party also. As well as those members, independent members and members of the Bloc need to recognize the bill for what it is: it is legislation that will enable individuals to turn out in better numbers and make it easier to vote.

I sat in committee when the Conservatives, member after member, talked about not needing the voter identity card, while we were hearing from Elections Canada about how important the voter identity card is. In a very real way, this is something that Canadians who are tuned in can understand and appreciate. Elections Canada, which is recognized around the world as a truly independent agency, should be appreciated and acknowledged for the important role it plays.

One of the ideas that Elections Canada had was for the voter ID cards to ensure that Canadians are informed that they are, in fact, registered. A vast majority of those Canadians who receive those voter ID cards during the period of the election believe they can use that card as a part of their identification in being able to vote. I do not blame them for believing that. It looks and appears to be a legitimate document, and it is a legitimate document. Elections Canada is providing it to them. It is going to the residential address. Why would the Conservatives not want to allow it to be part of the voter identification process?

This is one of the changes that is being proposed. Once individuals receive those cards, many will retain them. If they go to an election polling facility, they will find that many Canadians bring the cards, anticipating that they will be able to use them, and if this legislation passes, Canadians would in fact be able to use that card.

Vouching is another area that is made reference to. As Canadians we are a trustworthy bunch. There is nothing wrong with my saying that while my neighbour may not have a piece of ID, I know that, yes, that is my neighbour. I will vouch for that individual and that he or she lives there and is of voting age. Why would we not enable that to take place? After all, I am registered. When I say “me”, that would apply to anyone who lives in the community and has identification and is prepared to vouch for another person.

One of the things that came up time and again in the last election was the length of the election. This legislation attempts to deal with that and the issue of advertising. If it were up to the Conservatives, they would like to have unlimited advertising for unlimited days leading up to an election. We saw a good example of that. They say it is because they can raise money.

We have election laws that are in place to ensure that there is fairness in the manner in which election funds are raised, but we also need to protect the integrity of the system by preventing excessive amounts of advertising far in advance of an election, thus making sure this aspect of the field is also level and that no one political party would have an advantage over other political parties. From my perspective, this legislation would ensure that Canadians, who are a

fairly tolerant group of people, can understand that an election period is when we can anticipate the election advertising.

•(1100)

Whether it is the vouching or the voter ID cards, there are many positive changes within this legislation that will improve the quality of Canada's democracy, most of which have come from Elections Canada itself. I would recommend that all members support the legislation.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, much of my colleague's comments focused on what he called the voter identification card. Elections Canada has been very clear that it is not a voter identification card but a voter information card, and that it has not been allowed. With over 980,000 instances of incorrect information on these cards, I wonder how my colleague can actually say that the voter information card is a valid piece of ID.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the constituents I represent and I both believe that when voters receive that voter information card, voter ID card, or whatever it is that the member across the way or Elections Canada officially wants to call it, on election day they can take that card and present maybe a driver's licence, or in my case a Manitoba health card, or another piece of ID along with that card and be able to vote. I do not have a problem with that. I believe a vast majority of Canadians would like to see it that way because they received it from Elections Canada. It tells them where they will be voting. Their address is on the card itself. I believe it is one way to encourage and assist Canadians with respect to voting.

When I sat in hours of committee meetings three years ago to talk about the Elections Act, a fairly significant aspect of the feedback we received was that it should be allowed and included as a part of an individual's ability to say, “Here is my ID, along with the voter's card that was provided to me.”

•(1105)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is right that the New Democratic Party is prepared to give its support to the bill to move it to committee. However, I take issue with his accusations that this side of the House is responsible for the delay of the bill. The bill received first reading on April 30 of this year, and the acting Chief Electoral Officer said that April was the month in which the changes actually needed to be implemented in order for them to be ready for the 2019 election. Furthermore, Bill C-33 has been languishing at first reading for 18 whole months, so I will take no accusations of delay on this side of the House.

My question for the hon. parliamentary secretary is this. Why did his government wait so long, until April 30, when it knew full well that the proposed changes needed to be implemented well before then to be in time for the 2019 election and knowing that the bill has to clear the House of Commons and the other place before receiving royal assent? Does he realistically think he has enough time to act on the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations?

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and recognize the concern that the New Democrats have with respect to the issue of timing. All I can say is that there have been extensive discussions and debate on the issue of electoral reform. Most of what is within this legislation has been thoroughly debated, whether it is within this legislation or other aspects, such as reports and so forth. We are talking about many hours and days of thorough debate. One could even take some of it back prior to the previous election, under the fair election legislation of Stephen Harper. There has been a great deal of debate on it.

My concern is that the NDP will fall into the Conservative trap. The Conservatives do not want to pass this legislation and they want the NDP to complain and fight for this and fight for that in the hopes that they will join them, and by doing so put into jeopardy the possible passage of the legislation into becoming law. The NDP could play a critical role in not only supporting the legislation but ensuring that it also gets passed. We will be watching to see which role the New Democrats will take. Do they want the legislation to pass? They say yes. I hope their actions will demonstrate that they want the legislation to pass, because all Canadians will benefit from it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak in opposition to Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Saskatoon—Grasswood.

There is something very ironic about the rumours that the Liberal government is considering moving time allocation in order to limit debate on a bill that would govern how our elections would operate going forward. There has not been enough debate on this important piece of legislation, and I certainly hope the Liberals do not follow through with their threats of time allocation.

This important piece of legislation and the government's continued lack of respect for our democratic institutions will leave Canada in a much weakened position after just four years of Liberal government. Our Prime Minister, the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, has continuously tried to use every trick in the book to tip the electoral scales in his favour, but Canadians are seeing through this and raising reasonable and credible objections. Let us not forget his attempt to completely overhaul our electoral system to fit his personal preference, a system that overwhelmingly benefits one party over the other.

I am sure most of my colleagues in the House today will remember the 2015 election campaign, in which, in candidate debate after candidate debate, we were assured by the Liberal candidates that this would be the last first-past-the-post election in Canada. It was an ironclad guarantee that this would be the last election under first past the post. How long did that last? We all saw how quickly they folded their tents and went home on that one.

Canadians stood up to the Prime Minister and empowered our opposition efforts, and the Liberals backed down. Therefore, why now? Why is the Liberal Party tipping the scale in its favour, even though it has been in government for almost three years? I suspect it

is because the Liberals are having a hard time fundraising and we are getting closer to the 2019 election.

The party of cash-for-access fundraisers was caught and is now taking aim at opposition parties in order to limit members' ability to spend money that Canadians have willingly donated to our efforts to hold the government to account. The Prime Minister, his front bench, and even his backbenchers have shown in just three years that they have a hard time following rules, so how can Canadians trust them with Canada's democratic institutions when their ethics bar is so low?

Under this legislation, up to one million votes cast could be susceptible to voter fraud if the information card is accepted as valid ID. Again, I reflect back to a few years ago when I sat on the procedure and House affairs committee and the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Marc Mayrand, appeared before committee. Time after time, he commented on the large number of inaccuracies on the voter information card. Because of that information, as well as later information that incorrect information was on 980,000 cards that were mailed to incorrect addresses, it was decided it was not appropriate to use that kind of information as identification.

Think of all the situations today that Canadians need to show ID for. They include purchasing alcohol, getting on a plane, being admitted to a hospital, registering for Internet use, renting an apartment, opening a bank account, checking into a hotel, renting a car, and so many more. However, the Liberal government does not believe that one needs to show valid ID to vote. Voting is one of the most cherished privileges of a democracy, and the Liberal government is willing to compromise it by accepting a voter information card as valid ID, a card that had a 980,000 error rate in the last election.

Let us consider the currently acceptable forms of ID under the Fair Elections Act. Among others, they include a health card, a passport, a birth certificate, a social insurance card, an Indian status card, a band membership card, a Métis card, a Canadian Forces identity card. These are just a few of the official cards and documentation, any two of which could prove one's identity and address. However, in the very rare case that Canadians cannot provide two of those pieces of ID, here is a list of other acceptable forms of ID: a label on a prescription container, a blood donor card, a credit card, a debit card, a student card, a library card, a CNIB card, a fishing or hunting licence, correspondence from a school, a lease agreement, a mortgage contract, and an e-statement or e-invoice with one's address on it. All one needs to do with e-statements or e-invoices is print them and bring them along to the polling station as one of the pieces of acceptable ID.

● (1110)

If the members opposite can provide us with examples of constituents who could not provide any of the listed pieces of ID, I am sure there are multiple ways to help those individuals obtain that information, just considering the ones I have just listed.

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Members of the Liberal Party would like to say that the Fair Elections Act was meant to suppress voter turnout. The reality is that under those rules we saw record numbers of voters in the last election. On this side of the House, we are not afraid of high voter turnout. After the mess the current government has made of Canada's finances, we are quite certain that Canadians will turn out in record numbers to the polls in 2019, to stop the ever-increasing debt load that is left to our children and our grandchildren.

I have just dealt with one part of the legislation, concerning the voter information card. There are two other sections that are also very troubling, namely campaign financing and the national register for future voters.

There have been many allegations that millions of dollars in foreign funding were funnelled into third party advocacy groups during the 2015 election. According to reports, the Tides Foundation donated \$1.5 million to Canadian third parties in the election year alone. Conservatives want to know the status of any ongoing investigations and what has been done to solve this issue of foreign interference in the 2015 election. If the Liberals were truly committed to preventing foreign interference in Canadian elections, they should have dealt with this issue many months ago.

However, they have introduced limits on spending during the pre-writ period. This would fall between June 30, when the election is called, and the actual voting day. During that time, political parties would have a limit on how much they can spend, while the Liberals have access to government transportation and the ability to make funding announcements and run government ads. This is a clear example of the Liberals tipping the scale in their favour. It is undemocratic and Canadians are seeing right through it.

Furthermore, this bill would create a national register of future voters. Canadians, again, are rightly concerned that this is just the Liberal Party of Canada invading the privacy of young Canadians and harvesting their data for political purposes. We have asked the minister several times in question period for a straightforward answer on this, but have only been met with non-answers and talking points.

In closing, let us not forget that the current Liberal government has already failed to meet the deadline set out by the Chief Electoral Officer when appearing at committee last month. He said:

When I appeared last February, I indicated that the window of opportunity to implement major changes in time for the next election was rapidly closing. That was not a new message. Both Monsieur Mayrand and I had previously indicated that legislative changes should be enacted by April 2018. This means that we are now at a point where the implementation of new legislation will likely involve some compromises.

The government's decision to use the voter information card as identification is a failure waiting to happen. It is an information card; it is not an identification card, although it is often described as such by members across the way. In fact, we just heard my colleague from Winnipeg repeatedly in his speech refer to this as a voter ID card. It is not a voter ID card. The Elections Canada website clearly states it is not a voter ID card; it is an information card. It is an information card because that is what it provides: information. It has been stated before that in the 2015 election, 986,613 of those voter information cards had inaccurate information. They were sent to the wrong address or were not complete, yet the Liberals are okay with nearly a

million inaccurate voter information cards being used as identification.

This is an extremely flawed bill, driven by misguided ideology, being rushed through this House after the deadline set out by the Chief Electoral Officer has not been met. I hope my colleagues on the other side will join Conservatives in voting against this legislation.

● (1115)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really do appreciate the speech from the member, but I would like to push his idea a bit further. He talked about ensuring that everybody has an ID card. Perhaps the member should take his logic to the final conclusion of having a national ID card for all Canadians, so that the government can keep track of all of us. I know it is perhaps a suggestion the Conservatives would find anemic to their own position, but at the end of the day that is essentially what the member is suggesting, that we actually create a national ID card so that we can keep track of all Canadians.

In my own riding, I have 1,400 people who are homeless. These people, our fellow citizens, unfortunately do not always have the opportunity of having ID cards. It would be of great benefit to them if there were a way they could obtain an ID card that was free, so they could obtain more government services. Unfortunately, the previous government did not see that as necessary, so vouching and believing in the good credibility of Canadians and believing in their honesty is an excellent way forward, ensuring, for instance in a homeless shelter, that if the shelter manager or director can vouch for them and say that individuals are the persons they say they are, then those individuals should be allowed to vote.

The previous government's attempts to disenfranchise so many Canadians was so un-Canadian that the Conservatives' unfair elections act was simply anemic to our Canadian democracy.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, let me assure my good friend and colleague that on this side of the House we have no interest in having government enter more aggressively into the privacy of Canadians. I am not in favour of creating this national card that he speaks of.

In my comments I listed a number of acceptable forms of ID. Included is a letter of confirmation of residence from a first nations band or reserve, or an Inuit local authority. Also, as it relates to the homeless, of course we want them to be able to vote. A letter of confirmation of residence from a student residence, a seniors residence, a long-term care facility, a shelter, or a soup kitchen is acceptable identification if a person has two of these to bring along to a polling station.

The Liberals are trying to return to a flawed system in which they are going to allow a piece of information that had nearly a million errors on it, as has been pointed out by electoral officer after electoral officer. These cards are not accurate. It is unfortunate that the Liberals continue to want to use something that is inaccurate to allow inaccurate votes and a flawed voting system.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I agree with my NDP colleague on broadcasting the results. I think that the Conservatives must also agree. It is not right to know the results of an election when there are 30 or 50 minutes of voting time left in a province. Would the solution not be to ensure that no polling station can start counting the votes before every province has finished voting in order to prevent any possible influence?

I also agree with the people of Quebec on the requirement for ID. In Quebec, only five cards have been accepted as ID in the past several elections and that has not deterred people from voting; however, it did stop people from stealing a vote and other cheaters from voting. The government has a duty to ensure that everyone can vote but also that no one can vote in someone else's place. Some democratic countries have a mandatory voter card and only that card is accepted.

I also wanted to talk about mobile polling stations. They should be offered in more places, such as sick people's homes and seniors' residences. Small seniors' residences have to register if they want the mobile polling station to come to their facility, but they should be registered automatically.

Finally, I am also wondering about what can be done to actually get people to participate. Would it not be a good idea to follow Australia's lead, for example, and make voting mandatory?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, my colleague listed a large number of issues that deserve further study.

That is one of the reasons it is important that the debate be allowed to continue here, and indeed, when it goes to committee, that there be adequate debate and adequate opportunity for input from experts.

The member talked about the timing of results influencing opinion, and that sort of thing. I am much more concerned about third party advertising and third party influencing of the results. The biggest concern, as I indicated in my comments earlier, was using inaccurate information as voter ID, which would actually allow for fraudulent use of our electoral system. Our system is the envy of the world, and I would like to keep it that way.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-76, the amendments to the Canada Elections Act. One of the key foundations of Canadian democracy is the free and fair electoral process by which Canadians vote for their representation here in Ottawa. It is a citizen's right; it holds our government accountable to the people and makes our country stronger as a result. That is why it is so important that we study the

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many concerning problems of the bill, which the Liberal government has now decided to introduce so late in its mandate.

Canadians are doubtful of the bill and they have very good reason to be. The Liberals time and time again have broken the campaign promises they made to voters in 2015. Their pledge to address the issue of electoral reform is one of the biggest broken promises of all, and we need to remember how they talked about first past the post during the 2015 election.

What happened? In less than a year they shelved it, and here we are today. It is interesting how things have come around.

Why have the Liberals in government been so lacklustre on the commitments they promised to implement? With so little time left before the next election, why have the Liberals decided to just now introduce this 350-page omnibus bill on electoral reform, when they could have taken steps to bring it forward to debate earlier? Why are we, as official opposition, now being forced to cram our deliberations on Bill C-76 because the government has procrastinated so long on this matter? The Liberals started this process months ago. They should have brought in the bill way before May of 2018.

The acting Chief Electoral Officer warned the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs repeatedly that time was running out for Elections Canada to properly implement any changes to the electoral system in time for the election next year. The deadline for any major changes to be made was last month, April 2018. How can the Liberal government excuse its broken promises on the issue of electoral reform, and how can Canadians be expected to trust it on this file any longer?

The bill purports to improve our electoral system by making our elections more fair and transparent, but it actually damages our voting process in critical ways. When Canadians vote in elections, they expect that everyone will be held to the same high standard, so that everyone's vote is equal and that no person or group will be able to vote more than once or otherwise have more of a say than anyone else. We ensure this by requiring that when citizens vote, they provide a legitimate form of identification, so that we can guarantee fairness, transparency, and efficiency in all our electoral system.

In fact, as the website for Elections Canada notes and as we have said many times in the House today, Canadians can use nearly 50 different pieces of identification in order to prove their address and their identity. These accepted forms of ID are much more generous than the forms of ID required to purchase alcohol or, in the future, cannabis. They are much broader and more inclusive than the forms of ID that are required even to board a plane for a domestic flight.

Canadians need a driver's licence to drive a car, a motorcycle licence to drive a motorcycle, and a library card to take out a book from their public library. In order to vote, Canadians do not need to have any of these pieces of identification. A citizen could vote by showing their student ID card and their utility bill, for instance. The Liberals do not like to accept the fact that all sorts of pieces of identification may be used by Canadians in order to exercise their democratic right to vote, so they claim that voter participation is hurt, despite these generous identification requirements.

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●(1125)

How is this true? Is this claim actually true? Well, as we all know, data from Elections Canada tells us that the 2015 federal election saw the biggest voter turnout since 1993. Around 3.6 million people voted in the advance polls alone, which was another record-breaking achievement.

What about young people? We talk about young people a lot in the House of Commons. The Liberals previously justified Bill C-76 on the premise that the current identification requirements turn away youth from voting. We note that on May 10, the hon. member for Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, across the aisle, emphasized this line of reasoning by stating, “What this legislation does is to get youth more involved in the electoral process. I think it is a good thing when our youth are involved in our democracy”.

We agree that greater youth participation is something we all want to see in elections, and during the last election, we saw just that, young people coming out to the polls. In fact, the official data from Elections Canada shows that in the 2015 election, the participation of voters aged 18 to 24 increased by 18.3%, to 57.1%. Back in 2011, only 38.8% voted. We saw a major increase from 38.8% in 2011 to over 57% four years later, which is almost a 20% gain. This is the largest increase for this group since Elections Canada began recording demographic data on turnout in 2004.

Those nearly 50 different types of acceptable ID did not lead to a decrease at all in voter turnout among young people. Quite contrary to the Liberal narrative, actually, the percentage of young people voting went up significantly. As I mentioned, it was by almost 20%.

What about those voting on reserve? What did the turnout look like there? Once again, the data from Elections Canada tells us a different story from the one we continue to hear from the Liberal government. When we compare the voter turnout in 2015 to that of 2011, we find that on-reserve voter turnout increased by 14%. Furthermore, Elections Canada reports that during the 2015 federal election, the gap between turnout on reserves and turnout among the general population was the lowest observed by Elections Canada since it began calculating turnout for aboriginal populations in 2004.

Evidently, then, we see that what the Liberals claim to be the case in terms of falling voter turnout across the country clashes with what we find is reality. Far from disrupting voter turnout, as the Liberal fearmongering said it would, the nearly 50 accepted pieces of voter identification during the last election correlated with increases in voter turnout across this country. Nonetheless, the Liberals are pushing forward with this bill, Bill C-76, and in the process of doing so are threatening the integrity, transparency, and fairness of our electoral system, which would hurt all Canadians.

Under this bill, people would be able to use their voter identification cards as valid pieces of identification when they went to vote. This change would be implemented despite the fact that the government admits that 986,613 voter information cards were issued with incorrect information and had to be revised during the last election, in 2015.

●(1130)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his speech. I would also like to ask him a question about Bill C-76.

He spoke about getting more youth and indigenous people to vote. Does he think that this bill will help more people with physical and mental disabilities to vote, yes or no?

Since my colleague, like everyone in the House, wants to strengthen our electoral system and our democracy, could he explain how this bill could encourage people with disabilities to vote?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, in the early 2000s, I actually worked for Elections Canada. I went to Watrous, Saskatchewan, to a seniors place. I knocked on the doors and I talked about identification for voters. Many of them were bedridden. During the election at that time, in 2004, Elections Canada officials would go to the rooms and check off the ballots for the people in bed.

I think this would help. Many people have a tough time getting to the polls. As I mentioned in my speech, advance polls are certainly picking up across the country. Those who are bedridden should have the democratic right to vote, and I can see this helping them out.

●(1135)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was in Saskatoon a couple of weeks ago with the agriculture committee. It is a very lovely town and is certainly a hub for agricultural innovation and technology.

In my riding, a fair section of the population does not have access to voter ID cards. They are Canadian citizens, and they are guaranteed the right to vote. That is what makes this whole process different from getting a licence to drive a car. Driving is a privilege; voting is a right.

The claim about voter fraud has been going on for decades. In fact, Harry Neufeld, the former chief electoral officer for British Columbia, heard horror stories throughout his entire career, but not one of those stories was ever substantiated with evidence. With all due respect to my hon. colleague, this is the theory the Conservatives are presenting to the House and to Canadians.

I am wondering if my colleague could inform the House of any known cases of voter fraud he is aware of. I would certainly like to hear about them, given that we have had testimony from people who have been involved in this for decades, and they have yet to substantiate any evidence of widespread abuse or fraud going on in Canada.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, the government admitted that in the election of 2015, 986,613 voter information cards were issued with incorrect information and had to be revised.

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As I mentioned, I worked for Elections Canada. I was one of those people who would be in an electoral situation in a room. It was in Saskatoon. Many people in the early 2000s did not have proper identification. We went through the process, and we gave them, at the time, the right to vote.

The fraud situation is hard to prove. However, we know that third parties in this country are getting a bigger say than they should. This legislation would strengthen third parties, which is something I think all Canadians are very concerned about. We have seen what third parties have done in the United States. We have seen what third parties did with Brexit in Britain. We are all concerned about third parties. The money they are pouring into this country is a concern for all Canadians for 2019.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Toronto—Danforth.

I am honoured to rise in the House today to join other colleagues in the debate before us and in support of Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts.

Since the very first ballots were cast in Canada more than 150 years ago, Canadians have pushed for change, demanding that elections in our country be fairer, more inclusive, and more accessible. At first, it was only men who could vote, until women fought for their right to have a voice. Indigenous communities bravely stood up to ensure that they were heard at the ballot box. Over 20 years ago, it was mandated that all voting places be accessible to all Canadians.

The evolution of voting rights in this country has always proceeded in lockstep with the forward march of civil rights. As a government, we are committed to continuing this legacy and to moving forward.

Canada's democracy is made up of all citizens and what they have to say about the country they seek to create. The measures in Bill C-76 would be bold and important steps along this path of empowering Canadians and strengthening our electoral process, which benefited from the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer after the 42nd general election.

Voting has to accommodate people's busy lives. Bill C-76 would help Canadians vote when and how it works for them. These measures would reduce wait times at polling places. Bill C-76 would also increase advance polling to 12 hours a day so that Canadians could easily vote ahead of election day if they so wished. It would also make voting more convenient by letting people use their voter information cards, as was previously the norm.

In 2011, Elections Canada conducted a pilot project on using the voter information card as voter ID and recommended that Canadians be able to use their voter information cards to vote. The findings were hugely important. Among students, the cards were used by 62% of voters. In seniors residences, the number was 73%, and on first nations reserves, they were used by 36% of voters. It is clear that this measure is important in helping Canadians participate in our democracy. Based on a Statistics Canada study, over 160,000 Canadians could not vote because they did not have the ID they needed. I am proud that our government would be addressing this.

These changes would also reintroduce vouching so that a voter could allow another Canadian to vote as well. As has been the case with many of the initiatives undertaken by our government, this would not represent a radical departure from the norm but rather a return to standard Canadian practices and ideals.

Undoing the unfair parts of the previous government's so-called Fair Elections Act would mean that more Canadians would be able to participate in our democracy.

Participating by voting is more difficult for some people than others, and that is simply not fair. The men and women in uniform who risk their lives to protect the rights of all Canadians deserve to have their right to vote protected. Bill C-76 would bring changes that would give Canadian Armed Forces members greater flexibility in how they cast their ballots, while also making sure that it is a secure process, whether they are voting abroad or at home. Additionally, Bill C-76 would extend the right to vote to approximately one million Canadians who live abroad, ensuring that they would have their say.

We would also remove barriers to Canadians with disabilities by increasing assistance at polling places and by allowing voting at home. Bill C-76 would provide incentives for parties and candidates to make their activities accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. I am confident that all my colleagues in this House will welcome new resources for positive and common sense steps, such as having flyers in Braille and ramps at campaign offices. These are small changes that would have a huge impact on fellow Canadians.

I am proud that while our government is taking steps to empower voters today, we are also looking to the next generation. There can be no question that the young people of Canada are engaged, and they are shaping our future.

• (1140)

In my own riding of Willowdale, the members of the youth council are already grappling with our country's most pressing issues. They have gone to the G7 youth summit with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to ask questions about challenges facing the international community. Over the last months, they have also had debates on everything from how Canada can engage in meaningful reconciliation with our indigenous communities to what policies are needed to protect the environment.

The future of our country is in good hands. I know that youth from coast to coast have just as much to say about politics as the young people of Willowdale.

By creating a register of future electors, Bill C-76 would allow Canadians between the ages of 14 and 17 to register with Elections Canada, which would allow them to be added to the voter list automatically when they turn 18. This would have a huge impact on our youth. Provisions in Bill C-76 would make it possible to contact approximately 1.5 million young people as part of civic education initiatives in high schools.

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I remember the first time I voted, and how important it was to me. When I put an X on my ballot, I was excited to be weighing in on issues that mattered to me. I want to make sure that all of our youth have the same positive experience I had.

When our youth are empowered, they create change, and that leads to a brighter future. Studies have repeatedly shown that voting at a young age encourages lifelong voting and participation in the democratic process. Given that Canada ranks an uninspiring 23rd among OECD countries in voter turnout, encouraging habitual voting among the next generation of Canadians is a noble goal and a meaningful step forward.

Just as Bill C-76 looks to our youth as the future of our democracy, it also addresses changing realities and what our world will look like tomorrow. Cyber-threats pose a real and serious danger to the integrity of democratic processes everywhere. Canada must be prepared to meet these challenges with strength and determination to keep our elections secure and transparent. I am proud that Canada consistently ranks as one of the countries with the freest and most transparent elections, but this is no mere coincidence. It is because we have dedicated citizens and officials hard at work.

Democracy is at the heart of our communities and at the heart of our country. I know that Bill C-76 would strengthen Canada's democracy, not just for today but for many years to come.

• (1145)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Willowdale has spoken quite eloquently about Canada's past, our history. Canada marked its 150th birthday recently. He told us the truth, that throughout history we have increased the enfranchisement of voting rights, which is great. I would like to remind the member that Borden's Conservative government gave women the right to vote. It was a great movement in history for this country.

However, I would also like the member to reflect on the fact that today we have legitimate questions. These are not questions about the fact that the Liberals are trying to help more handicapped persons or military members have access to voting. We have specific questions regarding how we can trust the government, which in the last year has shown disregard for electoral fundraising with cash for access, and disregard for a fundamental promise made during the election to reform the way people vote. How can we trust the government going forward?

As well, we are hearing the Elections Canada director telling the government that it is too late now to implement those changes for the next election. What is the main goal of the government? How can we trust it going forward?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, I obviously took note of my hon. colleague's comments. However, it is important to bear in mind that before drawing up all the initiatives that were part of this bill, we did actually listen to the Chief Electoral Officer.

It was quite clear to us that some of the changes that had been made previously would impede the ability of various individuals to partake in the election process. As members will note, there is the issue of the voter information cards. The evidence is quite clear that the use of such cards allowed an increase in the participation of

seniors, students, and first nations communities. In addition to that, as I cited in my remarks, it is quite obvious that the evidence is telling us that we rank 23rd among OECD countries.

We thought it was incumbent upon us to honour our undertaking in the platform to do something about this, and that is exactly what Bill C-76 would do.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member that there are a lot of good things to unpack in this bill. I particularly like the fact that we are going to be registering young people. Over the last two months, I have had some great conversations in high schools in my own riding, and I am very proud to report to the House how engaged the youth are in those classrooms. It makes a lot of sense to start setting up the process so that when they turn 18 they are able to participate in our democracy.

I want to go back to the question I posed earlier to the parliamentary secretary regarding the timing of this bill. We know from the previous acting Chief Electoral Officer that Elections Canada really wanted to have these changes implemented by April 2018, and here we are, having had this bill introduced on April 30. Furthermore, the government let Bill C-33 languish at first reading for 18 months. Given that Elections Canada needed this time to have the legislation implemented, and the bill still needs to travel through the House of Commons and the other place and receive royal assent, I would like to ask the member why his government waited so long to introduce this bill.

I do not agree that we have debated the particulars of the bill. I know that the PROC committee has been debating the issues, but that debate is separate from the debate on the legislation. The House really needs to have its time to examine the legislation. Why did his government wait so long to introduce this very important piece of legislation?

• (1150)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely correct. We take everything that the Chief Electoral Officer says very seriously. As I indicated, some of the changes in the bill were actually based on things that were brought to our attention by the Chief Electoral Officer. However, it was important that we take a good, long, and close look at the legislation and try to make it as comprehensive as possible to make sure that more and more Canadians can take advantage of voting, and that they actually partake in the electoral process. Bill C-76 is obviously a reflection of that comprehensive approach.

*Government Orders***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS***[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been some discussions among the parties, and if you seek it I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the remainder of the debate pursuant to Standing Order 66, on the motion to concur in the 23rd Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented on Monday, March 6, 2017, be deemed to have taken place and the motion be deemed agreed to on division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-76, the elections modernization act.

In my own family, one of the things I have always placed a lot of importance on is to take my children to the voting booth with me when voting, and to keep emphasizing the importance of people being involved in the electoral process and getting out to vote. This bill goes to that very point, so it speaks very strongly.

Among the bill's provisions are measures that affect the Commissioner of Canada Elections. The commissioner is a non-partisan official responsible for investigating potential electoral issues, such as voter fraud or financial irregularities. He or she is supported by an investigations directorate made up of investigators, lawyers, and communications and administrative personnel.

Our government made a commitment to Canadians in the last election to reverse the changes in the former Harper government's so-called Fair Elections Act that made it harder for Canadians to vote, or made it harder for our elections laws to be enforced. Bill C-76 delivers on that commitment.

When it is passed, this legislation would return the office of the commission to Elections Canada. This relationship would create several advantages for the commissioner. This change would help increase the independence of the commissioner from the government of the day. It would also help ensure that the commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer are better coordinated in enforcing our election laws. Not only does Bill C-76 deliver on this important election commitment, but it goes further in providing new tools and powers to the commissioner.

Currently, the staff of Elections Canada are ineligible for consideration for appointment as commissioner. Elections Canada offers an obvious recruiting ground for personnel who are very familiar with the issues that arise in our democracy. Bill C-76 would restore Elections Canada's status as a source of candidate recruitment.

At the same time, however, I would emphasize that it is also important that the Commissioner of Canada Elections be independent, not only from the government of the day, but also from the Chief Electoral Officer. The bill before us adds an explicit statement that the commissioner's investigations occur independently of the Chief Electoral Officer. The bill also explicitly authorizes the commissioner to independently publish an annual report.

Under the bill before us, rather than having to first obtain authorization from the director of public prosecutions, commissioners would be able to lay a charge of their own initiative. The police and almost all federal regulatory investigators have such a power. As with most federal offences, the investigator would be the one to lay the charge, and the director of public prosecutions would be the one to prosecute. Giving the commissioner the power to lay charges would reduce the likelihood that delays might detract from the effective enforcement of the Canada Elections Act. Such delays present risks that witnesses may not be available or that their memories may fade.

The bill before us also provides the commissioner with the power to compel witnesses to provide testimony. Most Canada Elections Act offences are effectively enforced without recourse to a power to compel testimony. However, there are exceptional cases, such as allegations of electoral fraud, where the commissioner may need to secure a court order to compel witness testimony because some electoral offences are extraordinary in nature and enforcement is time-sensitive. Safeguards such as protection against self-incrimination, a statutory recognition of the right to counsel, and a requirement for an examination to be conducted in private would help ensure compliance with the charter.

The Canada Elections Act, as it stands, provides almost exclusively criminal sanctions for contraventions of the act. This approach is costly, time-consuming, and procedurally onerous. As a result, violations of Canada's electoral law are often not being dealt with in an efficient and timely manner.

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For example, the act stipulates that the official agent of an electoral district association must file information within 30 days following the election. Filing such a return just a few days after its due date is an offence under the act, despite the fact that neither the amount of harm caused, nor the degree of wrongdoing in such circumstances would be likely to make a criminal prosecution worthwhile. As a result, such minor contraventions of the act may not be acted upon, or there may be a delayed response to them.

● (1155)

Administrative monetary penalties, or AMPs, would give the commissioner the option to enforce the act through penalties that would more suitably match the infraction. The AMP could be increased if the offence is repeated or is of a continuing nature. The bill would also allow the commissioner to enter into compliance agreements with entities such as political parties or municipalities instead of with persons only, as is currently the case. It would also broaden the terms and conditions that may be negotiated, thus lending further flexibility and effectiveness to the commissioner's use of this important compliance tool. I would point out that a number of these changes have been called for by the current commissioner himself, as well as by the Chief Electoral Officer.

I have been dealing with the proposed changes to the authorities assigned to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, but let me turn briefly to some of the measures in the bill that would affect Elections Canada.

In his report on the 42nd general election, the Chief Electoral Officer proposed changes to political finances that would streamline reporting and harmonize rules among the various political entities. Further, this bill would deliver on the Minister of Democratic Institutions' mandate commitment to review the spending limits on political parties and third parties. Our government is proposing a new regime to bring transparency and fairness to spending, not just during the electoral period but also in the run-up to the election.

Bill C-76 would deliver on our government's commitment to protect, strengthen, and improve our democratic institutions. It would deliver on important election commitments made by our government. Bill C-76 would also go further in providing Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections with new powers and tools to better enforce our rules.

Modernizing our elections should be a priority for all members and I hope they support this legislation. I know it is an important issue for so many people in our communities and that it is so important that we maintain the integrity of the way our elections are held.

I am very pleased to have had this opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-76 and in favour of modernizing our Elections Act. This is an important step for all of us and I know that members will be in favour of it, because it is important to many of us that we maintain a system of integrity, create opportunity for people to vote, and bring down some of the barriers put in place and hindrances created by the previous government. We need to encourage people to get out to vote. Rather than trying to suppress voting, we need to make sure that people have these opportunities and use them. I have been very pleased to speak in favour of this bill.

● (1200)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech, but I think she is mistaken and has some philosophical conflicts. She talked about the integrity of the voting system, but the main goal of this bill is to permit voting by people who have no identification, but only the identification cards given by Elections Canada. The main goal of this bill is not the integrity of the action of voting, or which government is chosen by the people. The goal is to permit people to vote without government identification. This in itself bears with it the great danger of disrupting the integrity of the voting system.

How can the member address the House and talk about the integrity of the voting system when one of the major changes this bill would bring to that system would be very dangerous to its integrity?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking about maintaining the integrity of our system and encouraging people to vote, I was talking about how this bill actually reaches out to people to make sure they will feel safe within the electoral system. For example, there is a provision for electors in danger. The act would be clarified to specify that electors who have a reasonable apprehension of bodily harm may use an alternative address for both their place of ordinary residence and mailing address so they can feel safe when they go to vote and do not avoid voting because they feel they are in danger. I am talking about making sure that we have advance polls that are open for a number of days so that people do not have to miss work or run into difficulties of that sort. I am talking about making sure that our elections are held in a restricted period of time. There is much that can be done and much that would be done by this act to improve the integrity—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Toronto—Danforth about some of the opportunities this bill has missed. I am thinking specifically of a move toward a per-vote subsidy, because if we look at the tax dollars already expended during our elections, people get generous tax credits for the donations they make to political parties. I know that registered political parties are also reimbursed for 60% of their eligible expenses. Therefore, taxpayer dollars are already funding political parties to a fairly large extent. However, if I look at the constituent base in my own riding, and indeed across Canada, there are many people who cannot afford to make massive donations. Maybe this could be an opportunity to give recognition to their voices on an equal footing to those who can afford to donate \$1,500 per year to a political party.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, it would be mistaken to believe that the only way people can have their voices heard within the political and electoral system is through financing. We need to emphasize all of the ways that people can get involved in the political process, and to ensure that their voices are heard. When we keep focusing on dollar amounts, we are misreading the situation and not allowing people to understand all of the opportunities they have and should take advantage of to make sure they are heard by their candidates and the people running in elections. They do have those opportunities.

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• (1205)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard that diversity is our strength. I honestly believe that strength comes when we choose to be inclusive. I am proud of this piece of legislation for a number of reasons. The first is that it will delete references to the sex of individuals who choose to not disclose it. It will engage young people, like members of the Whitby Federal Youth Council and many students in the high schools across Whitby, to become involved in the voting process. Also, there is vouching, increased access for those with disabilities, and increased civic engagement.

We know that 80% of this bill is based on recommendations by the Chief Electoral Officer. I look forward to its passing this House, because it does involve inclusivity in our most basic and fundamental forms of our democracy.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for her comments because she is exactly correct. It brings me back to something I was talking about earlier, the integrity of our system. We need to make sure that people's voices are heard and that people are included. The inclusivity in this piece of legislation is a result of its taking into account people who might have different challenges. In particular, I thank my friend for raising the fact that a person's sex will not be recorded. These are important things that make people feel they are not included and not to want to participate in the system. What would make this place a better place is to have more people involved, more people's voices heard, and more diversity, frankly, within this place.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Beauport—Limoilou.

The right to vote is central to our democracy. For Canada's democratic system to be upheld, every Canadian citizen over the age of 18 must be granted fair and equal access to the voting process. In fact, this is such a vital component of Canada's DNA that it is actually in our Constitution under "Democratic Rights", where it reads, "Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly... and to be qualified for membership therein."

Conservatives believe that the vote of each and every Canadian matters. For this reason, I would like to give honourable mention to one aspect of Bill C-76 that is worth recognizing and appears to be well intentioned. That is the measures it includes to accommodate persons living with a disability. It is right to facilitate these individuals' participation in Canada's democratic process and should be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, I have significant concerns about the remainder of this bill. Today, I will draw attention to two of those concerns in particular.

I am proud of our previous Conservative government and the incredible work we did with the Fair Elections Act in 2014. That legislation worked to uphold our democratic right to vote while also protecting this country against voter fraud. In contrast, the bill before the House today, Bill C-76, would do a great deal to move us in the opposite direction. While the Fair Elections Act strengthened Canada's democratic system, the bill we are talking about today

would weaken it. Mainly, Bill C-76 would make it incredibly easy for an individual to use a false identification to vote.

As much as we need to ensure that all Canadian citizens have equal access to voting, we also need to ensure that they cast only one ballot, that they are citizens, and that they are over the age of 18. When individuals vote in the wrong riding or vote more than once or vote under a false identity, a crime is committed and our entire system is undermined. Unfortunately, instead of working to prevent such voter fraud, an objective that I am certain all of us in this Parliament, and indeed all Canadians, would stand behind, Bill C-76 would open up increased opportunities for voter fraud to be committed. Under the current system, voters are required to provide a piece of identification with their name and current mailing address on it to be able to cast a ballot. This way, Elections Canada can verify that voters are who they say they are and can protect the integrity of our electoral system.

Bill C-76 would amend Canada's current voter identification rules. Specifically, it would eliminate the requirement to show an identification card, making it acceptable to simply produce a voter information card received in the mail. The problem is that the voter information card does not actually identify the individual who holds it; it is simply a card that got sent to an address. Any individual could take it out of a mailbox and bring it to the polling station. For voting purposes, then, the card is not suitable identification.

That the government wants to allow the cards to be used for identification is of course problematic. According to Elections Canada, the cards have an error rate of about 16%, which means that in the last election nearly one million Canadians received a card that was wrong in some fashion. Either it had a name illegitimately attached to an address or an address illegitimately attached to a name, or it was sent to someone who was not even a Canadian citizen or to someone who was not over the age of 18. All of these problems must be addressed within our voting system. However, the government has decided to make it easier for this fraudulent conduct to take place. This means that people under the age of 18 and those who are not even citizens might vote. An individual who receives a voter identification card in the mail with Susy Smith's name on it when she is Samantha Simons can just take the card and go to the polls and vote under a false identity. It is not difficult to see the problems within this.

The current Liberal government would have Canadians believe that it is difficult to obtain ID, but that is just not true. The Liberals make it seem like the current system is unnecessarily burdensome, but in reality the broad range of already accepted ID documents makes it possible for every single eligible Canadian to vote. If a person needs to show legal identification to get on a plane to fly somewhere or to buy a case of beer or a pack of cigarettes, it should be that much more important for them to show proper identification to cast a ballot and participate in Canada's democracy.

• (1210)

Under the Fair Elections Act, the previous Conservative government did its best to make the process as easy as possible, while protecting the integrity of Canada's electoral system.

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Most people over the age of 18 may have a driver's licence, a provincial or territorial ID card, a passport, an Indian status card, a band card, a citizenship card, however, some people do not have these, and I will acknowledge that. People should not worry. Voters are able to bring in two separate pieces of ID as long as one has the voter's current mailing address. These IDs can range from a person's blood donor card, a hydro bill, a rental agreement, a credit card statement, a library card, a public transportation card, and the list goes on and on. However, maybe the voter still does not possess these. The good news is that there is a third option. Voters can bring in two pieces of identification and individuals who know them and are able to swear on their behalf that they are who they deem to be.

It is clear that we already have a system that allows every citizen who is of age and is a citizen of our country to vote. In fact, in 2015, under the new Fair Elections Act, we saw record turnout when it came to voter participation, one of the highest percentages in Canadian history. Knowing this, why would we then tamper with a system that has proven to be very effective in turning voters out to polls and encouraging their participation in democracy?

We all agree that it is irresponsible and imprudent to allow someone to board a plane or purchase alcohol or cigarettes without first presenting a valid piece of identification. After the 2015 election, the Prime Minister and the current government tried to change Canada's election laws to benefit the Liberal Party. It was the Canadian people who pushed back tremendously and stopped them. Now again we see the government trying to bend the arms of Canadians and push through legislation that is to the advantage of the Liberal Party and to the disadvantage of the Canadian public.

Our election process needs to be non-partisan. It needs to be separate from the whims of the governing party in order for a true democracy to remain in place. The integrity of the system should be protected at all costs. This means one person, one vote. Only those over the age of 18 and are valid citizens of our country should have the right and be granted the opportunity to cast a ballot. The bill that is being debated in the House calls into question whether this integrity will be protected.

The second issue I would draw attention to has to do with foreign interference. Beyond creating opportunity for voter fraud, the bill would allow for foreign interference in our elections. Today, more than any other time in recent history, it is important to be vigilant about protecting the independence and authenticity of our elections.

With allegations about foreign interference in Canada's 2015 election and the many problems we see taking place south of the border, it is absolutely vital to address concerns about foreign interference before going into the next election. We have yet to see the current government take any action on this.

The legislation would establish a new pre-pre-writ period; that is, the period before the period officially leading into the election. During this time, foreign contributions would be allowed. Bill C-76 would allow foreign money to be funnelled into Canada and then disseminated to numerous advocacy groups for the purpose of influencing the election outcome. Many allegations are still circulating from the last election.

The Tides Foundation, an organization based in San Francisco, is totally opposed to Canada's energy development. This organization funnelled \$1.5 million to Canadian third parties in the last election year, and is currently under investigation by the Canada Revenue Agency.

The government should be doing all it can to protect Canada's elections from being hijacked by foreign investment groups. This means closing the loopholes. If the government were really concerned with the integrity of Canada's democratic system, it would go ahead and fix this problem. Instead the Prime Minister chooses to turn a blind eye. Meanwhile the election is only a year away.

Instead of making it more difficult for illegitimate votes to be cast and for our system to be illegitimately impacted, the government that is presently in power is actually facilitating these things and therefore compromising our electoral system.

It should be understood that Bill C-76 fails to protect every Canadian's right to cast a vote that is equal to all other votes and to do so in a system that is free from foreign interference. In short, the bill undermines Canada's democracy, and I will vote no.

• (1215)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to listen to a number of Conservatives speak to the bill. One of the reoccurring themes that keeps coming up is the fact that voter turnout was so high in 2015. However, I would argue that perhaps it had less to do with the Fair Elections Act that came along previously and more to do with the actual election and the participants in that election. However, we can leave that to debate.

Another theme that continually comes up is about alcohol, cigarettes, and driving, how those things require proper identification and why voting should not require the same. When we talk about people buying alcohol, or cigarettes or driving a car, these privileges are afforded to them. However, the right to vote is a fundamental right of being a Canadian citizen, and that is what makes the difference.

How can the member not see that at the very basic core, we need to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to vote? Why should we not be encouraging people to vote? Does the member know of widespread situations where voter fraud has occurred, as she has described?

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, when Bill C-76 came out just a few short weeks ago, if it has been that long actually, and the government has moved time allocation, forcing it through, individuals said publicly that in the last election they got the wrong cards. They could have taken it to the polls, used it in a fraudulent manner, and voted under names that were not theirs. Therefore, we know that these things take place. Elections Canada has said that 16% of these cards are in error. Nearly one million Canadians would have the ability to vote under a different name, or according to a different address or perhaps they are not even a citizen. In my riding, I heard of multiple situations where individuals, who may be permanent residents but not citizens, received voter cards.

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It is not okay within Canada's democracy to encourage or allow these individuals to participate in our system. Citizenship matters. When we belong to a country, it means we uphold the rules of that land. It means that we are granted rights and privileges but also given responsibility. That responsibility is to get the proper identification, show up to the polls, and cast our ballots in a manner that is deserving of respect.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, we are talking about a bill that was introduced at the eleventh hour. We had to wait until Elections Canada imposed a deadline. The government decided not to go ahead with the electoral reform and now we have before us today a bill that was introduced in the House at the last minute and now must be debated.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about something that has continued to make the news recently, and that is the fact that Bill C-76 should include recourse against the collection of personal information by social networks, such as Facebook, and companies, such as Cambridge Analytica.

Does my colleague believe that Bill C-76 should contain those sorts of measures?

• (1220)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the bill before the House today has to deal with protecting our electoral system or at least it should be about that. It should be about protecting the integrity of the Canadian electoral system. It should be about ensuring that my vote counts the same as John's, Michelle's, or any Canadian citizen who goes to the poll.

When we allow individuals to vote within our system, individuals who are not over the age of 18, who are not Canadian citizens or who vote according to an addresses that are not theirs, one vote can sometimes count as two. Individuals who are not meant to have a vote all of a sudden have a voice in our system. This then dilutes someone else's vote and voice within our parliamentary system. The bill is about that. It is about the attack on our parliamentary system, the attack on our democratic system, the attack on Canadians and what their votes counts for.

We should be doing everything we possibly can to ensure that the votes of the people within our country matter and are protected, and that the integrity of our system is upheld.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today as we get back to the House after a week in our ridings. Last week was very busy, I must say. I also want to take this opportunity to say hello to the many constituents of Beauport—Limoilou who, as always, are watching now on Facebook Live or who will be watching at a later time when the videos are posted on CPAC.

Today we are talking about democratic participation, which I find fascinating. If there is one thing that interests me most in life, it is democratic participation. This was the reason I got involved in politics. I urge Canadians to get involved. Last week I held the first-ever “Alupa à l'écoute!” public consultation in Beauport—Limoilou.

I spent more than six hours listening to my constituents and answering their questions. Ultimately, my goal was to hear about the concerns, challenges, and difficulties they face in their day-to-day lives. The next consultation will be in Giffard on September 13, and the third will be in Beauport on November 17. For more information, people can call 418-663-2113. After these three public consultations, I will produce a report in the winter of 2019 and introduce a bill to address an issue that people face in their day-to-day lives. In those six hours last Thursday, I answered every question from around 40 constituents. I was very proud, because this kind of democratic accountability is absolutely essential. That actually ties into this bill.

Let us talk about participatory democracy. Once again, Bill C-76 is not all bad, but we expect that the Conservatives will vote against this bill for specific reasons. I did say “expect”, but that will depend on what happens in committee. My first impression is that this is another attempt by a government that brags about its international and national brilliance. Specifically, the Liberal government thinks it has a monopoly on being virtuous all the time. They want to sell to Canadians on the idea that with this bill they are again improving the accessibility of the electoral system and the eligibility to vote. A number of Liberal colleagues spoke in this place about the integrity of the system. With respect to Bill C-76, we feel that some of the amendments and new rules will directly or indirectly undermine Canada's electoral system.

My Liberal colleague, who as usual was fiery and spouted anti-Conservative rhetoric, said that voting is of course a fundamental right, but that it is also a privilege, as my colleague from Lethbridge stated. It is a privilege that requires a right and individual responsibility first and foremost. The laws that govern Elections Canada at present seek not just to foster participation, but also to ensure that this duty is carried out with integrity and responsibly. It is really a conflict between how to increase the public's participation and how to ensure that the right to vote remains a protected right.

The Liberal member for Willowdale spoke eloquently of the history of our great federation by talking about the changes in voting almost every decade; we went from suffrage on the basis of property ownership to popular ballot. We went from the popular ballot, just for men, to voting for women, thank God. It was Borden's Conservative government that gave women the right to vote. All the parties here, Canada's major governing parties, Liberal and Conservative, are always in favour of making voting more accessible.

We have some technical questions about the bill. That is unfortunate because, as my Liberal colleagues said, accessibility to the vote is a fundamental debate. Why did the Liberals move a time allocation motion a week ago? We were supposed to vote on time allocation today. Surely, the Liberals backed down after finding that they would look undemocratic by allocating only two or three hours of debate on such a fundamental issue.

In comparison, for Conservative Bill C-23, which dealt with Elections Canada and which was introduced during the 41st Parliament, we had four days of debate for a total of 14 hours, in addition to 23 meetings in committee, on this bill that was aimed at improving our electoral system. At this point, we have only had two hours of debate on Bill C-76.

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•(1225)

As the NDP did, it is important to recall the concerns raised by the Chief Electoral Officer. He said that the government had previously tabled the amendments to Bill C-76 in Bill C-33, which died on the Order Paper. Actually, it did not exactly die on the Order Paper, because there was no prorogation, but it never got beyond first reading. The Chief Electoral Officer therefore told the government that it needed to get to work right away if it really wanted to make changes in time for the 2019 election. However, the government waited until the last second to make these changes, just days from the deadline set by the Chief Electoral Officer. Clearly, this is just another tactic to keep us from debating Bill C-76 properly.

Certain parts of this bill are fine, but what I find utterly astounding about it is that it proves that Mr. Harper was right back in 2015. The Liberals called us terrible, horrible partisans for announcing the election on July 1. However, the reason we did that was because Mr. Harper had noticed a problem. During the month of June 2015, unions, such as the FTQ in eastern Canada and other big unions in western Canada, which of course are free to protest, had spent tens of millions of dollars on partisan ads attacking the Canadian government in power at the time, which was a Conservative government. Since we could not respond to that situation because we were not in an election period, Mr. Harper, a man of unimpeachable integrity, decided to call an election so that we could respond using election expenses.

Throughout the campaign, the Liberals called us enemies of democracy who only cared about winning votes. In fact, they still say that about us today. However, by creating a pre-election period beginning on June 30 in Bill C-76, they are confirming, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Mr. Harper was right to do the same thing four years ago. That is a tribute to our former prime minister.

What exactly would Bill C-76 do? It would expand voter eligibility. Apparently this bill would prepare future voters by creating a register of young people aged 14 to 17 so that Elections Canada can start communicating with them. That seems kind of strange to me because that is when young people are most likely going to CEGEP or community college and living in apartments with two or three roommates. I do not really know how that communication is supposed to happen considering that young people today use their phones and social networks such as Facebook to communicate.

My Liberal colleague said that Liberals support enfranchisement, but giving kids the right to vote is something else entirely. He said that voting is a basic right, but that there is discrimination inherent in our system because Canadian citizens under the age of 18 do not have the right to vote. Voting is not in fact a privilege and a basic right granted to everyone. There are limits, and we can all agree that those limits are good for democracy and the duty to vote because people under the age of 18 have to go to school and do their homework. I strongly agree with that. If they are not in school, they should at least be working or travelling around the world and around Canada without asking anyone for money. I can say for sure that, up to age 18, people should be preparing to exercise their civic duty. That is why people cannot vote until they turn 18. It is not in fact an absolute right for everyone. There is already some discrimination inherent in the right to vote in Canada.

Then there are three pre-election periods. I have already mentioned the pre-election period, so let us talk about the “pre-election” period. There is already a problem with this one, since there will be no constraints on the financial commitments of domestic and international third parties.

Until June 30, we know very well that all the international environmental groups, who like to see the Prime Minister contemplating the death of the oil sands, will spend millions of dollars to promote the end of natural and energy resources in Canada, which is very bad news. Natural resources represent 40% of the Canadian economy. We are in an energy transition. The systematic blindness on the part of the Marxist left and the centrist left in Canada is astounding. We are always being told that we are not making any effort on the environmental front. Since 1960, the environment has been systematically and continuously improved. Let us also not forget that this 40% of the Canadian economy is used to fund hospitals, education programs and our elections, which still cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

•(1230)

They also want an extended period of advance polling, which is very good. I won because of advance polling, so it is a very good idea. Joking aside, it is a good thing.

With regard to limiting the election campaign to 50 days, we could also ask why 50 days and not 37.

The Liberals want to change the requirement of having identification with an address and photo. It will be terrible. I go door to door every month in my riding—

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development.

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the opposition that there will be fraud with the voter information card. The last speech was fraught with fear and cynicism.

I am going to read a couple of quotes from experts. The first is from a political science professor at Carleton University, who stated:

There's been very little evidence to show that there has been fraudulent voting—double voting or impersonation by people [through] misuse of the card.

Marc Mayrand, chief electoral officer from 2007 to 2016, stated:

After elections, officials go over the records to single out any instances of repeat or ineligible voting. Very rarely has that led to criminal prosecution.

Finally, Richard Johnston, Canada research chair at the University of British Columbia, said that claiming the information card opens the door to fraud is “just blatantly manipulative”.

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What does my hon. colleague say to members of his community who feel disenfranchised and who would like to use the voter information card to be part of our democratic process?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question.

I held a town hall last week and I go door-knocking every month. I have knocked on 35,000 doors. In all honesty, no one has ever brought up the potential problem of not having an ID card to vote. We need an ID card for many things in our society. We are talking about the vote that will determine the next Canadian government. In 2015, 16% of the cards we got from Elections Canada had significant errors. What is more, it is very easy to get a voter card.

Sometimes in community buildings with 160 dwellings the mail room can be a bit of a mess. Mailboxes overflow with paper and anyone can grab an Elections Canada voter card and go to a polling station and vote. We are simply asking the Liberals to ensure that the right to vote is not just a game where anything goes. It has to be reasonably protected and ensured.

• (1235)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very hard to hide and the party across the way is doing a poor job of it. In fact, they are imitating what the Republicans are doing in the United States. In other words, they are trying to limit voter turnout any way they can. It is common knowledge in the United States that the Republicans want low voter turnout in some places in order to increase their chances of winning the election. That was the goal of the Conservatives' so-called electoral reform during the last Parliament. That is what we are seeking to correct. The bill contains 85% of the suggestions made by Elections Canada in order to increase voter turnout in Canada. That party is trying to suppress votes. It wants to take away Canadians' right to vote.

What does my hon. colleague have to say about that?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Incredibly, Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is telling Canadians that the objective of 99 MPs is to suppress the vote of Canadians; he is also responsible for the Phoenix file, and we all know how that is going. He should be ashamed to say that about 99 MPs who represent nine million people. He rose in the House and dared to say that 99 Canadian MPs want to suppress the vote. That is terrible and nothing but rhetoric.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I will be splitting my time with the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, the very dynamic Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, who does a wonderful job advocating for her constituents.

We tend to take democracy for granted and in some way I suppose this is understandable when one is born into one of the best democracies in the world, Canada's. When one is born into a democracy or relative prosperity, it is not always easy to imagine there was a time when things were not as good, or there are places in the world that have not achieved this level of democracy or prosperity. In this regard, sometimes it is new Canadians, refugees especially, who remind us that there are places in the world where

there is no democracy, where there are strong-arm dictators, where there are no rights, and where there is corruption. Sometimes we forget that when we debate in the House. We do not realize there are places where there are real democratic problems.

[*Translation*]

We live here, in Canada, the best democracy in the world. It is a highly evolved democracy, one based on respect for individual rights and freedoms. However, it is flexible enough to also recognize and respect the rights and interests of communities, in particular official language minority communities.

That said, we must respond to any attempt to weaken the underlying principles that support our great democracy. That is the objective in part of this bill, which would reverse certain measures previously implemented in an attempt to suppress Canadians' right to vote. Bill C-76 would also establish measures to strengthen the foundation of our democratic system by also fostering a higher participation rate in federal elections through education programs and the registration on the voter list of youth from the age of 14, even before they have the right to vote. We want to give them the opportunity to get on the voter list in advance.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Voting is a hard-earned right, something we must encourage in order to have a better and stronger democracy, a democracy where government decisions reflect the will of the largest number of people, and not of special interests. Voter suppression does not serve the democratic interest, obviously.

What would Bill C-76 do? It would do a number of things to improve our democracy. Let us start with the fact it would limit the length of elections.

As we know, 2015 will go down in history as the longest campaign ever. Ironically, the previous government brought in fixed-election dates purportedly to prevent governments from using election timing for partisan advantage, but then it broke the spirit of that legislation by calling an election in 2008, long before the fixed date and without real reason.

Bill C-76 tries to prevent governments from using their position and their insider information to manipulate the electoral process to their advantage, to create campaigns that last 60 or 90 days for partisan reasons.

I heard the hon. member say that the timing of the election by the former prime minister was done out of a great sense of fairness. That was not the case: there were strategies behind the timing of the dropping of that writ. Bill C-76 tries to do away with this power that governments have to manipulate the length of an election for their own purposes.

Government Orders

Bill C-76 would also make important changes to spending limits. Our Canadian democracy, while resembling many advanced democracies, also has its own shadings, if I may say. Most Canadians believe that diversity, including diversity of opinion, is essential to a healthy democracy. This does not mean that some views will not win out in an electoral contest, but only that the electorate has a right to be exposed to a variety of ideas in order to have a broad choice of ideas that a majority of voters will judge most desirable, and thus merit implementation.

In Canada, we believe that measures to safeguard and promote diversity of opinion are essential to a well-functioning and healthy democracy.

Our neighbour to the south, the United States, has a different view of this, in a way. For example, the U.S. Supreme Court has taken the view that money is speech, and that those with more money have a bigger say, as it were. I refer to a court case in the United States in 1976, *Buckley v. Valeo*, where the majority ruled that spending limits during elections are unconstitutional because they contravene the first amendment right to freedom of speech.

In that decision, a minority view was expressed. Justice Byron White dissented in part and qualified election spending as “a mortal danger against which effective preventive and curative steps must be taken.”

Justice Byron's view is more in line with that of our own Supreme Court, which has taken the egalitarian or “level playing field” position when it comes to spending limits.

In 2004, for example, in the case of the Attorney General of Canada v. Stephen Joseph Harper, the court found that although spending limits, in that case third party spending limits, infringe on section 2(b) of the charter, the law was reasonable and justified under section 1. By a majority of six to three, the court ruled:

In the absence of spending limits, it is possible for the affluent or a number of persons pooling their resources and acting in concert to dominate the political discourse, depriving their opponents of a reasonable opportunity to speak and be heard, and undermining the voter's ability to be adequately informed of all views.

We know, for example, that the fixed election date law that was brought in by the previous government had, in a sense, an unintended consequence. When we know when the election is going to be, spending can be ramped up. If candidates can afford it, they can ramp up spending well in advance of the date that the writ is to be dropped. We saw that happen in spades in the last Parliament. We saw the Conservative Party ramping up its partisan advertising long before the writ was dropped.

Bill C-76 is essentially trying to correct that unintended consequence of fixed election dates by making it illegal to engage in partisan advertising in the pre-election period, defined as beginning June 30 of the election year. To be more precise, it will be allowed but only to a maximum of \$1.5 million.

This bill also encourages voting by allowing young people in Canada, those 14 and over, to register to vote when they turn 18. In other words, it encourages them to start thinking about voting long in advance.

I know we all visit classrooms, and we see that students are quite interested in what is going on in the political realm and the societal

realm. This goes against the narrative we always hear about young people being disengaged from politics or being apathetic. When we go into classrooms, regardless of the party to which we belong, we all see that young people are indeed keenly interested. We owe it to the teachers in this country who take it upon themselves, either as part of a curriculum course or outside the constraints of the curriculum, to engage students about politics.

This bill will allow students to register, and will of course create discussion within classrooms. They will start thinking about who they might want to vote for, or which party they might want to vote for. As has been said many times in this House, once somebody votes, especially at a young age, they are more likely to continue voting throughout their lifetime. This particular measure in the bill will encourage first-time voting for young people. This is another very good aspect of the bill.

I will leave it at that for now. I look forward to any questions my colleagues might have.

• (1245)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on a very thoughtful speech and agree with him 100% that regardless of what my colleagues in the Conservative Party say, every Canadian knows why former prime minister Harper called an excessively long election campaign. He was pressing his advantage as the party that had the most money to spend. He was using the bully pulpit of the bank account to try to gain an advantage in our democracy by spending more money than the other parties had. That was the only reason we had a historically long election campaign. I congratulate the government on closing that gap. We have minimum election campaign periods, so it only stands to reason that we should have maximum ones as well.

My question is about the financing of elections. It is my view that democracy is a fundamental matter of public importance and that our democracy should be publicly financed, not privately financed. I know that when Jean Chrétien brought in what I thought was incredibly wise electoral reform in this country, giving Canada the best system in the world, we had a per-vote subsidy. The Conservatives removed that per-vote subsidy, and that damaged the public financing of our system.

Does the member agree that there is a case to be made to restore the per-vote subsidy on the supposition that the rebate is to pay for the election just had, but the per-vote subsidy is to allow parties to be funded for the elections to follow? Does he agree that it is a wise move, and could he explain why it is not part of this electoral reform bill?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, this idea of returning to the per-vote subsidy has come up. I chaired the electoral reform committee and know it was brought up by the member's party. Some provinces, like Quebec, have a per-vote subsidy, and we have had a per-vote subsidy before. There are other ways of having public money support our democratic system, one of which is through the tax credit, as has been mentioned.

Government Orders

One thing I learned from the electoral reform committee was that every country has its own political culture. It has its own idea of what people want to see in a democratic system, and I do not believe that Canadians want a return to the per-vote subsidy. The per-vote subsidy does not reflect how people feel about the parties, because it is based on decisions they made one, two, three, or four years ago. That is an important point to make.

The other thing is that it is also important for political parties to focus on collecting small donations. I know all the political parties are engaged in this. In some cases, it happened when the per-vote subsidy was withdrawn. It is a question of what Canadians want, and I do not think that is what they are looking for right now.

• (1250)

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for his particularly thoughtful speech with regard to running fair elections and encouraging the democratic process. The way forward is with a reasonable financial accounting system that allows for people to contribute to election campaigns while, at the same time, not allowing money to overrule the power of the electorate through many of the things that were mentioned earlier.

A very good point the member made was that getting young people to vote is particularly important. If young people do not vote in the first election after they turn 18, they are more likely never to vote in an election again. That is tremendously important. I wonder if the member would speak to his experience of getting young people to vote and the real power of getting them to vote at the earliest opportunity in order to engage them in the electoral process.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really touched on the central point, which is that we want people to get into the habit of voting. That habit starts at the first opportunity, which is at 18 years of age. The more people anticipate having that right to vote and the day they will be able to put the X in the circle or the box, the more excited they will be about that day coming.

The other important reason for wanting people to vote, vote regularly, and get into the habit of voting is that it then becomes a value they pass on to the next generation, to their children. Yes, if we can get people talking about voting ahead of time, and if parents give the example of voting to their children, then their children are more likely to vote. As someone else said, it is often young people who create positive change for all of us, so it is important that they go to the ballot box.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today to talk about such an important issue. In the last election campaign, in my community and in communities right across the country, many concerns were raised about how we can ensure the integrity and inclusivity of the elections modernization act.

Things that came up were that parties must protect personal information. We need to reduce barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from voting and participating. We need to reverse changes made by the previous government, including reintroducing the voter card, reintroducing vouching, and safeguarding the independence of the commissioner of Canada Elections, who

ensures compliance with the act. We need to ensure greater flexibility for the Chief Electoral Officer. We can expand the franchise to Canadians living abroad. We need to target the malicious use of technology like political bots, which have been seen to interfere with the integrity of our elections.

I rise today to focus more on the important opportunity we have to address spending by political parties and other entities before the writ period. With the implementation of fixed date elections, political parties and third parties may use the time before an election period to spend money without limit.

The Prime Minister gave the Minister of Democratic Institutions a mandate to review the limits on the amounts political parties and third parties can spend during elections, and to propose measures to ensure that spending between elections is subject to reasonable limits as well.

Since the introduction of fixed election dates in 2007, the Canada Elections Act has stipulated that an election should be held on the third Monday of October in the fourth year following the previous general election. In the interests of fairness and transparency, and in keeping with the fact of fixed election dates, this bill defines a pre-election period for federal elections as beginning on June 30 of the fixed election year. This anticipates that the House will have risen, so that there will be no interference with a parliamentary session.

Defining the pre-election period from the end of June provides a window of two to two and a half months before the mid-October election, in which partisan spending would be regulated. New pre-election spending rules will affect registered political parties and third parties. However, it is the latter group that I would like to raise in the House today.

During the 2015 election, a spending limit of about \$211,000 was imposed on third parties. Only 19 of over 100 third party contributors spent over \$100,000. Thirteen of those were unions. The median spending by third parties was about \$8,500. New spending limits for both pre-election and election periods will therefore not directly affect most third parties, but are essential to prevent those with deep pockets from potentially exerting undue influence.

Under this bill, for the first time, all partisan activities by third parties that support or oppose a political actor, like rallies, phone campaigns, and door-to-door canvassing, will be included in the spending limits. For this reason, the limits for third parties will be increased to approximately \$500,000 for the election period in 2019, with no more than \$4,000 permitted to be spent on a single electoral district. For the pre-election period, the bill sets a spending limit for third party partisan advertising, partisan activities, and election surveys. The limit for the upcoming election in 2019 will be \$1 million, with no more than \$10,000 spent on a single electoral district. Since the pre-election period could be twice the length of the election period, the limits need to be higher.

Government Orders

I would like to make it clear that in the bill we are distinguishing between partisan and issue advertising. Partisan advertising and activities are those that directly support or oppose a political party or candidate in an election. Issue advertising and activities, on the other hand, encompass a broad range of issues on which third party organizations advocate as part of their regular business. This, of course, is very welcome. Provided they do not mention a party or a candidate, these would not be regulated in the pre-election period.

Third parties that spend \$500 or more on partisan advertising or activities during the pre-election period would need to register with Elections Canada. This is already the case during the election period. Third parties that have spent more than \$10,000 or received contributions of over \$10,000 for partisan purposes will be required to report, upon registration and again on September 15, the contributions received and expenses incurred in the pre-election period.

● (1255)

It is exciting to think about the transparency of all of this, and the help in the investigation of potential allegations of the use of foreign funds. However, the \$10,000 threshold will limit the administrative burden to larger third parties that are receiving and spending a significant amount of money to influence an election. Third parties are currently prohibited from using foreign funds on election advertising. This prohibition would be expanded to forbid foreign funding during the pre-writ period for partisan advertising, other partisan activities, and elections surveys.

During both the pre-writ and election periods, tag lines on advertisements would need to identify the third-party sponsor, as is required for a political party. This requirement will now be applied to both the pre-writ and election periods. Previously, it was the case only during the election period.

To facilitate the tracking of financial involvement in these periods, a third party would be required to open a dedicated bank account. This must happen as soon as it receives contributions or incurs an expense with respect to partisan activities. Currently, third parties report on contributions for election advertising received within six months of the writ. As recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, this time restriction would be removed. Third parties would now report on all contributions received at any time and used for election advertising and partisan activities.

These measures are required because the fixed election dates have changed the way in which partisan activities are conducted in Canada. Parties and third parties know that an election will occur mid-October 2019. Without the new measures included in the bill, those with the most money could dominate the conversation in the pre-election period and could avoid the transparency measures that exist during the election period. This bill would rectify the situation, maintain a level playing field, and ensure transparency in political financing in Canada.

I look forward to the support of hon. members in putting forth this important legislation. It is certainly what Canadians have told us and what Canadians expect us to deliver on.

● (1300)

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

Mr. Speaker, I look at this legislation as giving strength to Canada's democracy. I believe a majority of Canadians want to see this. It includes more accessibility for the disabled. It looks at the potential impacts of spending on advertising, putting in some restrictions. It even deals with some third-party issues. All in all, the legislation will give more strength to our democratic system.

Could my colleague reflect on what her constituents would say about this very important legislation?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to anyone representing the west coast of Canada and British Columbia that electoral reform and democratic institutions writ large are very important. We have a community of advocates. I held three town hall meetings. Each of them had 100 to 150 people in attendance. One had 300 people at it. Therefore, I have done my homework.

I do not want Canadians to forget the tension during the last election over the sanctity of our democratic institutions and the sense that the previous government had started to close down the access, inclusion, participation, and voting of Canadians. Also, Canadians expect us to protect the fairness of the political system and to ensure that, whether one is a practitioner, a volunteer, a thought leader, or someone at home trying to get the best information, nothing impedes that. Therefore, I am happy to bring forward ideas from the community to the House today.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment a bit on this. We heard from the acting Chief Electoral Officer, over the course of some time now, that the government needed to bring forward any changes to election legislation by a deadline in order to implement them properly for the next election. He gave us a very specific deadline of April 30. That obviously has passed now. As a result, he has been clear that there is the need for some compromise with respect to what can be implemented, that some elements of the legislation will not be implemented in time for the next election.

First, could the member comment on why the government has waited so long to bring forward such changes, is now trying to rush it through, and has even gone as far as to give notice of time allocation after only one hour of debate? Second, does she see this as a problem, the fact that some of these things will not be implemented, given the delays of the government?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, we are taking the time to do it right. We are doing a comprehensive job. It surprises me tremendously that the member opposite is now deciding to listen to the Chief Electoral Officer. If the Conservatives had listened in the first place, we would not be in this situation. However, my understanding is that in PROC today, the Chief Electoral Officer is prepared to work diligently and feels we can achieve this over the summer.

Government Orders

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think my line of questioning will resonate with my hon. colleague from coastal British Columbia, just given the part of Canada in which we live.

The legislation missed an opportunity to stop the broadcasting of election results in eastern Canada. In the 2015 election, broadcasters were already calling the election when there was still half an hour of polling left in British Columbia. While it did benefit the member's party in 2015, we know in future elections it could very well be another party that forms government. If they are already announcing those results from Quebec and Ontario and calling the election, that might have undue influence on people who have yet to cast their ballots.

I hope this line of questioning resonates with the member. Would she not agree that perhaps we could look at this? I know we cannot stop social media from reporting on it, but we can stop Canada's major broadcasters from filling the airwaves about election results and calling the election, while the good people of British Columbia are still casting their ballots.

● (1305)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, social media is the media so that is the world in which we live. This question has been considered. It is a big country and we really are treating everybody as fairly as we can. Every one of us in this room has experienced calls that were not the way it really turned out. Therefore, let us put our faith in Canadians and let us put our faith in improving the system as we have it before us now. Let us hope the next election sees an even bigger voter turnout than the record turnout in 2015.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand to speak to this legislation.

The Liberal government is really good at saying one thing and doing another, and Bill C-76 is another classic example of exactly this point.

First, the fact is that this is an omnibus bill. It is a 350-page bill. The Liberals can say what they want about the previous government's use of omnibus legislation, but they have plain out campaigned against the use of it. The 2015 Liberal Party platform said:

...Stephen Harper has also used omnibus bills to prevent Parliament from properly reviewing and debating his proposals. We will change the House of Commons Standing Orders to bring an end to this undemocratic practice.

Here we are today, debating a 350-page piece of legislation. It is certainly omnibus legislation, and not the Liberals first use of it either. There is a term I could use to describe that, but it is unparliamentary language so I will not use it.

However, members do not have to take it from me. Senate Liberal Joseph Day stated recently, "This government has evidently abandoned its election promise to end the practice of omnibus bills", and indeed it has. Bill C-76 is a shining example of that.

That is not the only broken promise or the use of Liberal doublespeak I will be talking about today. In fact, that is just the tip of the legislative iceberg on the level of egregiousness the Liberals have used in this bill.

What is worse is that the Liberals sat on the predecessor of Bill C-76, which was Bill C-33, for almost two years without debating it even once. November 24, 2016, was when Bill C-33 was tabled. It is now past the eleventh hour. The deadline of April 30 was set by the acting Chief Electoral Officer. He stated for some time, as did his predecessor, that action needed to be taken by a certain time in order to change electoral legislation.

I think it was a few weeks ago when the acting Chief Electoral Officer was before the procedure and House affairs committee once again. He testified that April 30, 2018, was the absolute drop-dead date that he would need to have legislation, with royal assent, in order to have it implemented prior to the 2019 federal election. Maybe the Liberals slightly misunderstood that and thought it had to be tabled by April 30, because that is when they tabled the legislation. However, the Chief Electoral Officer was quite clear that the bill would need to have had passed and received royal assent by that date. Therefore, here we are late into May and just starting to debate it.

The Liberals have slapped a bunch more changes on Bill C-33 and have rushed it out the door. We have even heard reports of the Liberals' minister did not knowing what was in the bill. This was indicated in a Huffington Post article, entitled "Bill C-76: Democratic Institutions Minister's Office Didn't Know Elections Bill Closes Loophole". Even their own minister and his office were not familiar themselves with what was in the bill. That is how quickly the Liberals rushed this thing out. Then they expected members of Parliament to digest the 350-plus pages so quickly that after one hour of debate, they gave notice of time allocation.

The minister has invited members of Parliament to submit amendments to the bill, but as it turns out, the bill already would accomplish things that the minister did not even realize. The minister's communications director told the Huffington Post in that same article "neither she nor [the minister] was aware that the bill actually addresses the long-standing loophole."

● (1310)

He went on to say:

She wasn't certain why all the government's communications material relating to Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act, makes no mention of it or why officials had also glossed over the change.

As a legislator, that certainly does not instill too much confidence in me and my colleagues when neither the minister nor his staff know what this legislation does, or what is even contained in it. I am not sure whether that is incompetence or a result of political masters having no idea of what bureaucrats are doing, or what it is, but any way, it is completely unacceptable.

Government Orders

What we have in Bill C-76 is the Liberals claiming to fix a problem, but actually making it worse in the process. What they are proposing with regard to third party spending, for example, would increase the potential opportunities for foreign money and foreign interference in our democratic process. There have been numerous claims about millions of dollars in foreign funding being funnelled into third party advocacy groups here in Canada during the last election. It is something we have raised time and again as an issue and a problem. If we look at the Ontario provincial election currently in progress, we can see the practice of third party advocacy and advertising in action now. *Global News* reporter, David Akin tweeted on May 4:

Coincidental? As shadowy @ActWow seeds social networks fear-mongering about Ford cutting healthcare, latest release from @ontario_liberal party is ... fear-mongering about Ford cutting public services.

Akin was wondering whether the messaging being tied together in that regard was just coincidental.

Canadians would certainly not have an issue if these third parties were solely funded and supported by Canadian money, because third party groups certainly have a right to have its say in our elections. However, I think people would expect that these would be funded and supported by Canadians, and not a result foreign money coming in to push viewpoints upon Canadians and to interfere in our elections. However, we are certainly seeing more of that. We are seeing foreign entities funneling money into Canada through these third party groups to try to affect the outcomes of our elections. I think all Canadians expect that only Canadians should be allowed to determine the outcome of our elections.

Foreign interference in Canadian policy is happening already, and it is time that the Liberals realized it. There are groups like the U.S.-based Tides Foundation that have poured considerable amounts of money and manpower into shutting down our oil industry. Its goal is to land-lock Alberta and our oil, and it does not care how many Canadians it puts out of jobs. It does not care how many opportunities are lost to Canadians as a result. It is not concerned about that.

The loudest groups, like those against the Trans Mountain expansion project, are usually foreign funded. They are acting in ways that do not serve the best interests of Canada. However, only Canadians should be able to determine Canadian policy.

Currently, Canadians are allowed to contribute \$1,575 annually to political parties or to candidates, and corporations or unions are completely banned from making those types of contributions. Under the government's proposed legislation, foreign entities could contribute an unlimited amount to third parties to engage in campaign activities just weeks before an election.

Third parties wish to behave like political parties and engage in campaigning. That is certainly fine. We live in a democracy. They are able to do that. However, they should be required to follow the same rules that political parties do. They should be held to the same kinds of standards that political parties are. If a political party needs to account for and pay for campaign expenses like polling and organizing rallies, so should third parties.

●(1315)

If not, John Ivison of the *National Post* rightfully pointed out that it could lead to U.S.-style political action committees emerging, funded in part by foreign money, to influence federal elections. It is not just me and my colleagues in the Conservative Party who are speaking to this; it is coming from a media source as well, and others out there. It is certainly a pretty accurate concern. It is a concern that many Canadians would have if they were aware of this.

Does the Liberal government want to see big money, foreign-backed political action committees here in Canada? I ask because that is what we are getting, and it is due to its inaction on this very serious threat to our democracy. The vote and voice of each Canadian is diminished when foreign parties try to sway the outcome of our elections. Foreign interference in our elections is a concern I have heard from many Canadians, and I am sure that all members have heard those same kinds of concerns.

I will turn now to another common concern I hear, namely, voter identification. It is really unfortunate that the Liberal government is going to weaken the laws on the requirements for proving one's identity when one votes. The Liberals want to move backward and allow the use of voter information cards as acceptable pieces of ID for voting.

There is a high rate of error in the elections register. Elections Canada shows that in the National Register of Electors, there can be error rates as high as 16% in the records at any given time. It is a very significant, high rate. In the last election, the rate of erroneous cards sent out was also quite high. There were nearly one million of them erroneously sent out in the 2015 election. This policy could really have far-reaching implications, and certainly leaves our Canadian democratic process open to the potential for fraud.

In their response to Parliament and written Question No. 333, Elections Canada and the Privy Council Office said that "there were 986,613 updates to elector information during the revision period which resulted in another Voter Information Card (VIC) being mailed to the elector." That was during the last election.

As well, there were 509,397 individuals who received voter information cards, representing about two per cent of the voter information cards, who proactively advised Elections Canada of incorrect information on the cards. Those are the numbers of those who notified them.

How many more did not, in fact, notify Elections Canada of errors? It was about 16%, as I mentioned earlier, according to the testimony of the previous Chief Electoral Officer, Mark Mayrand, of Elections Canada. He confirmed the statistic I just gave: 16% of entries in the National Register of Electors are erroneous at any given time. He also indicated that after the revisions period during an election, the error rate is still approximately 12%. That is a pretty significant error rate, one that could potentially affect three million or four million electors, because the National Register of Electors contains about 26 million electors.

Government Orders

This legislation would allow the use of the voter information cards, which have an average error rate of 16%, as an acceptable form of ID to vote. Again, 16% is roughly four million electors. That means that with voter information cards, nearly four million electors could be sent erroneous information. For the life of me, I do not understand how the Liberal government could see that as acceptable. Right now, there is a long list of potential pieces of ID that can be used and are acceptable to Elections Canada for voting.

● (1320)

There are 39 potential forms of ID available for electors to use. They range from drivers' licences, to bank statements, to letters confirming residency, and even e-statements and e-invoices are acceptable if they are shown on a mobile device. There are 39 different forms, and it is hard to imagine a scenario in which someone would not have one of the 39 forms, and yet they would have a correct voter information card. That is very hard to imagine.

It is really not too much to ask that Canadians show some form of ID before casting a ballot? That is not unreasonable, and it is not just me who thinks that. Canadians overwhelmingly accept that showing ID before voting is a positive thing. When polled, 87% of Canadians indicate it is reasonable to require someone to prove their identity before they vote. The Liberal government needs to explain to those Canadians why it does not think that ID should be required to vote. Why does it not want to protect our electors from potential voter fraud?

We want to encourage as many Canadians as possible to vote, but we have to do everything we can to ensure that we prevent all potential avenues of voter fraud as well. People are expected to show ID before they rent a car, check into a hotel, buy alcohol or tobacco, or consume marijuana, and before they board an airplane. I could go on and on with that list. Why not for voting as well? That is a question the government has failed to answer, but leave it to the government to introduce a bill that is 350 pages long and lacks some specifics.

There have been all kinds of attempts by the government to make changes to its benefit. The Liberals have been caught in scandal after scandal, with ethics violations and cash for access to the Prime Minister, and when they tried to make electoral changes to their benefit. If they had wanted to do something to strengthen democracy rather than attempt to benefit themselves, they would not have sat on their hands with this piece of legislation for two years. They waited until we were past the eleventh hour to bring forward this legislation, and nothing was done to properly consult with opposition parties in the process either.

Conservative Party members have raised the issue of foreign interference in our elections multiple times. The Liberals could have maintained that voters need to have proven identity to vote. They could have ensured there were proper privacy safeguards for our children, but none of those things were done. We are left with a massive disaster of omnibus legislation that the Liberals are trying to rush through after waiting and delaying and making other attempts to try to benefit themselves. Here we are with legislation that is 350 pages long. After one hour of debate, they moved notice of time allocation. It is absolutely astounding that the government breaks every promise it has made during the election. It continually says one

thing and does another, and this legislation is another example of that.

We will continue to push the Liberals on that, and I know that Canadians will hold them accountable as well. I look forward to taking questions on the bill.

● (1325)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-76 is not an omnibus bill. “Omni” means pertaining to all things. That would be if a bill was about beef and veterans or about health and defence. This is about one thing only, and that is the Canada Elections Act.

Members may recall that during the debate on the previous government's Fair Elections Act, the former Conservative member for Mississauga—Streetsville claimed that he had witnessed voter information cards being stolen from garbage cans and given to others to use to vote for fraudulent purposes. Of course, he later had to retract that, because it was a false statement. That was very interesting.

Even earlier today, the hon. member's colleague talked about people being able to pull voter ID cards out of mailboxes. People cannot use those unless they have ID that has their address on it. There is no fear here. This led to the acting Chief Electoral Officer, just this morning, telling PROC that there was zero evidence of fraud during the 2011 election and that he considers the integrity of the voter ID card to be extremely high.

I wonder if the member could tell the House why he is so focused on gerrymandering, not political boundaries, but gerrymandering the very act of voting itself in this country.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I have a two-part response to that. First, when I talked about the use of the voter information card, I was very clear. There are 39 pieces of ID. There is no evidence at all that in the last election there was any problem for anyone in being able to vote as a result of the voter information card not being one of those permissible forms of ID. In fact, voter turnout went way up during the last election. People will say it was because they were looking to vote out the previous government, but the fact is that people were able to vote, and far more people than had been able to vote in the previous election. There is absolutely no evidence in any way that this was somehow preventing people from voting.

While we are on the topic of the debate on the last piece of legislation moved by the previous government, the Fair Elections Act, I have a list of quotes here from members on that side who indicated at that time that they felt that it was improper for a government to use time allocation, or closure, or any of those kinds of things, on that piece of legislation. Is that member going to abide by that in this regard as well?

Government Orders

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while I agree with my hon. colleague that identification of a voter at a polling place is important in an election, I would disagree with him on the restricted forms he would use. He would restrict himself to a piece of paper, whereas the process of vouching for someone, where one voter actually signs an affidavit and identifies another person and vouches for that person's identity I think is an equally valid form of identification that his previous government withdrew from the possibilities. That disenfranchised certain people who did not have access to traditional forms of identification.

My question is about the prohibition against broadcasting election results before the polls close. Since 1938, this country has allowed that to happen, and it is based on the premise that voters in one part of the country should not be able to cast a ballot already knowing the result of the election. It is like holding an election yesterday and going to the polls today. I am just wondering if the member has any comments on that. Does he agree with me that those of us in the west, British Columbia in particular, have a right to cast our ballots before we know the result of the election?

• (1330)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, there were two parts there. I will address the first part to begin.

The member brought up the idea of the voter information card, vouching, and voter ID. I would just remind him again that there are 39 acceptable forms of ID available. Under our previous legislation, people could attest for someone's residence, but it still was necessary for people to prove who they were.

We saw in the last election that the turnout went way up. There was obviously no indication that people were prevented from voting as a result of the voter information card or any of the other changes that were made. It seemed to me that things worked pretty darn well. I do not see a need to open our system to potential problems that could exist as a result.

In regard to the member's other question, that is exactly the reason. There are all sorts of questions like this one that need to be contemplated and considered by all members of the House.

I am sure many members in the House of Commons have not had the ability to go through this whole 350-page bill yet, and we need to have these types of debates. That is why it is so important that we have the proper time to do that here in the House and in committee as well. The way the Liberal government is behaving and acting, it does not appear as though that is the case, and that is a real problem. I think my colleague would share my concerns about that. The government needs to allow proper time for debate.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is pretty interesting that the hon. member mentioned the way we are behaving. I represent Mississauga—Streetsville, and the previous Conservative member for my riding had imagined a scenario in which he had witnessed voter fraud, and then he further clarified and stated that he had not witnessed it.

My question is quite simple. Does the hon. member agree that there is an onus on the government to enact legislation that allows Canadians to exercise their fundamental right to vote?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the member is trying to get at, because I did not see that there were any issues in the last election with anyone being able to exercise that right. In fact, as I have said many times in this debate in this House today, there was certainly no indication that it was in fact a problem in the previous election.

While we are on the topic of things that were said during debate on the Fair Elections Act in the previous Parliament, I will note that the Liberal member for the riding of Bonavista–Gander–Grand Falls–Windsor made the following comment:

If we are actually debating on second reading, third reading, or reports stage any changes to the Elections Act or the Parliament of Canada Act, time allocation and closure need not apply. It basically codifies a convention in this House, a tradition we should respect.... I hope every member of this House will agree with us that closure and, specifically, time allocation would be set aside because of something of this importance.

I certainly hope the current government will live up to those words, which many of its members said in the past, and not break one more election promise, as we have seen with a multitude of election promises the Liberals have already broken.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was struck by what the hon. member said, that only Canadians should be able to determine Canadian elections. We started to talk about foreign money coming in to affect the hearts and minds of individuals. We saw what happened with northern gateway. We saw what happened with energy east. We have seen all these different actors that are actually putting wedges between Canadian provinces and between Canadians. A lot of those types of things have taken place. I remember in the last election when they had Vote Compass. I still have constituents in therapy because they found out that they were Liberals after having gone through that little exercise.

Could the member speak to the significance of making sure that foreign money stays out of Canada so that we are able to take our products to market and do not have to worry about other companies and countries trying to shut them down so that they can have the advantages while we are disadvantaged?

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, the question gives me an opportunity to explore something I did not have a chance to explore in as much detail as I would have liked in my speech.

Certainly the changes being made here, on one hand, would make it more restrictive for political parties, in the period leading up to an election, to spend the money freely donated by Canadians. On the other hand, they would allow more foreign money that comes in through third-party advocacy groups to be spent during that period of time than previously. In fact, it would be more than double what could be spent prior to this bill coming forward. That money could flow freely, in an unlimited fashion, from foreign actors.

Government Orders

The bill would limit political parties in being able to freely spend what they want while also, during that time, allowing government advertising and ministerial travel to continue, which everyone can see would potentially give an advantage to the governing Liberal Party, because its fundraising numbers have been so dismal. At the same time, it would allow foreign funds to flow in freely through third-party groups. As the member mentioned, we have seen in the past that foreign influences have come in to try to end opportunities for our oil and gas sector in my province of Alberta. That has many people very concerned that foreigners would have the ability to influence our policies and our elections in such a way as to harm jobs and opportunities in this country.

• (1335)

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Halifax.

It is my honour to speak in favour of Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act. There are many important facets of the bill, but today I will focus on how this legislation would address barriers that prevent some Canadians from participating in the democratic process.

There are four groups of people that regularly encounter difficulties at the ballot box: persons with disabilities, those who have difficulty producing identification, electors living abroad for more than five years, and women and men who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Let me begin with electors who have disabilities, both physical and cognitive. Elections Canada has made efforts to help electors with mobility issues by introducing provisions to provide what has been referred to as level access. An example is providing ramps for wheelchairs at polling stations.

The bill would expand upon the options for persons with disabilities who, for reasons of their disabilities, would be better served by casting their votes in locations other than their originally assigned polling stations. Currently, to acquire a transfer certificate, an elector needs to apply in person to the returning officer or the deputy returning officer. Under the provisions of this bill, the Chief Electoral Officer would be given greater discretion as to how to provide that certificate, with an eye to making it easier for persons with disabilities to vote.

Another provision of this bill would expand the ability of electors with disabilities to be visited by an election officer to vote at home. This option would be available where the polling station was not accessible to the elector.

Another kind of barrier is encountered when electors come to the polls and find that they do not have the appropriate ID to provide their name and address. Following the 2015 election, Statistics Canada found that an estimated 172,000 electors who did not vote stated a lack of ID as the reason.

The bill before us would restore the authorization of the voter information card as identification at the polls and the practice of vouching by another eligible elector for the identity and residence of someone without the necessary ID.

Research has shown that when authorized, voter information cards have been beneficial to groups that have traditionally voted in lower percentages than the national average. These groups include students and indigenous electors. The research also demonstrates that seniors in residences and long-term care facilities use voter information cards as ID 73% of the time. These cards are readily identifiable, easy to use, and with appropriate safeguards, a secure way to establish a right to vote. Indeed, during a federal election, these cards are perhaps the most accurate piece of government-issued identification.

The Chief Electoral Officer has long recommended allowing these cards to be used. The bill before us would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to add the voter information card as an approved form of ID, at his or her discretion. To ensure the continued integrity of the process, an elector would still be required to show an additional piece of identification confirming identity, alongside the voter information card, as was the case prior to the adoption of the so-called Fair Elections Act.

The bill before us would also restore the practice of vouching as a method to make voting more accessible. Under the provisions of this bill, an eligible voter would be able to establish both the identity and the residence of an otherwise eligible voter who did not have ID. In other words, they could vouch for the voter.

Restoring vouching would make it easier for people without the required ID, such as individuals who are homeless, to vote. However, we would ensure that there were safeguards so that the vouching system was not abused. The person vouching would have to have proper ID and reside in the same polling division as the elector being vouched for. One elector would not be able to vouch for more than one other elector, and an elector who had been vouched for could not then vouch for another elector. This would prevent the practice of serial vouching, in which people might in effect vouch for each other.

This brings me to the third group currently denied access to Canadian elections: Canadians who have lived abroad for more than five consecutive years. Under the bill before us, electors who have lived more than five consecutive years outside of Canada would be entitled to vote. The electors would also no longer need to have a stated intention to return to Canada.

The current system provides non-resident voters with a wide choice among the electoral districts where their ballots could be counted. The bill before us would stipulate that non-resident electors would be required to vote in the electoral district corresponding to their last place of ordinary residence in Canada.

Government Orders

• (1340)

Finally, let me turn to the Canadian Armed Forces electors, whose voting rights are defined in division 2 of part 11 of the Canada Elections Act. These provisions were initially implemented to help armed forces personnel participate in the election process. Over the years, other parts of the act have been amended to reflect changing realities, but division 2 of part 11 has not. This facet is important to me because in Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley is a Canadian Forces base, 17 Wing Winnipeg, and other important military institutions that play a crucial role in the community.

It is our responsibility as members to protect the rights of our brave women and men who protect us on a daily basis. Elections Canada has been working with the Canadian Armed Forces to determine the best way to facilitate voting by Canadian Armed Forces electors. The bill before us would provide Canadian Armed Forces electors with options for voting similar to those enjoyed by other Canadians. The statement of “ordinary residence” would be eliminated and Canadian Forces electors would be able to update their information like any other elector. This would enable them to cast their votes in the electoral district to which they have the strongest connection.

Since we now have fixed election dates, the Minister of National Defence would be able to designate election liaison officers to help facilitate the military polls before the writ is dropped. It is hoped that the percentage of Canadian Forces electors who cast a vote will increase in the next election as a result of these measures.

Each of the provisions I discussed will not only make it easier for Canadians to participate in elections but will also strengthen our democratic institutions and our democracy as a whole. I hope hon. members from all parties will support this bill and I look forward to a thoughtful and fruitful debate on this important matter.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of debate today on the voter ID card or information card that Elections Canada has provided. It is important to note that this card was utilized back in the 2011 election, and it was the Harper government that said it did not want it used. At the time, there was a great deal of concern that it would have a negative impact on voter turnout. Earlier today, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs heard representatives of Elections Canada talk about 150,000 Canadians who had difficulty voting and an estimated 50,000 who walked away.

I have more of a comment than a question for my colleague. I look at the voter ID card as yet another piece of identification that can assist Canadians in voting and I would highlight that what is good about this particular piece of ID is that it is something that Elections Canada provides to voters, which voters often keep as a reminder to vote and where. Their addresses are on the cards. If it worked in 2011, why would it not work in 2019? The former prime minister should never have gotten rid of it.

I am interested in the member's thoughts on that.

• (1345)

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. As I referred to in my speech, 172,000 people in the 2011 election,

according to Statistics Canada, cited lack of identification as the reason they did not vote. We are not suggesting the voter identification card is the only piece of identification that voters present. However, there are people, particularly a number of first nations people, who do not have any form of ID and need to rely on the voter identification card and vouching. These people, without these changes, would be denied the right to vote. We have evidence from the last election that thousands of Canadians had that right taken away from them.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could assure me of one thing. On this piece of legislation, the government, after one hour of debate, gave notice of time allocation. I can point to a whole list of quotes from members on that side, when they were in opposition, indicating how concerned they would be about time allocation or closure being used on a piece of legislation of this nature. They even included it in their election platform.

I wonder if the member would confirm that he would stick to that campaign commitment made by his party, and if the government were to move time allocation, whether he would vote against that measure.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that despite time allocation, this vote will be having all of the scrutiny at committee and by Parliament that it deserves. I will take no lessons from the party that invoked time allocation on this motion twice.

I would also like to clarify one of my answers. I said that 172,000 people did not vote in the 2011 election. I will correct that statement: it was in the 2015 election under the previous government's act that these people could not vote owing to lack of ID.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have asked this question before, but I am conducting a survey of Liberal members of Parliament today. My colleague's government knew well in advance that Elections Canada needed a certain amount of time to have these changes in place in time for the 2019 election. It was identified as the month of April 2018, yet this bill was introduced on April 30 for first reading. It still has to travel through the House of Commons. It still has to go through the Senate before it receives royal assent.

My question for the hon. member is this: Why did his government take so long to bring this bill before the House? I mean, here we are, two and a half years in. They knew well in advance that these changes needed to be implemented with enough time for Elections Canada to actually get them implemented in time for the 2019 election.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, whether we waited until a given time or not is not really relevant. We will be passing this measure in time to apply it for the next election.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in the debate on this important bill, Bill C-76, the Elections Modernization Act.

Government Orders

This legislation is about ensuring that we break the barriers Canadians have been facing in their efforts to participate in our democracy. It is a significant piece of legislation. It will make our electoral process more secure and transparent by regulating advertising during pre-election and election periods, prohibiting foreign entities from spending any money to influence Canadian elections, and requiring political parties to provide an easy-to-read privacy policy.

[*Translation*]

Although there are many parts to this bill, today, I want to talk about how this legislation will make it easier to vote and ensure that all Canadians are able to participate in our democratic process.

[*English*]

Although there are many parts to this bill, today I want to talk about how this proposed legislation would make it easier for eligible Canadians to vote and how the bill would ensure that all Canadians are able to participate in our democratic process.

Whether a Canadian is living abroad, has a disability, is in the armed forces, lives in a care facility, is at university, has no fixed address, or is working an inflexible schedule to provide for their family, no one should face barriers to vote. Voting is a right, and as the federal government, it is our responsibility to make voting accessible to all Canadians. I firmly believe that the strength of our democracy depends on the participation of as many Canadians as possible, and that is why first and foremost this proposed legislation would undo many of the restrictive voting laws put in place by the previous government.

The previous government also put in place legislation to amend the Canada Elections Act, but its legislation was not drafted with Canadians and their needs in mind. It made it harder for Canadians to vote. Among other things, the so-called Fair Elections Act eliminated the use of vouching and the use of voter identification cards as a form of ID. This was a form of voter suppression. It was the gerrymandering of not a polling district's boundaries but rather the gerrymandering of the very act of voting itself.

A 2016 Statistics Canada survey found that approximately 170,000 Canadians did not participate in the last election because of the Conservatives' decision to make voting less accessible. The Harper government was determined to wring political gain from every measure and was determined to bring a fierce partisanship to something that ought to not have been partisan.

Official opposition members will tell us that it is not that hard for Canadians to obtain proper ID. They will make false comparisons between voting and boarding an airplane or buying a six-pack of beer. In fact, how curious to hear from the member for Banff—Airdrie raise this old canard this afternoon mere hours after he and I both heard the acting Chief Electoral Officer say at the procedure and House affairs committee that voter ID cards need to be used in conjunction with another piece of ID in proving the elector's identity. The names must match on the identification and the VIC. The level of integrity in that process is very high. We used it in 2011 and there were no concerns of fraudulent use.

Therefore, let us retire this old fiction, shall we?

According to Elections Canada, 68.3% of eligible voters cast their ballot in 2015, which is up 7%, or over 2.5 million, from 2011. This was not because the Conservatives' Fair Elections Act removed barriers to voting but rather because Canadians stood up against the barriers created by the Conservatives. We have listened to Canadians, and we have been delivering and will continue to deliver real change for the middle class and for all Canadians.

For Nova Scotians, getting a piece of government-issued ID is not always affordable. The cost of a driver's licence is nearly \$90. The cost of a passport is over \$100. Reinstating both vouching and the voter ID card will help not just Nova Scotians at the polls but all Canadians who cannot afford these pieces of identification to vote.

Bill C-76 would repeal many elements of the previous government's legislation and ensure that all Canadians have the ability to participate in a democratic process. We believe that voter participation actually strengthens our democratic system—unlike the Conservatives, who continue to produce barriers and continue to breed cynicism around our democratic processes.

My constituents in Halifax have shared with me their concerns about how difficult it can be to vote. Long lines at the polls, unexpected life events, work or personal responsibilities, confusion around where to vote, and lacking proper ID are all reasons to stay home on election day. Canadians in my riding work hard, and I suspect my colleagues in all corners of this House would say the same about their constituents. No one should be prevented from voting because they are working hard to provide for their family, caring for a loved one, are away from home for work or school, or have other responsibilities on election day.

We can make voting more convenient.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

The elections modernization bill will make voting more convenient for all Canadians. We will streamline the intake procedures during regular and advance polls to reduce wait times, and increase the hours of advance polls to 12-hour days.

[*English*]

Currently, there are barriers in place that have made it more difficult for some Canadians to take part in the democratic process. This includes persons with disabilities, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and Canadians living abroad. We want to make it easier for all Canadians to engage with our democracy.

This legislation would increase support and assistance for Canadians with disabilities by expanding accommodation measures to include all Canadians with disabilities, not just those with physical disabilities, and this includes expanding the option of at-home voting.

Statements by Members

Let us talk about Canadian Armed Forces members, who make tremendous sacrifices protecting and defending our democracy. Our government will make it easier for soldiers, sailors, and air personnel to participate in our democracy. We will do this by allowing them the flexibility to vote at regular polls where they reside in Canada, to vote abroad, to vote in advance polls, or to vote in special military polls, as they currently do. This is a big issue for voters in my riding, Halifax, many of whom serve in the Royal Canadian Navy. I hope that my colleagues who represent ridings with Canadian Armed Forces personnel will be in support of the bill.

I imagine there is not a single member of the House who does not represent some constituents living abroad. Whether they are there for work, for school, or to support their families, Canadians living abroad should still have the option to continue to participate in our democracy and have their say on issues that are important to them. Currently, non-resident Canadians may vote only within five years of leaving Canada and must demonstrate an intention to return to Canada.

• (1355)

[*Translation*]

Through Bill C-76, our government will restore voting rights to more than one million Canadians living abroad.

[*English*]

In the past, Elections Canada has engaged in a range of educational activities with Canadians as part of its core mandate of administering elections. Unbelievably, in 2014, the Harper Conservatives limited the Chief Electoral Officer's education mandate, removing the CEO's ability to offer education programs to new Canadians and historically disenfranchised groups.

[*Translation*]

Our government believes the Chief Electoral Officer should be able to communicate with all Canadians about how to access their democratic rights. Our government believes the participation of as many Canadians as possible is essential to having a strong democracy.

[*English*]

That is why Bill C-76 would restore the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate to undertake broad public education campaigns about elections. This is not about partisanship. This is about ensuring that all Canadians know where, when, and how to vote. We want Canadians to be ready for election day.

Through the bill, we would empower Canadians to vote and, more broadly, to participate in our democracy. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to strengthening Canada's democratic institutions. We want to restore Canadians' trust in our democracy and, if passed, Bill C-76 will do just that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that, with all the tax increases and jimmying with our democracy, yes, Canadians will be ready for the next election.

One of the first things I was told in the political training I did as a Conservative was that, generally speaking, Conservatives do better in elections where there is higher turnout. I tested these numbers. In

the last 25 years, in elections Conservatives have won, the turnout has been, on average, 67%. In elections Liberals have won, it has been 65%. The same differential holds whether we look at the last 40 years or the last 60 years. In other words, consistently, Conservatives are more likely to win elections when more people turn out. We want to see more people participate in the vote, not only because it is good for our democracy, but also because it is good for us politically.

If we have a fair system, as we do now, with legitimate ID requirements, such as a library card, a status card, and many different options, which allows people to vote and ensures that voting is fair, why is the member intent on introducing a system where an ID can be used that does not actually ID at all but is just an information card?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about the need for greater participation in our democracy, we are not just talking about Conservative voters; we are talking about all Canadians. That is who needs to vote in our elections. I am sure that the member would have an interest in reducing the number of non-Conservative voters.

Getting to the point of the member's question, we are reintroducing the voter information card, which the Chief Electoral Officer has said must be used in conjunction with another piece of ID. These, together, when the names match, are the only way to cast a vote. This has a high level of integrity. It was used in 2011 without any incidents of fraud being reported. We have high confidence moving forward that this is a way to enfranchise more and more Canadian voters to take part in our fantastic democracy, which we enjoy and love so much.

• (1400)

The Speaker: Following question period, there will be three minutes and 20 seconds remaining in questions and comments following the speech of the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

NATIONAL SEAL PRODUCTS DAY

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am wearing seal in honour of National Seal Products Day. Inuit and coastal communities across Nunavut, Atlantic Canada, and Quebec have relied on seal and seal products for sustenance and survival for millennia, and continue to do so to this day.

Seal day is about recognizing and honouring the historical, social, cultural, and economic contributions that seals represent for our communities. It is a day when we can recognize and counter narratives about the seal harvest that seek to delegitimize the practice, as these have had devastating impacts on our indigenous and coastal communities. Supporting a culturally sensitive, sustainable, and humane seal harvest, I believe, is just one step on our path to reconciliation with all Canadians who depend upon this resource.

*Statements by Members***FLOODING IN B.C.**

I urge everyone to watch the award-winning documentary *Angry Inuk*, which talks about how vital the seal harvest is to Inuit food security, health, and well-being.

Today, we will host a seal products day in the Speaker's lounge. I invite all my colleagues to join us, and also to join us tonight as we meet with the seal industry of Canada to celebrate National Seal Products Day.

* * *

BUS DRIVER SAFETY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I took my son to the Edmonton zoo. We saw seals, elephants, lions, tigers, and caribou. As we walked around the zoo, I explained to my son that the animals were wild so we needed barriers between ourselves and them to ensure that we do not get bitten or harmed, and that monkeys do not throw stuff at us.

In light of this discussion with my son, the installation of barriers on Edmonton city buses to protect the bus drivers is a sad reflection on our society. Last I checked, wild animals do not ride city buses. However, one would think they did, after reading the CBC article that stated, "Most often drivers were punched or spat on, although many were bitten, kicked, or had something thrown at them."

Installing Plexiglas barriers is not the solution to this type of behaviour. Rather, we need to cultivate a high regard for human dignity. We can install the bus barriers if we must, but we would be far better off if individuals were accountable for their actions, parents instilled respect in their children, and leaders encouraged a culture that values human dignity.

* * *

VICTORIA DAY

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend we celebrated what many Canadians colloquially know as May Long, May Two-Four, or the unofficial beginning of summer. However, in Canada and across the Commonwealth this Monday officially marked Victoria Day.

[*Translation*]

Even before Confederation, the nation we now know as Canada has always celebrated Queen Victoria's birthday. Although this was a special day for celebrating Queen Victoria, it has now become a tradition to celebrate our country's reigning sovereign.

[*English*]

Of course, this long weekend, the royal family had more than a birthday to celebrate. Royal enthusiasts from across Canada tuned in during the early morning hours this weekend to watch Meghan Markle, a successful actress with an affinity for all things Canadian, wed Prince Harry, founder of the Invictus Games and sixth in line to the throne. I wish to extend heartfelt congratulations to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex on their recent nuptials. I look forward to seeing how they continue to use their platform to make a difference in the lives of others.

To my fellow Canadians, regardless of whether they tuned in for the wedding or not, I hope they enjoyed an excellent long weekend, with a safe and productive Victoria Day.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, floods have devastated much of my riding over the past weeks. Thousands of residents were evacuated, and hundreds are homeless. Businesses and industries are closed. The town of Grand Forks was hit the hardest. Nine hundred people are still out of their homes, and some may never be able to return. The downtown business core is devastated. Many other communities have been affected as well: Twin Lakes, Willowbrook, Okanagan Falls, Oliver, Osoyoos, Westbridge, Rock Creek, Midway, Greenwood, Christina Lake, and the Slocan Valley.

Community spirit is strong, and thousands of volunteers have been working hard. Businesses have closed to allow their employees to help out. Shuttered industries have kept paying their employees. I want to thank all those who volunteered countless hours in the hot sun. I thank the Red Cross and the government agency staff, who worked around the clock. I thank the armed forces personnel who were deployed to assist. I also thank the provincial and federal ministers who responded quickly to requests for help. I thank them on behalf of all my constituents.

* * *

● (1405)

BASKETBALL SCHOLARSHIP

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each week, we run a free basketball drop-in in our riding, and over 100 kids come out to play some basketball. Today, I am very proud to rise in the House to congratulate Humraj Grewal, one of our drop-in participants, who has recently accepted a basketball scholarship to Huntington Prep high school in West Virginia. The program at Huntington Prep is known for its basketball development, and it trains young athletes to get scholarships in the NCAA division I. Past graduates of Huntington Prep include Canada's own Andrew Wiggins, who plays for the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Statements by Members

At just 15 years of age, Humraj has shown amazing talent, playing small forward for his local high school in Brampton East. I have no doubt in my mind that he will show even greater promise in his new school in the United States. I want to wish Humraj and his family the best of luck in his future basketball career. All of Brampton East and all of Canada are cheering for Humraj.

* * *

HEMOCHROMATOSIS AWARENESS MONTH

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, May is Hemochromatosis Awareness Month across Canada. Hemochromatosis is an iron-overload disorder that can lead to many health complications and even premature death. One in 300 Canadians has the genetic predisposition for hemochromatosis. Many of them do not know it.

Hemochromatosis is underdiagnosed. This is partly because public awareness of the condition is low, but also because its symptoms, including fatigue, depression, and joint pain, are confused with a range of more commonly known diseases. Let us use this opportunity to raise awareness of hemochromatosis.

I invite all hon. members to join me at the Canadian Hemochromatosis Society reception tonight, at 5 p.m. in Room 256-S Centre Block, to learn more.

* * *

[Translation]

MAURICE QUINN

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every community depends on stalwart members who contribute to community development and life. Maurice Quinn was one of those exceptional individuals in Verdun. He was a proud firefighter who joined the Verdun fire service in 1959, became the director in 1991, and remained in that position until he retired in 1994.

[English]

Maurice Quinn remained a strong citizen throughout his retirement by becoming involved as an active member and then president of the Optimist Club Saint-Laurent for Verdun-LaSalle-Lachine until 2006. He contributed to funding campaigns for non-profit organizations such as the United Way and the Kidney Foundation, and was a pillar of the Irish community in Verdun. He was recognized as a Grands Verdunois in 2006.

Respected by all who knew him and loved by many, he will surely be missed by his neighbourhood in Crawford Park as well as across Verdun and LaSalle. May Maurice rest in peace.

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ROYAL WEDDING

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday, May 19, His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales wed Ms. Meghan Markle in a beautiful ceremony at Windsor Castle in the United Kingdom.

There are several Canadian connections to this royal wedding. Ms. Markle lived in Toronto as an actress, the couple's romance

blossomed in Canada, and Prince Harry has travelled to Canada numerous times as a member of the royal family, including last year when he opened and attended the Invictus Games.

Thirty-three per cent of my constituents identify as being of British descent, and my team and I were excited to host an early morning breakfast on Saturday to gather our community around the telly to celebrate this very special occasion. It was a morning full of tea, crumpets, marmalade, and other goodies, and the wedding brought us a great sense of joy and optimism.

I call on members of the House to join the people of Mississauga—Lakeshore and all Canadians in wishing the royal couple the very best for the years to come.

* * *

TAXFIGHTER AWARD

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the recipients of this year's TaxFighter Award.

Last week, I joined the Canadian Taxpayers Federation as it honoured Tom Flanagan, Barry Cooper, Ted Morton, and Rainer Knopff, collectively recognized as the Calgary School. The school has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of taxpayer emancipation and the broader case for limited government that underpins our freedom.

For over 35 years, these individuals have worked toward the Conservative goals of small and accountable government in Canada. Their efforts have transformed the historical and political landscape of not only my province of Alberta but also our nation.

As a former student of the Calgary School, I am honoured to be a part of its legacy as its commitment has inspired a generation of leaders across the country in academia, law, politics, journalism, and beyond.

* * *

● (1410)

TAIWAN NIGHT

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the membership of the Canada–Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group, I would like to invite all members of Parliament to attend Taiwan Night this evening at the Chateau Laurier. This evening's cultural celebration will be an opportunity to recognize and celebrate Taiwan's rich and vibrant diversity, as well as a chance to build a better relationship between Canada and Taiwan.

Taiwanese Canadians have contributed to the Canadian mosaic with pride and admiration. It is important that we take times such as these to recognize the many contributions they have made to our great country. The Taiwanese-Canadian community has made tremendous advances, and I am very proud to call many of its members as personal friends.

I look forward to seeing many of my colleagues at the Chateau Laurier tonight for a wonderful celebration.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I am pleased to welcome the Club des bons amis and the Club de l'âge d'or italien de Laval to Parliament Hill today.

[Member spoke in Italian and provided the following translation:]

Welcome dear people of Laval.

[Translation]

Our seniors are our heritage. They set a course for us that is filled with hope, endurance, and perseverance. We must continue to follow that course, improve it, and cherish it with the same great sense of responsibility, the same hard work, the same resilience and determination, and the same respect for Canada and its values of openness, tolerance, and diversity.

Thank you to the seniors of Alfred-Pellan and Canada for your contributions and your sacrifices. You continue to be an inspiration to those around you.

[Member spoke in Italian and provided the following translation:]

I sincerely thank you for coming to Ottawa to see me. Have a safe trip home.

* * *

[English]

CHILLIWACK CHIEFS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate Canada's top Junior A hockey team, the 2018 RBC Cup champion, Chilliwack Chiefs.

This past Sunday, in a thrilling championship game that had the Prospera Centre rocking, the Chiefs scored three times in the third period to come from behind and beat Ontario's Wellington Dukes 4-2 to win their first-ever national championship.

For Chilliwack, this was a victory both on and off the ice. Not only did we get to showcase our great community, our great hockey team and fans, we showed what true partnership and reconciliation look like.

The Chilliwack Chiefs Hockey Club, Tourism Chilliwack, the city of Chilliwack, and the Ts'elxwéyeqw first nation's management group worked together to host one of the most successful RBC Cup championships ever.

I thank everyone who played a part in putting on one of the most memorable events in Chilliwack sports history, and congratulations once again to the National Junior A champion, our Chilliwack Chiefs.

* * *

[Translation]

**INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA,
TRANSPHOBIA AND BIPHOBIA**

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 17, people from across Canada and around the world marked

the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. May 17 was chosen for a reason. It was on that date in 1990 that the World Health Organization decided to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

[English]

Last year, our Prime Minister stood in this place and made an apology to members of the LGBTQ2 community who had suffered from discrimination. As our Prime Minister stated on that day, "Discrimination and oppression of LGBTQ2 Canadians will not be tolerated anymore."

[Translation]

We have come a long way, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

[English]

We are just over a week away from Pride Month, beginning June 1. I am looking forward to trans fair, the Dyke March, and the Pride Parade. People should check out events in their communities.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the deadline for Kinder Morgan approaches, I want to tell the House what I have been hearing from constituents about this project. This pipeline goes right through my riding and my constituents will be directly affected.

People are infuriated that the federal government would even consider using taxpayer dollars to bail out a Texas-based company instead of investing in services Canadians need, like affordable housing, services for seniors, health care, and a national pharmacare program.

My constituents do not accept the risks that Kinder Morgan brings to our community and our province. They would rather see a just transition to a low-carbon economy, with investments in good-paying jobs and training in the renewable energy sector. They want the government to make a bold investment in our future. They want an economy that promotes good health, good jobs, and sustainable living.

I think that makes a lot of sense, and the government would be wise to listen.

* * *

● (1415)

CLIFF DOWNEY

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to Cliff Downey, someone who also stood in this chamber as a former member of Parliament. Cliff recently passed away in Edmonton.

Cliff was a proud Albertan who represented the riding of Battle River from 1968 to 1972 as a Progressive Conservative. Though he served on two standing committees during his time in Ottawa, he was first and foremost a farmer.

Oral Questions

During Cliff's career, he was a member of the Alberta Surface Rights Board and the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta. Agriculture was his biggest passion and he often returned to his hometown of Castor to visit his family farm. His smile was his trademark and he was always a man of his word.

Cliff was a great mentor to many people, including me and those of us involved in politics in south Edmonton. I want to recognize that service to Alberta. I also extend my sincere condolences to his wife, Frances, his eight children, his 16 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren. He will be dearly missed.

* * *

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the importance of world day for cultural diversity.

It is more than simply a day to recognize our differences; it is a day to celebrate the tremendous diversity of the human experience. In Canada, and especially in my riding of Brampton North, we are home to a diversity of languages, histories, perspectives, and cultures. We must nurture these strengths.

Three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability, and development. Our Prime Minister recently stressed the importance of respect and understanding, because merely tolerating one another is not enough to achieve these goals.

I am fiercely proud of our government's strong promotion of the principles of diversity, inclusion, respect, and dialogue. I would like to thank my constituents for affording me the privilege of bringing their diverse voices here.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Prime Minister ordered Elections Canada to implement his electoral changes before the bill was even debated in the House of Commons, without one word of debate or one vote. If that is not trying to rig the rules in his favour, I do not know what is. Why is the Prime Minister ignoring Parliament in trying to ram through his preferred electoral system changes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the elections modernization act is a large step forward in our government's commitment to improve and strengthen our democratic institutions. We are reversing the changes brought in by the Harper Conservatives that made it harder for Canadians to vote. This legislation will ensure that more Canadians are engaged, will help protect the integrity of our electoral system, and give Canadians more information as to what political parties do with their personal information. We committed to reversing the Harper Conservatives' unjust changes to the Canada Elections Act, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one believes the Prime Minister's claims that he has taken action to limit government activity in the pre-election period. Spending announcements will not be limited. Ministerial travel will not be limited. What he is doing is limiting the ability of opposition parties to engage with Canadians while refusing to apply those same restrictions to his own government. If the Prime Minister wants to fix this he has only one choice. Will he commit today to banning all ministerial spending announcements, travel, and advertising during the entire pre-writ election period?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only are we pleased that we are engaging with a broad range of experts and not doing it the way the Conservatives did it when they brought in their attempts to improve Canada's elections in a way that advantaged them, but we also look forward to the discussions that will be happening at committee. We encourage the members opposite to come forward with amendments and proposals, because, unlike them when they were in power, we are open to suggestions on how to improve Canada's democracy.

● (1420)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Dogwood Initiative is a Canadian organization that actively campaigns against Canada's energy sector. Of course, the Prime Minister already knows that. He gave it a grant. It also runs get-out-the-vote campaigns during federal elections. Dogwood received almost \$3 million in American funding in the last eight years. According to the former Chief Electoral Officer, when it comes to foreign funding for organizations like Dogwood, "Once the funds are mingled [with those of the organization in Canada], it's the Canadian organization's funds." This bill does nothing to prevent this. Why is the Prime Minister continuing to allow foreign influence in Canadian elections?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we look forward to the members opposite bringing forward reasoned amendments and thoughtful proposals to improve further our Elections Canada reforms. We know that it is important for Canadians to be able to trust their electoral systems and to trust our democratic institutions, and we intend to do just that.

I will highlight, however, that the Harper Conservatives were the ones who branded people as "eco-terrorists" and tried to limit their capacity to vote and be heard in our public sphere. We believe in freedom of speech, we believe in supporting a broad range of voices, but we will protect our—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I have heard a number of times from the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman already when he has not had the floor. Therefore, I would ask members to wait until they have the floor before they speak.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Prime Minister is truly interested in amendments being proposed by the opposition parties, then why did he already instruct Elections Canada to start implementing his changes?

[*Translation*]

However, the Prime Minister knows that the carbon tax makes the price of everything go up. When businesses have to raise their prices, it is harder for them to be competitive. When our businesses are disadvantaged in that way, the entire economy suffers. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, GDP growth is projected to slow down.

Why does the Prime Minister keep hiding the real cost of the carbon tax?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Conservatives, who are still Harper Conservatives, refuse to accept is that four of our largest provinces are already taxing pollution and that 80% of the Canadian economy is covered by this pollution pricing. Our economy has been growing at a record pace over the past few years with 80% of it already subjected to a price on pollution. The Conservatives are fearmongering for nothing because they fail to understand anything.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to not knowing anything, it is actually this Prime Minister who does not know how many GHG reductions will actually be implemented by his carbon tax, but he does know the cost of it. However, he is deliberately hiding that cost from Canadians. What we do know is that the cost of everything will go up, including gasoline.

When it comes to higher gas prices, the Prime Minister says that is “exactly” what he wants. We know that millionaires like the Prime Minister do not worry when it comes to higher gas costs, but hard-working, middle-class families do. Why is the Prime Minister continuing to increase taxes on hard-working Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, we have committed to working with the provinces on a broad range of initiatives, including demonstrating that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. That is why we are working with the provinces, who will bring forward this fall their proposals on how they will approach pricing carbon pollution. We will work with them and ensure that right across the country we have systems of similar stringency and effectiveness.

That fundamental respect for provincial jurisdiction and partnership was what was lacking from Stephen Harper's Conservatives—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the 2015 campaign, the Prime

Minister swore up and down that a Liberal government would eliminate subsidies for the oil and gas industry. The government has been in power for two and a half years now, but it has not done a thing to keep that promise. Energy transition means moving away from fossil fuels, not subsidizing them.

Will the Prime Minister finally be transparent and tell the House about his plan to eliminate subsidies for oil and gas as he promised in 2015?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we promised Canadians that we would build a strong economy while protecting the environment, create jobs, and ensure that future generations can breathe clean air, drink clean water, and live in a protected environment. That is exactly what we will continue to do. We are showing that, unlike the NDP, we know that creating good jobs goes hand in hand with transitioning to a low-carbon economy and protecting the environment. That is what we are doing.

• (1425)

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what I know is that Rachel Notley's New Democrat government keeps its election promises, and John Horgan's New Democrat government in B.C. keeps its election promises. This government is the one struggling to keep its election promises. Not only do the Liberals refuse to keep the promise they made to Canadians to eliminate the subsidies, but they now also want to compensate Kinder Morgan for the political risk the Trans Mountain project faces. We do not know where this money will come from or how much will be invested. Are we talking about \$1 billion, \$2 billion, or \$10 billion? We have no idea, and the Minister of Finance refuses to set a limit.

How can the Liberals justify throwing billions of dollars at Kinder Morgan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said many times, we will not negotiate in the public arena. We said that we would ensure that this project, which is in the national interest, will be built. It is important to our economy, and it is also important because it will strengthen our economy and enable us to protect the environment. They go together. We are implementing a national pollution tax. We are implementing measures to protect our oceans and coastlines. We are doing what we can to create economic growth and protect the environment.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us jump in a time machine and go back to an era the Liberals would find strange and unfamiliar. When was this mysterious time? It was October 2015. That is when the Liberals were just elected on several forward-looking environmental promises.

Oral Questions

Jump back to today and the government appears to have rigged the review with Kinder Morgan, failed to end fossil fuel subsidies, and instead is now offering billions more in support to a Texas oil company. Canadians are wondering, when will the Liberals go back to the future?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the 2015 election campaign we did what the NDP did not do. We promised to invest in Canadians. We promised to invest in the middle class and those working hard to join it, while they committed to balancing the budget at all costs, including through cuts. We knew that Canadians needed investments to be able to grow the economy and to be able to protect the environment, and that is exactly what we did.

On the TMX process, I am happy to correct the member opposite. We actually strengthened the review process, added more consultation with indigenous peoples, and involved more science and citizens. That is what we committed to Canadians. That is exactly what we are doing.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is the reason so many indigenous communities are in court and so many people are protesting against this.

The Liberal plan to indemnify Kinder Morgan against losses means that Canadians will be on the hook for billions of dollars. The government is trading private profit for public risk, and to make matters worse, the Liberals will not even put a cap on how much Canadian money they are willing to give this Texas oil company. The sky is obviously the limit.

How is it possible that the Liberal government can find billions for Kinder Morgan shareholders, but cannot find the money or the commitment to end boil water advisories in indigenous communities in this country?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that we are fully on track to ending boil water advisories across Canada in indigenous communities.

My question for the member opposite is this: Why does she not listen to indigenous voices? Why does she not listen to the indigenous communities that have expressed their support for the Trans Mountain expansion? Why do they not listen to indigenous communities that dare to have differences of opinion with what the NDP here actually thinks, because we know that the NDP elsewhere can have different perspectives?

We ask them to respect the broad range of voices on—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[Translation]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are things we know and things we do not know about the Liberal carbon tax.

What we do know is that the Liberal carbon tax will take \$10 billion out of the Canadian economy, as was reported by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. However, what we do not know is how much the Liberal carbon tax will cost taxpayers. We also do not know what impact it will have on greenhouse gas emissions.

I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister.

Can he tell us how much greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by a Liberal carbon tax?

• (1430)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that climate change is real. What we do know is that putting a price on carbon works. If we look at British Columbia, it has cut its greenhouse gas emissions and boosted its economy. At present, 80% of Canadians pay a carbon tax and the economies of Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta are the fastest growing economies in the country. It is working. We will continue to fight climate change and grow our economy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we do know is that the Liberal Party is refusing to tell Canadians how much the Liberal carbon tax is going to cost them.

What is more, we learned today in *The Globe and Mail* that the Liberal government is seriously lashing out at anyone who disagrees with it.

Today, *The Globe and Mail* reported that one of the finance minister's assistants told Normand Lafrenière, president of the Canadian Association of Mutual Insurance Companies, to stop toying with them, that he had better not appear in front of committees, and that he should stop talking to senators and MPs.

The Liberals are already hiding the truth. Do they now also want to muzzle Canadians?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to tell my opposition colleague that his statement is not true.

No interest group or individual has ever been told not to talk to a parliamentarian or a committee. That is simply not true. We are open and we are involved with Canadians, interest groups, and Department of Finance stakeholders to hear a variety of views and interests.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that a 2016 memo by Fisheries and Oceans Canada revealed that the carbon tax will “degrade” our fishing sector. It will mean that the fishing families trying to earn a living doing work that is already difficult will have to pay more and more to fuel their vessels, which will put them at a competitive disadvantage with other countries around the world.

How much will this new national Liberal carbon tax cost the average Canadian fishing family?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been a strong supporter of fishermen and fisherwomen across the country.

Oral Questions

When we need to look at putting a price on pollution, provinces are the ones taking a leadership role. If we look at the context in B.C., the fishing industry has grown while there has been a price on pollution, emissions have gone down, and the economy has grown. That is exactly what we want to do.

However, it is up to provinces to determine how to address any concerns they have, including in the fisheries sector.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question was how much the carbon tax would cost the average Canadian fishing family. There was no answer. The carbon tax cover-up continues.

The government admits that gas prices will go up at least 11¢ a litre, that it will cost on average about \$200 more for Canadians to heat their homes. Other costs like higher grocery bills will also cascade throughout the economy, according to a memo by Finance Canada.

Will the government end the carbon tax cover-up now and tell us how much this tax will cost the average Canadian family?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try explaining again.

Right now, 80% of Canadians live in a province where there is a price on pollution. A price has been put on pollution by Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta. They are the ones responsible for the revenues. They can return the revenues directly, as some of them are doing, such as British Columbia, in tax cuts, or they can give rebates, as in the context of Alberta. They can also make investments in clean innovations. It is up to the provinces.

What we know about those provinces is that their economies are growing the fastest in the country.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, she keeps trying to blame the provinces for this carbon tax. In fact, it is right in the Minister of Finance's budget bill that is before the House of Commons right now. It proposes a new tax of \$50 a tonne, which will increase the price of gas, groceries, home heating, electricity, and almost every consumer good that Canadians buy.

Prices are already rising. Inflation is above 2%. Canadians cannot afford to pay any more, so why do the Liberals not end the carbon tax cover-up and tell us how much this tax will cost the average Canadian family?

• (1435)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the record. I would like to applaud the provinces that have stepped up and put a price on pollution—a price on what we do not want, pollution—so that we can get what we do want: less GHGs and clean innovation.

However, what Canadians are really asking is, what is the Conservatives' plan?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our plan actually reduced greenhouse gases while reducing taxes at the same time.

The carbon tax cover-up continues. The government refuses to tell Canadians what the government knows. The Liberals have

calculated how much the average family will pay. They have documents laying out these numbers, but when I obtained those documents, unfortunately all of the numbers were blacked out.

If this is anything more than a tax grab, why will the government not end the carbon tax cover-up and tell us what this tax will cost the average Canadian household?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that polluting is not free. It is having an impact right now. Canadians are paying billions of dollars in insurance costs, but there is also a huge economic opportunity. Since members of the party opposite like talking about jobs, maybe they should get on the bandwagon, because there is a \$23-trillion opportunity in clean growth.

Mr. Michael Cooper: This is pathetic, absolutely pathetic.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: I have seen companies across the country that have clean solutions. This is a great opportunity for us to tackle climate change while growing our economy, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

The Speaker: Order. As much as I like hearing the voice of the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, I prefer it when he has the floor, of course. I would ask him not to be yelling out when someone else has the floor.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

* * *

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after promising to make amendments to the Canada Elections Act, the Liberals waited until the last minute to table them.

Worse still, when they were in opposition, they criticized the Conservatives for limiting the number of debates on electoral reform in the House of Commons, yet they plan to do the exact same thing today.

The member for Winnipeg North said in 2014, “We need to recognize that the Canada Elections Act is like no other.... This legislation should be designated such that time allocation cannot be applied to it.”

What happened between 2014 and now? Do the Liberals no longer believe that the Canada Elections Act deserves to be properly debated?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my NDP colleague for her question. I am delighted to be back in the House of Commons.

Oral Questions

I must admit I am a little puzzled, because we did not limit debate on this important electoral legislation. It is vital to remember that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has spent more than 30 hours studying this bill. I am thrilled to be here and to hear my colleagues from other parties—

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

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our elections are the very foundation of our democracy. The laws that have governed them for generations were never forced through by any government without support and proper debate, up until Stephen Harper came in with his unfair elections act, going it alone and bullying Parliament. The Conservatives were lambasted and then thrown from office.

Canadians and even Liberals condemned the actions of that former government, yet now that they are in power, the Liberals are threatening to do the exact same thing. Lord knows that Canadians have learned to tolerate a lot from Liberals, but hypocrisy they will not stand for.

Why will the Liberals not work with us rather than bully us? Surely Stephen Harper is not the standard.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleague on this bill. I am glad he brought up the unfair elections act, because Bill C-76 does so much to reverse the changes that were put in place that limited democracy and limited people's rights to vote, and we are looking forward to working with our colleagues in the NDP to make sure that we can encourage more people to vote in Canada, get young people voting, encourage women to run for politics, and ensure that we are protecting the integrity of our electoral system.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister is now officially under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner over the awarding of a very lucrative clam harvesting licence to a group with both close Liberal and family ties. Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, remove the minister from the file, and restart the process?

• (1440)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously I am happy to work with the commissioner and answer any questions he may have.

My hon. friend spoke about family ties. It is important that he understand that Mr. Thériault is one of my wife's 61st cousins. He is an employee of the largest Mi'kmaq first nation in New Brunswick and has been for over 15 years. Chief Sock has publicly said that Mr. Thériault was not involved in any way in preparing their submission, and he will not be benefitting in any way whatsoever.

This was about improving access for indigenous communities, and we are proud of that decision.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): And they got a contract, Mr. Speaker, without a boat.

The Liberal government is keeping the Ethics Commissioner hopping. We now know the Liberal member for Brampton East is officially under investigation for bringing his private employer on the Prime Minister's India trip. Why does the PM continue to allow this kind of unacceptable outside work by members of the Liberal caucus, which is, in this case, so clearly just another form of crony cash for access?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the member has addressed this issue. He consulted with the commissioner's office and continues to work with it. We believe that members of Parliament from all sides should work with the commissioner in a co-operative manner, and that is exactly what the member is doing.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the Minister of Finance was found guilty of conflict of interest and the Prime Minister was found guilty four times of conflict of interest for his trip to the Aga Khan's private island, we now learn that it is the turn of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Coast Guard, who is favouring his friends and family in the allocation of fishing licences.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. What is he waiting for to do what any good manager would do, namely take this file out of the hands of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Coast Guard and start the process all over again?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am obviously happy to work with the commissioner and answer any questions he may have.

My colleague was referring to a member of my spouse's family. I think it is important to point out that Mr. Thériault is one of my spouse's 60 first cousins. He has been employed by one of New Brunswick's largest Mi'kmaq first nations for 15 years. Chief Sock has publicly stated that he was not involved in the preparation of the five nations' proposal and that he did not personally benefit from this process.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that this is not an isolated incident. Again, there is the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. It feels like the sponsorship scandal all over again.

Now we can add to the mix the hon. member for Brampton East, who is under investigation for a conflict of interest after inviting a business partner to official events during the Prime Minister's disastrous trip to India.

When will the Prime Minister ensure that his caucus obey the basic ethics and conflict of interest rules that all Canadians expect us to obey here in the House?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has commented on this, he consulted the commissioner's office, and he will continue to work with its representatives and take their advice.

We believe that all members across the way should respectfully work with the commissioner. On this side of the aisle, we will continue to respect the work of officers of Parliament.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the weekend, Saudi Arabia arrested seven women's rights activists, some of whom visited Ottawa for the One Young World Summit in 2016. As Canada continues to ship arms to Saudi Arabia and as the government appears to be celebrating its Canada-Saudi Arabia relationship, who is defending human rights in Saudi Arabia? Is there anyone on the Liberal side who will speak up for the rights of Saudi women to live without fear of their government?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to this House and to the hon. member, yes, there is. I am prepared to speak up for Saudi women, and I think our entire government is.

We are extremely disappointed by the arrests of civil society and women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia. These arrests are inconsistent with the Saudi government's stated commitment to create a more tolerant and open society.

I raised our human rights concerns directly with the Saudi foreign minister in Bangladesh earlier this month. We will always promote the rights of women and girls.

* * *

●(1445)

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, after the Israeli army killed more than 60 Palestinians and injured thousands more, including a Canadian doctor, the Prime Minister finally called for an independent investigation into what happened in Gaza.

[English]

Then on Friday, his ambassador in Geneva opposed a UN resolution establishing an independent investigation.

Which is it? Does the Prime Minister support an independent investigation into the violence in Gaza or not?

[Translation]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear: Canada is a steadfast friend of Israel and a friend of the Palestinian people. We have also been very clear about the fact that the use of excessive force is unacceptable. That is why we support a neutral investigative process to shed light

on the events in Gaza. Canada is prepared to work with its international partners.

[English]

However, in keeping with our government's policy of not supporting resolutions that unfairly single out Israel, we did not support a clearly biased resolution at the UN Human Rights Council.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more Canadians are touched by family law than any other area of law.

Thanks to data from the 2015 census, we know that as many as two million Canadian children live in separated or divorced families, yet family laws in Canada have not been substantively amended for over 20 years.

Can the Minister of Justice please explain how Bill C-78 will strengthen and modernize the family justice system in Canada?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning I was pleased to introduce Bill C-78 and the accompanying charter statement.

We know that separation and divorce impact the lives of millions of Canadians and can be challenging for families, particularly for children. That is why Bill C-78 focuses on the best interests of the child first, reducing conflict, addressing family violence, and encouraging parents and former spouses to meet their family support obligations.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deadline for the Trans Mountain expansion is only nine days away.

Kinder Morgan never asked for tax dollars or a federal backstop. It just wanted an end to ongoing delays and roadblocks.

The Prime Minister's failure of leadership caused this crisis. Canada's former ambassador to the U.S. says it is making Canada a "laughingstock" in the world. It is a massive blow to investor confidence in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister finally admit his failure is jeopardizing future private sector investments in major energy infrastructure in Canada?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we say, as often as the hon. member rises in this House, that this Trans Mountain expansion project is going to create thousands of jobs. It is going to open up our resources to export markets.

No one feels comfortable that 99% of our exports of oil and gas go to one country, the United States, nor do they feel comfortable that we are losing about \$15 billion a year in revenue. Much of that revenue could be used by governments to fund schools, hospitals, and other public services.

Oral Questions

We agree that the line should be built.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, then they need to get it done.

The livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Canadians are at stake in the finance minister's Trans Mountain gamble. Now he plans to risk tax dollars and pension funds, but the finance minister says it will not cost taxpayers, while the infrastructure minister says Canadians will not know how much it will cost until after there is a deal. Meanwhile, Kinder Morgan says there is still no deal. The Liberals promised a law, but time is running out. It is a gong show, and it is undermining Canada's reputation and economic stability.

Why do the Liberals keep driving investment and jobs out of Canada?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the gong show is that the member stands up and after 10 years of failure, there is not one kilometre of pipe to tidewater, to export markets, while the environmental record is poor and the economic record is the worst for Canada since the Great Depression. That is some gong show.

* * *

GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers want to know why the Liberals forced them to suffer through a debilitating grain backlog. For more than a year, the Conservatives offered options to get grain moving, but the only action the Liberals took was to delay their own bill.

Now the agriculture minister has admitted that Bill C-49 will not solve all the problems our farmers are facing, no own motion powers and no true extended interswitching.

Why is the Minister of Agriculture not fighting for the provisions in Bill C-49 that our farmers are asking for so they do not have to face this crisis again?

• (1450)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really cannot believe what I just heard from the Harper Conservatives who for 10 years did not do a single thing to modernize freight rail legislation to allow our grain to move far more effectively. In fact, they have voted against Bill C-49 on every possible occasion, and have caused an additional 11-day delay because they did not want to let it pass on May 11.

The Conservatives call themselves friends of the farmers. It is total hypocrisy.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers know who their true friends are.

Captive shippers in the Maritimes are feeling shortchanged by the Liberal government. The Minister of Transport claims his new long-haul interswitching remedy is key for captive shippers in Canada, but is not extending it to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. All of the Liberal MPs from those provinces have not said a word.

Why is the Prime Minister treating captive shippers in the Maritimes so unfairly?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-49 is a very well balanced bill. If the members look at it and understand it in detail, 90% of the measures are to give shippers an advantage. This is very clear.

The Harper Conservatives obviously have not taken the time to read the bill in detail. If they did, they would also know that Canadian shippers and grain shippers fully understand the value of the bill, which will change things that should have been done decades ago.

* * *

[Translation]

YOUTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, several groups of young people, including the Canadian Federation of Students, are calling for an end to interest on student loans.

The government is unwilling to tackle tax havens and does not mind signing blank cheques to Kinder Morgan, but in 2016-17, it made \$662 million off of students. Why is the government helping multinationals instead of young people? This is kind of absurd.

In 2011, the government eliminated interest for part-time students.

Will the Minister of Youth now eliminate interest for all students?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's prosperity depends on Canadians getting the education they need to succeed. Unlike the opposition parties that campaigned on cuts, our government is investing in Canadians. That is why we have increased the amount of support for Canada student grants by 50%. That is why we are ensuring that no student has to repay their Canada student loans until they make a minimum of \$25,000 a year. We have expanded Canada student grants and loans for part-time students, for students with dependent children. We launched skills boost, which allows older students to access Canada student loans and grants and get the support they need to join the workforce.

We are making post-secondary education more affordable for all Canadians.

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, elected office is not all that complicated. We are there to put the interests of the public first, but the Liberals treat it like an exclusive clam bar for their pals and their friends. Let us look at the investigation into the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans who had his hook in a deal that smells fishier than a Liberal at low tide. I have seen a lot of political red herrings over the years.

I am asking the minister to stop floundering around like some kind of fish in a suit and come clean about that fishy surf clam quota deal, please.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have thought Brian Tobin or John Crosbie were back in the House of Commons. I want to congratulate the hon. member for those series of words. Obviously we are happy to co-operate with the Ethics Commissioner and answer any questions he may have.

Our government believes that increasing indigenous participation in offshore fisheries is a powerful opportunity to advance reconciliation. We created a process to consult industry and indigenous communities. We went to the next steps with a proposal that we think offered the best economic opportunities for indigenous communities.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of border services officers were transferred from the Toronto airport to deal with the influx of asylum seekers at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, which has reached crisis proportions. The Conservative government increased the number of front-line officers by 26%. If the Prime Minister really wanted to deal with this crisis, he would have taken down his 2017 tweet inviting the whole world to come settle in Canada.

What will the Prime Minister say to Canadians who have to wait longer before deplaning in Toronto because officers were diverted to deal with the crisis he sparked?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reports upon which that question is based are mistaken. CBSA resources at Pearson International Airport are up by 6% over the past two years, and seasonal hirings for this summer are already up by a further 26%. Our service standard objective is to have passengers cleared in 20 minutes, and our determination is to meet that standard 95% of the time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is diverting over 800 border agents to prioritize processing for illegal border crossers. Officials say that those legally returning to Canada from family vacations or entering for business trips can expect long delays at the customs lines.

Oral Questions

Therefore, while the Conservatives increased front-line border guard positions by 26%, the Liberals are sending those resources to welcome those who are illegally entering Canada.

When will the Prime Minister close the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people running CBSA, the RCMP, CSIS, and our other security agencies did an extraordinary job last year in managing their resources internally to cope with an unusual situation. They have also taken the necessary steps this year to further manage that situation.

I am very pleased that the Minister of Finance has offered to CBSA, and we have obviously accepted the offer, \$72 million to augment our resources in the coming year.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, terrorist, Abu Huzaifa has admitted to authorities, the CBC, and *The New York Times* that he left Canada to join ISIS. ISIS officials in Syria confirm that he joined their terrorist group.

I would like to remind the Prime Minister that it is illegal under the Criminal Code to leave Canada to join a terrorist organization. It is illegal to be trained as a terrorist. It is illegal to be an ISIS enforcer and executioner.

Abu Huzaifa is the worst of the worst, and committed war crimes. When will the Prime Minister finally take action, put public safety first, and arrest this terrorist?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's police and security agencies work to the highest professional standards every day to keep Canadians safe. That is true in this case and in every other case.

With respect to terrorist travellers returning to Canada, our priority is to investigate, arrest, charge, and prosecute. Operations are active and ongoing. Obviously, we do not broadcast our plans to suspects so they know what our tactics are.

I would note that under the Harper government some 60 terrorist travellers returned to Canada. Not one was charged.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Durham will come to order.

The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Government of Canada received a request from the province of British Columbia to support its efforts in responding to seasonal flooding. As a result, members of the Canadian Forces were dispatched to a number of places throughout the province to include the Okanagan, Grand Forks, and the Lower Fraser Valley.

Could the Minister of National Defence inform the House how our Canadian Forces members are contributing to the flood mitigation effort?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Kelowna—Lake Country for the support he has provided to his constituents during this difficult time. The safety of Canadians is our number one priority, and our government stands ready to offer assistance during times of crisis.

Yesterday I was in the Okanagan with my colleague to tour the affected area. I also met with some of the 600 outstanding Canadian Armed Forces members on the ground to thank them for their help with evacuations and sand-bagging.

We are focused on helping residents, and we will stay in the region as long as we are needed.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six staffers from the Prime Minister's office apparently needed a lot of help waking up for a convention in London, Ontario, seeing as they spent nearly \$600 on coffee. I am sure you will agree that the Liberal Party spending taxpayer money like water is nothing new, but Canadians deserve an explanation.

How could the government possibly spend \$600 on coffee for six people?

• (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the coffee my colleague mentioned was purchased for the members of the media who were covering the cabinet retreat. A clerical error was made in the proactive disclosure process, and that is currently being corrected.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would not normally intervene in the relationship between broadcasters and Quebec's many production companies, but since it was the heritage minister who drew up the agreement with Netflix in absolute secrecy, I would like to ask her if she is satisfied with her precious partner's approach. Forcing production companies to convince anglophone American bigwigs of the relevance of

producing francophone stories for Quebec in English is like a throwback to the 1950s.

Is this the kind of colonialism that was redacted from the Netflix deal she has been hiding from us for months?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of supporting our artists and artisans. We also know that the way Canadians access content has changed over the years. That is why we have invested a historic \$3.2 billion in culture.

It is also why we are going to modernize our laws, especially the Broadcasting Act, to better support our artists in the digital era. The Netflix investment is a transitional investment. This five-year agreement guarantees investments that will support our creators while we are modernizing our laws and programs.

* * *

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, Montreal hosted the OECD social policy forum and ministerial meeting. The forum brought together ministers from the 35 OECD countries, as well as over 350 Canadian and international representatives from business, trade unions, academia and civil society.

Could the Minister of Social Development tell the House how this forum promoted policies that give everyone a real and fair chance to succeed?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate and thank the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for his hard work on behalf of his constituents.

At the end of last week's historic meeting, the Secretary-General of the OECD had this to say about Canada: "The leadership shown by the Prime Minister and the Canadian government on social policies that benefit everyone is an inspiration to other OECD members."

Canada is proud to be a member of the OECD, and Canada is pleased to show other OECD countries how strong and sustainable economic growth can benefit everyone.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recent violent confrontations along the Israel-Gaza border have unfortunately resulted in many tragic deaths. One fact is undeniable. The riots that led to these deaths were deliberately orchestrated by the terrorist group Hamas. Unfortunately, last week in a statement, the Prime Minister ignored the involvement of Hamas and instead unilaterally blamed Israel, the most democratic, pluralistic nation in the region.

Will the Prime Minister apologize for his poorly worded statement and join me in condemning the role Hamas played? If so, what took him so long?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada, and I am sure all Canadians, deplore the violence in Gaza that has led to a tragic loss of life and many injured people. Reported use of excessive force and live ammunition is inexcusable.

It is imperative that we establish the facts of what happened in Gaza, especially given the shooting of Canadian doctor, Tarek Loubani. That is why Canada is calling for an independent investigation to ascertain how the actions of all parties concerned contributed to these events, including reported incitement by Hamas.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly is unanimously calling for a single-tax system in Quebec to save Quebec taxpayers time and money, but the government has refused to implement such a system because too many jobs would be lost. This confirms what everyone already knows: there is a duplication of work.

This is costing taxpayers \$500 million a year, not counting the \$150 million Quebecers pay every year to file a second, useless tax return. It is time to put an end to this waste of money.

Will the government allow Quebec to collect all taxes?

● (1505)

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ensuring Canadians receive the best possible services from the agency is a priority for us. The agency has more than 4,700 employees in Quebec and is an important economic engine in cities such as Jonquière and Shawinigan. It currently collects taxes from all provinces, territories, and many indigenous governments.

Our government is putting a number of measures in place to facilitate tax filing for all Canadians. We are always open to working with the Quebec government to ensure that service is offered to Quebecers.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Liberals do not care about the expense, but \$500 million for a duplication of services is a waste of money and a waste of human resources.

The minister or her parliamentary secretary could loan those employees to payroll services, which seems to need all the help it can get because of Phoenix. They could have those employees investigate companies that are running schemes to hide their money in tax havens. They could have those employees register all the most vulnerable seniors for the guaranteed income supplement.

Why are the minister and her parliamentary secretary insisting on throwing taxpayers' money out the window against the unanimous will of Quebec?

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, ensuring Canadians receive the best possible service from the agency is a priority for us. The agency has more than 4,700 employees in Quebec and is an extremely important economic engine in cities such as Jonquière and Shawinigan. It currently collects taxes from all other provinces and territories and many indigenous governments. Our government is putting a number of measures in place to facilitate tax filing for all Canadians, and we are always open to working with the Quebec government to improve the services offered to Quebec people.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, last week the government announced that it will indemnify the Trans Mountain expansion. Kinder Morgan had contracted to build most of the project using steel pipe manufactured in Regina, which is cleaner and safer than offshore steel. To support Canadian jobs, will the government make its indemnity conditional upon any potential investor in Trans Mountain upholding the existing commitment to use Canadian-made steel?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the contracts have already been awarded. This is very important for Canadian industry, but it is particularly important, I might say, for his home province of Saskatchewan and the city of Regina. We are very pleased that the economic development benefits for this project will extend right across the country, and notably in Regina and in Saskatchewan.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The Speaker: It being 3:09 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 666)

YEAS

Members

Albas
Aldag
Alleslev
Amos
Angus
Arseneault

Albrecht
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arya

Government Orders

Aubin	Ayoub	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-
Badawey	Bagnell	Soeurs)	
Bains	Barlow	Monsef	Moore
Barsalou-Duval	Baylis	Morrissey	Motz
Beaulieu	Beech	Mulcair	Murray
Bennett	Benzen	Nantel	Nassif
Bergen	Bernier	Ng	Nicholson
Berthold	Bezan	Nuttall	O'Connell
Bittle	Blaikie	Oliphant	Oliver
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	O'Regan	O'Toole
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block	Ouellette	Paradis
Boucher	Boulerice	Paul-Hus	Peschisolido
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard	Peterson	Philpott
Bratina	Breton	Picard	Poileuvre
Brison	Brosseau	Poissant	Quach
Caesar-Chavannes	Calkins	Qualtrough	Rankin
Cannings	Caron	Ratansi	Rayes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Reid	Rempel
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger	Richards	Rioux
Champagne	Chen	Robillard	Rodriguez
Choquette	Clarke	Rogers	Romanado
Clement	Cooper	Rota	Ruimy
Cormier	Cullen	Rusnak	Saganash
Cuzner	Dabrusin	Sahota	Sajan
Damoff	Davies	Samson	Sangha
DeCoursey	Deltell	Sansoucy	Sarai
Dhillon	Di Iorio	Saroya	Scarpaleggia
Diotte	Donnelly	Scheer	Schiefke
Dreeshen	Drouin	Schulte	Serré
Dubé	Dubourg	Sgro	Shanahan
Duclos	Duguid	Sheehan	Shields
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Shipley	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Dusseault	Dzerowicz	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand
Easter	Eglinski	Simms	Sohi
Ehsassi	El-Khoury	Sorbara	Sorenson
Ellis	Erskine-Smith	Spengemann	Stanton
Eyolfson	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Stetski	Strahl
Falk (Provencher)	Fast	Stubbs	Sweet
Fillmore	Fisher	Tabbara	Tan
Fonseca	Fortier	Tassi	Tilson
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)	Tootoo	Trost
Fraser (Central Nova)	Freeland	Trudeau	Trudel
Fry	Fuhr	Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Gallant	Garneau	Vandal	Vecchio
Garrison	Généreux	Viersen	Virani
Genuis	Gerretsen	Wagantall	Warawa
Gill	Goldsmith-Jones	Warkentin	Waugh
Goodale	Gould	Webber	Weir
Gourde	Graham	Whalen	Wilson-Raybould
Grewal	Hajdu	Wong	Yip
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Hehr	Hogg		
Holland	Housefather		
Hughes	Hussen		
Hutchings	Iacono		
Jeneroux	Joly		
Jones	Jordan		
Jowhari	Kang	Boudrias	Fortin
Kelly	Kent	Pauzé	Plamondon
Khalid	Khera	Ste-Marie	Thériault— 6
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Kusie	Kwan		
Lake	Lambropoulos		
Lametti	Lamoureux		
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)		
Laverdière	LeBlanc		
Lefebvre	Leslie		
Liepert	Lightbound		
Lloyd	Lobb		
Long	Longfield		
Lukiwski	MacAulay (Cardigan)		
MacGregor	MacKenzie		
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney		
Masse (Windsor West)	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)		
Mathysen	May (Cambridge)		
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	McCauley (Edmonton West)		
McColeman	McCrimmon		
McDonald	McGuinty		
McKay	McKenna		
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)		
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès		
Mendicino	Mihychuk		

NAYS

Members

Fortin
Plamondon
Thériault— 6

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS[*Translation*]**TRANSPORTATION MODERNIZATION ACT**

The House resumed from May 11 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Friday, May 11, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the Senate amendments to Bill C-49.

• (1520)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 667)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bittle	Blair
Bratina	Breton
Brison	Caesar-Chavannes
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
DeCoursey	Dhillon
Di Iorio	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)	Freeland
Fry	Fuhr
Garneau	Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardie	Harvey
Hébert	Hehr
Hogg	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	LeBlanc
Lefebvre	Leslie
Lighthbound	Long
Longfield	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Mendicino	Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morrissey	Murray
Nassif	Ng
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Peterson
Philpott	Picard
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Rota	Ruimy
Rusnak	Sahota
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schieffe

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Sgro
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Government Orders

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Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Tootoo
Vandal
Whalen
Yip

NAYS

Members

Albas	Albrecht
Allison	Angus
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boucher	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Calkins	Cannings
Caron	Choquette
Clarke	Clement
Cooper	Cullen
Davies	Deltell
Diotte	Donnelly
Dreeshen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Fortin	Gallant
Garrison	Généreux
Genus	Gill
Gourde	Hardcastle
Harder	Hughes
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière
Liepert	Lloyd
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
Masse (Windsor West)	Mathysen
May (Saainch—Gulf Islands)	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Moore
Motz	Mulcair
Nantel	Nicholson
Nuttall	O'Toole
Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Plamondon	Poilievre
Quach	Rankin
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Saganash	Sansoucy
Saroya	Scheer
Shields	Shipley
Sorenson	Stanton
Ste-Marie	Stetski
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Thériault
Tilson	Trost
Trudel	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vecchio
Viersen	Wagantall
Warawa	Warkentin
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Wong
Zimmer— 123	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères on a point of order.

• (1525)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: that the House call on the Government of Canada to negotiate with the Government of Quebec to allow the Government of Quebec to administer its own income tax returns.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

[English]

ELECTIONS MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make certain consequential amendments, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 16 minutes.

There are three minutes and 20 seconds remaining in questions and comments following the speech of the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question I would like to ask the member is in relation to this new pre-writ period that is being established. In that period of time, the government is looking to put restrictions upon what political parties can spend, but I have noticed that what the government has not done is to place the same restrictions on itself in terms of government advertising, ministerial travel, and announcements. It claims it has done that, but those restrictions begin on July 23, almost a month after the restrictions on other political parties. Liberals are clearly giving themselves a bit of an advantage, and I wonder if the member would be open to closing that loophole that exists and gives their party some advantage.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pre-writ period changes we are envisioning, which run from June 30 until the writ is actually dropped, until the writ period proper, are intended to apply to political parties. These are changes to the Canada Elections Act and they do not impact government. That is where that matter stands.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned before that when I look at the legislation, all in all I see it as legislation that builds upon the strength of our Canada Elections Act, which is well recognized around the globe. In fact, Elections Canada, as an independent organization, is thought of by many countries around the world—as I am sure you are aware yourself, Mr. Speaker—as an independent body.

When we look at the incorporation of many of the recommendations in this legislation, would my colleague not agree that they would strengthen Canada's democracy?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Mr. Speaker, the answer is a very simple “yes”. A number of measures within this very weighty bill are focused on the Canada Elections Act to help make election financing more transparent, to increase the access of eligible Canadians to the ballot box, and to in general allow Elections Canada to educate Canadian people on where, when, and how to vote. This is a tremendous step forward, one that we might not have had to take if it were not for the Fair Elections Act of the previous government. I see in Bill C-76 that we are not only making up the lost ground but covering some excellent new ground as well.

• (1530)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today on the debate on Bill C-76. I know we have had a lot of conversations in this House of Commons about the Liberals and their plans for debating this bill or the ideas behind the bill.

As this House knows, Bill C-33 was languishing at first reading for 18 months. We then finally had the government bring in Bill C-76 on April 30. That was precisely during the month when the acting Chief Electoral Officer had informed the government and all members of Parliament that he wanted to see the changes on behalf of Elections Canada put in place in April 2018 so that Elections Canada would have the opportunity to implement the changes in time for the 2019 election. Here we are. It is now well past the halfway mark in May, and we are debating the bill at second reading.

I am by no means making an argument that the House should not have its look at this legislation. My main criticism is that the government has been sitting on this file for so long and has really left it to the eleventh hour to bring in major reform of our electoral system. The Liberals have made arguments that this issue has been looked at by the procedure and House affairs committee and that these concepts have been debated. I acknowledge that this is the case, but debating issues and policies at the procedure and House affairs committee is very different from actually looking at a piece of legislation, especially one that is as large as this particular bill. To dump this bill into the House of Commons on April 30, to have its first-day debate on May 10, then May 11, and then today, and then to suddenly expect the House of Commons to do its due diligence, when the government was aware all along of the constraints it was facing, really does a grave injustice to the people of Canada and to the members of this House who are here representing the people of Canada.

The other thing that we in the NDP are fairly critical of is the fact that there were some missed opportunities in this piece of legislation. For example, we all know that this Prime Minister, both in the 2015 election campaign and in this House, repeated the promise that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post. That is a missed opportunity.

Government Orders

We had a special committee on electoral reform. I had the honour of sitting on that committee when it was going through the Atlantic provinces, and I remember hearing from Atlantic Canadians, both experts in the field and normal, everyday Canadians, who took time out of their day to appear before our committee in Halifax, in St. John's, in Fredericton, and in Charlottetown, to give us their views on what electoral reform should be. I thought the report by that special committee, which was formed by this House upon the recommendation of my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, was quite comprehensive and reflected a majority of the views of Canadians.

The way we reached a consensus was that all the parties on the opposition benches tried to work out our differences. I know that my Conservative colleagues have had a few problems with some of our ideas on electoral reform, but we in the NDP, the Green Party, and the Bloc Québécois decided that to arrive at a compromise so that we could have a committee report backed by the majority of the members on that committee, we would agree to hold a referendum to give Canadians the ability to decide whether they wanted to go past first past the post into a new system that would perhaps be something closer to proportional representation. It is just a fact of life here in Parliament that the governing party usually gets in with 39% of the vote. The ironic thing is that 60% to 61% of Canadians actually vote for members of the opposition parties, yet our voices continually lose out when it comes to votes in this place.

● (1535)

On the subject of missed opportunities, my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway mentioned this. There was an opportunity to go back and extend the media blackout so that the citizens of British Columbia who had yet to cast their votes would not be unduly influenced by a broadcaster announcing the results before the polls closed. We talk about fairness in this place. Where is the fairness for British Columbia when people are lining up at 6:30 or are just about to leave the house to go vote, and CBC comes online and says that the election has already been won and that we are going to get a Liberal majority? That is not fair to the people of British Columbia.

I acknowledge that we cannot do anything about social media. We cannot do anything about people on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram announcing the results, but we can at least make an effort so that our major broadcasters are not dumping this on the news and providing those kinds of updates. That was a missed opportunity.

I also think that in some ways, we could have provided an opportunity for a per-vote subsidy. In the NDP, we have always talked about this. The argument made is that we should not have public financing of our political system. Guess what, folks. When people make donations, especially generous donations, they are eligible for tax credits, which they can then apply, so we are actually giving people a reward from our public funds. Political parties are eligible for reimbursement of a certain percentage of their eligible election expenses. Our tax dollars are already being used, but they reward people with the means to make donations.

Before I continue, I want to notify the House that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Continuing in that vein, a lot of my constituents struggle to pay the bills. Usually these families are living day to day and paycheque

to paycheque, and they do not have the means to invest \$100 in a political party. They certainly do not have the means to invest \$1,500.

Through this system, political parties have to chase the money to stay competitive. I would like to see a system in which votes are put more on an equal plane and political parties are, in fact, rewarded for going after and getting the vote out rather than for going out and seeking the highest donor to fund their election expenses.

There are some good things. I will use the last bit of my speech to talk about the limit that would be placed on election length in this particular bill. I very much appreciate that the government has adopted my idea, because I introduced Bill C-279 in 2016, which sought to place a cap on the length of elections of a maximum of 46 days. I got this idea from the 2015 election, when we all had to go through the marathon 78-day campaign. I had a lot of constituents asking me why we needed an election that was 78 days and saying that they could easily make their decision in 36 days or 40 days. Obviously, the intent was to lengthen the election to such a point that money became an incredibly huge factor.

When we look at our neighbours to the south, the influence of money in politics is an insidious thing and can be a slippery slope. I am very glad the government has taken my private member's bill and sucked it up into Bill C-76 to make it part of this legislation. I am very glad to see that.

I am also glad to see that we will be registering future electors from age 14 to 17 and that we will allow child care expenses to be reimbursed. I would like to see more single parents have the opportunity to run as candidates. If we are truly going to be a representative House, we have to start reaching out to members of our society who do not often get that opportunity. We had an opportunity with the member for Burnaby South's bill, which would have rewarded political parties for trying to establish equity.

I see that my time is almost up. I will conclude by just acknowledging that the NDP will be giving its support in principle to this bill at second reading. We, of course, know that there will be a lot of hard work ahead in committee.

● (1540)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my friend. I certainly agree that we should have gone further in reforming political financing rules and restoring the per-vote subsidy. Another good idea would be to make voting day a statutory holiday, if we are really concerned about encouraging participation. That would be a small step we could take to encourage participation. I wonder what the member thinks about such an addition to the bill.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, that is a fantastic idea. I believe the bill would move voting day to a Sunday. That would be a great step. Many Canadians have busy lives, and by just dumping an election on a Monday, we are constraining the amount of time. People have the legal right to go and vote, but often when trying to juggle busy school schedules, work schedules, and all the chores around the home, it can be incredibly difficult to try to make it to the polls by 7 p.m. I welcome the hon. member's suggestion to move it to a Sunday, a day when people have more ability to make it to the polls.

Government Orders

Perhaps that is something his Liberal colleagues can find a way to discuss and perhaps support at committee. They will have the deciding vote, so I look forward to him advocating with his caucus colleagues on that front.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague from the Liberal benches. I think he has intelligent and unconventional ideas, but I wonder if in this case, I could take the opportunity to disagree with him and to encourage my friend from the New Democrats to share my disagreement here.

Just this morning, the new Chief Electoral Officer, Stéphane Perreault—I assume he will win the support of the House—was testifying at the procedure and House affairs committee. He pointed out to us that in a number of countries, Canada being one following this pattern, more and more people are voting prior to election day at advance polls, or in some cases by mail. It appears to him, and I agree with this, that the best way to increase participation is to better facilitate that advance participation. He pointed, for example, to such things as allowing Elections Canada to send packages to voters electronically and allowing them to then vote by mail in response. I wonder if that would not be the best thing to focus on, if our goal is to ensure that we are trying to raise the level of participation by Canadian voters.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, all the work of the procedure and House affairs committee should always be looked at by all members of the House. I have sat on that committee on a few rare occasions when I have had to substitute, and I know the subject matter it deals with is always of great importance not only to the House but in some cases to Canadians at large.

I think many of my colleagues, in all parties, would agree with me that encouraging people to get their voting complete in the advance polls is a great way to remove the stress of waiting until E-day to actually find a way to juggle it. I welcome these kinds of proposals, such as a combination of moving the voting day to Sunday, when people do not necessarily have to be concerned about work or other obligations, and including ways to make advance voting easier. I am sure the committee will be looking at that and trying to include it in the final version of the bill so that when it is reported back to the House, we have some great things to work with.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I agree with much of what he said, especially that it is important to shorten the length of the election campaign. We could talk about financing and also how to increase the number of women in politics.

In view of this consolation prize and the Liberals' retreat from their promise to completely overhaul the electoral system, I have a question that I would really like to ask my colleague. What part of this bill does he think the next Chief Electoral Officer of Canada will be able to implement for the 2019 election?

• (1545)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, that is a valid question from my hon. colleague. That is one of the main concerns we have been raising. The government has been aware of these problems for so long. It let Bill C-33 languish for 18 months after first reading. It

is no secret that Elections Canada has consistently told the House and the government that the changes need to be implemented by a certain time to be ready for 2019. That was April 2018, last month. I am not sure what the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to do, but let us hope that at least we can get some of these measures put in place in time.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for stepping in at the very last minute with a very articulate and thoughtful 10-minute speech, as there was some confusion in the House as to who was next. He is a rookie no more, if he is able to come forward like he did on such a complicated bill as the one we have before us, Bill C-76. It is 350 pages long. It deals with a whole suite of issues with regard to our elections here in Canada.

The process by which the Liberal government got us here has been as much of a challenge and raised more questions than provided answers to Canadians, in terms of who is actually running things over there. When I say “things”, I mean important things like how we have our elections here in Canada.

Let me start by saying that the Liberals promised at the time of the last campaign two and a half years ago to undo some of the changes forced through Parliament by the previous Conservative government in what it called the Fair Elections Act. Many Canadians came to know it as the unfair elections act, simply because in many aspects it sought to do what is often called in political circles “voter suppression”. It did so by changing the standards by which Canadians are able to vote, changing the ID requirements that seemed, both on the surface and in substance, to target certain groups of Canadians—those of lower income, first nations, and young people—in terms of voting ID requirements, in banning the Chief Electoral Officer from doing things like educating Canadians about how it is important to vote, and with a number of other issues that came out as we went to the polls in 2015.

For example, the previous government realized that it had a bit more money than the other parties. One little loophole in our elections act was to have an incredibly long election period. By doing that they essentially doubled the amount of money that parties could spend in that election.

I never really heard a good rationale as to why we needed a 78-day election, as if Canadians could not sit and listen to the views of various candidates in their local ridings, listen to the national leaders, hear a couple of debates, and then make up their minds. Even in a riding like mine, which is 330,000 square kilometres, we have never found it all that much of a struggle in 35 to 40 days to be able to get out and meet people.

The government did that. The previous Conservative government did that because they could spend more money. They had more money so they spent more money. It did not work out in the end, but it was an attempt that is now being fixed by Bill C-76.

Government Orders

How we got here is a serious concern. The promises made then by the newly minted Liberal government were to undo much of what had been done with regard to vouching, education, and all of these other issues by the previous government, and it introduced a bill to that end. The government said, "Here is our bill. It's going to get rid of the stuff that Stephen Harper did". Then it sat on it for 28 months.

We were writing to the government. We were calling the government and the democratic institutions minister out, both the previous one and the current one, asking where the bill was. Tick tock. We had heard from Elections Canada, which runs our elections, that it needed any legislation and major changes to be passed as of April this year, not introduced but passed through the House of Commons, through the Senate, and to receive royal recommendation, so that it could implement the changes. Any delay would risk the changes coming to fruition in time for the next election.

It made sense. Elections Canada needs that time to train its workers, to educate Canadians, especially if there is anything big coming. Well, Bill C-76 is big. It is 350 pages long. The Liberals themselves call it a "generational change". If it is a generational change with regard to our elections, one would think there would be some urgency to introduce it in time so that the Chief Electoral Officer and all the people who work during our elections would have time to implement it. However, the due date for the homework came and went.

The day after the Liberals introduced this omnibus bill, this generational change, they still had not hired a Chief Electoral Officer, by the way, a role that hung vacant for 18 months. Apparently they finished interviews last October. This morning I met the nominee for the first time and we asked him about the process. Yes, he had interviewed back in October and he got a call in February. It was a nice little chat. The first time he heard about an actual nominee was the first time we as parliamentarians had heard about a new Chief Electoral Officer from the pages of the *Toronto Star*.

• (1550)

The Liberal government wanted to leak its nominee, so it did, and then two weeks later, that nominee was gone. Then there was a new letter from the Prime Minister announcing a new nominee, and we asked, quite rightly, what happened to the other guy? Did he do something wrong? Was he no longer qualified? He seemed qualified. There was no explanation from the Prime Minister or the minister.

Many people describe our democracy and elections like an ecosystem: all the rules are in place and there is a person bringing the rules forward and enforcing them. We kind of want it to be like a great hockey game. At the end of a great hockey game, we do not really picture the referees, do we? They did not really factor into it too much. They called penalties fairly for both sides and administered the game. That is what we want the Chief Electoral Officer to be like. We want him to have a clear and fair set of rules for everyone to play by, calling out the bad actors when they do something wrong, but we do not really want them front and centre. We do not want the rules to be the question; we want the competitors, those seeking the vote and the hope of Canadians, to be the story. That gets very difficult if major rule changes are introduced at the last minute. If we are hiring the referee at the last minute, we

make the whole job of running an election in Canada, which is difficult already, even harder.

With a Liberal government that had blatantly betrayed a promise that was repeated 1,800 times to Canadians that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post, a government that has already lost the favour and trust of many Canadians when it comes to democratic voting issues, one would have thought there would be a whole bunch of urgency and importance placed on something like this to try to regain some of that trust, the basic trust in the competence of the government to bring in rules, the basic trust in the government's willingness to work with the other parties. We have had a long tradition in Canada, regardless of which government is in power, that whenever we make major changes to the rules that govern our democracy, there would be not just an attempt but also a standard to achieve consensus among the major political actors, so that Canadians could understand that there was no bias in the rules and that the rules were not put in place to favour one party over another. The way to do that is to consult meaningfully, to seek and achieve the agreement of each of the parties.

Unfortunately, that tradition, which is not required in law but is something we should consider, was broken by the previous Conservative government. It wanted to bring in changes that the other parties and Canadians broadly did not like or agree with, and rather than negotiate and work with us in the full light of day, the then Harper government forced the debate through Parliament. It shut down debate time and time again, and the Liberals screamed as loud as anybody else about how unfair that was. We have a raft of quotes from Liberals in this House from that time.

The Liberals in fact introduced an opposition day motion condemning the Conservative government for doing it, and voted for that, saying, "How dare they shut down debate in Canada's Parliament around our election laws." What did we see last week? The Liberals introduced a motion to shut down debate about changes to our election laws, as if they had not read their own speeches, as if they had not participated in the election that got them here, in which they said they would be different and would not do the terrible, nasty tricks that Stephen Harper did, and we believed them. We believed them because it had been so blatant and they had a mandate to be better, to be different from the previous government.

Government Orders

I should say before my time runs out that there are, of course, a number of things in this bill that New Democrats like: the reinstatement of vouching; creating the future electors list; helping folks with disabilities; helping veterans vote freely and fairly; making education part of the mandate of the Chief Electoral Officer, and not just how, where, and when to vote, but why to vote, especially encouraging young people. The Liberals make it so hard sometimes. They make it so hard to agree with them sometimes. Sometimes they do the right thing, but they do it so late, so poorly, and they do not talk to anybody. There is this strange sense of entitlement of their, one that I think they have to clean out their system. I do not know if it is possible for them to do that, because it has been baked in there, for some of them, for generations.

They have to understand that for the health of our democracy, for the health of that ecosystem, to grow and be nourished, we need to listen to all sides. We need to have respect for all sides, whether we agree with them or not. We need to come up with election laws that Canadians can trust to be non-partisan and to be fair for all actors involved, so that when Canadians cast their votes, they know that the rules are fair, the referee is fair, and that they can freely and fairly decide who will speak on their behalf.

• (1555)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP very admirably voted against the changes made in the previous government's Fair Elections Act. We would reverse those changes, and the NDP supports this. In fact, when discussing the reversal of the Fair Elections Act changes in *The Hill Times*, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley said that “These are all important things.”

During the committee's study of the Chief Electoral Officer's report following the last federal election, the NDP voted in support of many of his recommendations. Bill C-76 would implement about 85% of the recommendations of the CEO, which make up about 80% of Bill C-76.

Today in the procedure and House affairs committee, the chief electoral officer said that his department was ready to implement this proposed act if we could pass it before the summer recess. Is the member and his party, consistent with their past actions, ready to commit to helping us get this done so that Elections Canada can start implementing these important changes this summer?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Halifax has to be careful about the testimony he heard this morning. I may have misheard him, although I do not think I did, but the CEO did not place the summer time limit on implementation. He was asked very specifically about things like vouching and some of the changes in here and if his department was getting to work on them. His answer was yes, because Elections Canada saw the introduction of some of Bill C-76 18 months ago and strangely thought that the government was going to introduce the bill any time, as we did too.

Therefore, I wish my friend had shared his newfound sense of urgency with the rest of government, because for 18 months the NDP was knocking on the door asking, “Where's the bill?” Yet for 18 months we heard nothing from the Liberal cabinet or the Prime Minister's Office, which is strange because they were pushing an open door on this one, saying, “Let us get this stuff done.” Then at the last minute, actually after the last minute, after the deadline from

Elections Canada, the Liberals come in with an omnibus bill and say it is panic time.

However, there are a lot of things in the bill that we do not understand. There are things in the bill that the minister who introduced it did not understand. When asked about specific components of the bill, he said that, no, they were not in there but could be introduced with an amendment. Then, three days later, he had to correct himself and say that these things actually were in the law but had not known that they were. Therefore, if there is confusion on the part of the minister who introduced the bill, my friend can understand why we want to look through it carefully, because these are laws that will govern us for maybe a generation. It is unfortunate that the panic on the Liberals' part is now putting a panic on Parliament.

Our job is to get this right. Our job is to make sure that we can introduce it in time, but we are not going to get things wrong, because this matters. This matters to us deeply as New Democrats.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend spoke about many of the different issues with this omnibus bill. However, one issue he did not mention that I would like to get his thoughts on is the issue of foreign funding of Canadian elections.

We spoke about the Dogwood Initiative. The NDP may not be as concerned about that as we are, but maybe he could just think of the Koch brothers every time I say the Dogwood Initiative.

When the Dogwood Initiative is getting money sent to it from other entities outside Canada, that money can then be used to influence the outcome of Canadian elections. That can happen as long as the money is formally transferred outside of the election period. That looks a lot like foreign entities influencing the outcome of Canadian elections. When we have foreign groups actively involved here who may have some interest in Canada that is not aligned with the interests of Canadians, whether that is stopping economic development or acting in the interests of an authoritarian regime that wants to influence outcomes in Canada to have a government that is more friendly to it, then, obviously, it is something we should be concerned about.

Would the member agree with us that the bill needs to contain meaningful protection against this kind of foreign influence in Canadian elections, and specifically against money transferred outside of an election period that may be used during an election period?

Government Orders

•(1600)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I was thinking of scenarios. Say there were a foreign oil company in Texas that came forward and said, “We demand this of the federal government”, and then gave the federal government an ultimatum, a deadline, and said that if it did not do this by May 31, there would be consequences. That would be a strange level of foreign influence. I am curious as to whose interests are actually being satisfied. Is it Texas or is it Canada? In my book, when companies of foreign nature come forward and say, “You must ship your raw bitumen to China or else”, I ask, whose interests are we talking about?

To the member's question, yes, the Koch brothers do donate very heavily to things like the Fraser Institute and others. All the Fraser Institute has to do is to shift out its core funding, receive the foreign funds from the Koch brothers who are no friends of Canada, and simply then run the election on that money. It is a loophole that we are concerned about. It is a loophole we have asked the government about. However, up to this point, the government has not answered how it is planning to close that loophole.

This is the kind of thing we want to talk to Canadians about. We want to take this bill out on the road and talk to Canadians who are concerned about the things the member mentioned. We want to make sure that Canadians' voices are heard and that this not stay here in the bubble in Ottawa and the echo chamber that the Liberals hope to potentially create.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères if I may.

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

[*English*]

The unfair elections act was a bill enacted by the Harper Conservatives. It was introduced on February 4, 2014 by the minister of democratic propaganda. *The Globe and Mail* named this the worst legislation in 2014 and said it was a low point of Stephen Harper's government: “It was a partisan attack on Canada's election rules that ignored fact [and] mocked expertise”, as well as common sense.

The Conservatives want to take away our right to vote. They want to restrict who can vote only to subsets of Canadian society. A right to vote is not like an ID for driving a car or obtaining firearms, which is a privilege. It is a fundamental human right that is protected, or should be protected, around the world, and a fundamental Canadian value.

In Winnipeg—Centre, we have 1,400 homeless people. Under the old rules, they mattered not. However, they do matter, because they are also Canadian citizens. They are often the poor and disadvantaged, and they should have an equal right to vote, like any other Canadian. I had the opportunity of meeting many homeless during the last federal election in 2015. In fact, I campaigned in many of the homeless shelters. While I could not pay for ID cards for many of my fellow citizens, I did nonetheless encourage them to go out and vote. I was surprised and encouraged to learn that some had taken the opportunity of raising funds themselves to be able to afford and buy an ID card from the Province of Manitoba, which costs \$20.

For homeless people, this is a substantial investment in democracy and their own well-being.

I remember being with my kids, enjoying a Sunday afternoon, when I was stopped in the street by a gentleman who asked me what we were doing for policies. He reminded me that he had voted in the last federal election and wanted to know what we were doing. People across Canada were disheartened by the Harper Conservatives' attack on democracy. It gave rise to institutions like Idle No More and Indigenous Rock the Vote, which happened across Canada. Organizations and groups of citizens came together to promote the idea of voting in order to take back their rights from people who did not want them to exercise that right.

As a government, we are committed to continuing this legacy. Canada's democracy is made up of each and every citizen, and what they have to say about the country they seek to create. The measures in Bill C-76 are bold and important steps along this path of empowering Canadians and strengthening our electoral process, which have benefited from the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer after the 42nd general election.

Voting must accommodate people. It must accommodate people in their lives, sometimes very busy lives. Bill C-76 would help Canadians vote when and how it works for them. The measures contained within the bill would reduce wait times at polling stations. I remember that in Winnipeg—Centre there were times the lineups stretched outside the polling station because there were so many people who had not voted before. They were concerned about the attacks made by the Harper Conservatives, not only on voting but also the environment, the criminal justice system, and many fundamental Canadian values, ignoring who we are as Canadians.

Bill C-76 would also increase advanced polling to 12 hours a day so that Canadians can easily vote ahead of election day. It is going to make voting more convenient by letting people use their voter information card, as was previously the norm. In the 2011 election, Elections Canada conducted a pilot project on using the voter information card as a voter ID. Elections Canada, the independent organization that runs our elections, recommended that Canadians be able to use their voter information card. The findings were hugely important. Among students, the cards were used by 62% of voters. In seniors residences, the number was 73%. On first nations reserves, they were used by 36% of voters. It is clear that this measure is important for helping Canadians participate in our democracy.

Government Orders

•(1605)

Based on a Statistics Canada study in 2016, 172,000 Canadians in our country could not vote because they did not have the requisite ID they needed. I am proud that our government is going to attempt to address this, to ensure that no one's vote is stolen by an unfair elections act. The changes we are introducing will also reintroduce vouching, so that a voter can allow another Canadian to vote as well.

As has been the case with many initiatives undertaken by our government, this does not represent a radical departure from the norm, but rather the return to a standard Canadian practice and ideal. Undoing the unfair parts of the previous government's unfair elections act means that more Canadians will be able to participate in our democracy.

Participating by voting is more difficult for some people than others, and that is not fair. The men and women in uniform, who risk their lives to protect the rights of all Canadians, deserve to have their right to vote protected. I remember how difficult it was sometimes to vote in our federal elections when I served with the Canadian Armed Forces. Bill C-76 introduces changes that would give Canadian Armed Forces members greater flexibility in how they cast their ballots, while also making sure that it is a secure process, whether they are voting at home or abroad.

Additionally, Bill C-76 would extend the right to vote to approximately one million Canadians who live abroad, ensuring that they, too, have their say in our democracy, for they are also Canadians.

We are also removing barriers to Canadians with disabilities by increasing assistance at polling places and by allowing voting at home. Bill C-76 would provide incentives for parties and candidates to make their activities accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. I am very confident that all of my colleagues in the House would welcome new resources for positive and common-sense steps such as having flyers with Braille and ramps at campaign offices. These are small changes that would have a huge impact for our fellow Canadians.

I am proud that while our government is taking steps to empower voters today, we are also looking to the next generation. There can be no question that the young people of Canada are engaged. They are shaping our future, and they should not let the Conservatives take away their right to vote.

The creation of a register of future electors in Bill C-76 would allow Canadians between the ages of 14 and 17 to register with Elections Canada, which would allow them to be added to the voter list automatically when they turn 18. This would have a huge impact on our youth. Provisions in Bill C-76 would make it possible to contact approximately 1.5 million young people as part of civic education initiatives in high school. We need to give power back to fact and reason, and the Chief Electoral Officer knows more about the electoral system than any of us lowly MPs.

Currently, we are 23rd among OECD countries in voter turnout, and encouraging habitual voting among the next generation of young Canadians and indigenous Canadians is a noble and meaningful step forward.

Just as Bill C-76 looks to our youth as the future of our democracy, it also addresses changing realities and what our world will look like tomorrow. Cyber-threats pose a real and serious danger to the integrity of the democratic process everywhere, and Canada must be prepared to meet these challenges with strength and determination to keep our elections secure and transparent.

The bill would also take action to deal with the so-called political bots, software designed to shape people's political opinions online. By banning such malicious practices during elections, we would ensure that Canadians have the confidence that our process is open and based on the truth.

While making sure that elections are fair, our government is also committed to protecting the privacy of all Canadians. Political parties would now be required to have a policy to protect any personal information they collect. This means that parties would have to explain what information they collect and how they will use it. It would also provide a contact person for voters to contact if they have concerns about their privacy.

Democracy is made up of people. It is the voice of our neighbours, colleagues, and friends. On election day, I hope that more Canadians will go out to vote, as they did in Winnipeg Centre, to turf out politicians who have old ways of thinking and who have ignored them for too long, and to cast a ballot for actual change and people who will stand up and defend their rights day in and day out.

Democracy is the heart of our communities and the heart of our country. I know that Bill C-76 would strengthen Canada's democracy, not just for today but for years to come.

•(1610)

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important that parties and politicians keep their promises to the electorate. One of the promises the Liberals made during the 2015 election was that they would end the use of time allocation and closure for bills. During the debate on the Fair Elections Act, multiple members on that side made comments about the fact that there should not be time allocation or closure used for election legislation. I wonder if the Liberals are going to keep their commitments on that front.

If his government does use time allocation and closure and tries to rush this through in those kinds of ways, without making sure that all parties' voices are heard, will the member vote against the use of those measures on this piece of legislation?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated, time and time again, that we have a lot to work on in this country due to what has been left to us, the legacy of the previous government.

Government Orders

We have a lot of legislation that we need to ensure gets enacted. We have a busy legislative agenda, whether it is looking at the Criminal Code or investing in the environment and infrastructure. Because of that very busy legislative agenda, and because of the games that are played in the House, unfortunately sometimes time allocation becomes necessary. While it is not the preferable way to move forward, if we want to ensure that we enact the promises we made to Canadians, it is sometimes necessary.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to follow up on that. My friend was not in the previous Parliament, but when the Conservatives made almost the identical argument he just made with respect to changes to the Elections Act, his leader and his party, especially the member for Winnipeg North, explicitly made the argument that when it comes to changing the Elections Act, the parliamentary tradition, the democratic tradition in Canada, is that it is never done unilaterally and never forced through Parliament.

The Liberals actually moved an opposition day motion condemning the Stephen Harper government for doing it. Of course, the member for Winnipeg North and many members who now sit in cabinet, including the Prime Minister of Canada, voted for that motion, condemning Stephen Harper for ramming these changes through Parliament.

Does the member understand that this crisis is of the Liberals' own making? They sat on many of these changes for 18 months. They knew the deadline was coming. Elections Canada had notified them a year and a half ago that it needed these changes to pass through Parliament, all of Parliament, the House and the Senate, prior to May 1. The Liberals knew this deadline was coming. They did not act.

The member for Winnipeg North can spin as much as he wants, but people pay attention to these things, and we have the quotes that the government should not use time allocation when it comes to our electoral laws. That is what Liberals said in opposition. Now they sit in government and say that they were forced to do this. We ask, "By whom?"

It was the Liberals who introduced the bill a year and a half ago, and it was the Liberals who did nothing, despite New Democrats and others saying, "Where is the bill? Where is the law? The deadline is coming." The Liberals were silent, and now we have this.

Does the member understand that when it comes to election rules, this is a most sacred place in the House, and that seeking consensus and not unilateral action should always be our standard, nothing less?

• (1615)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I was not in the House before the last election.

From what I can tell, there are an awful lot of procedural games being played here in the House of Commons by all opposition parties. From what I understand, there were a lot of games being played by the third party in the House of Commons when it was the official opposition.

Unfortunately, if every member wanted to debate every bill, we could be here all the time. I have no problem with sitting until midnight, or even running the House of Commons 24 hours a day,

but will the opposition show up and actually do that? Personally, I will be here if I am required to speak. Obviously, I am here to speak to the government on behalf of my citizens of Winnipeg Centre and to give their vision to the House of Commons.

I would encourage not only the opposition but all members, if they wish to speak to the legislation, to extend the hours until two o'clock or three o'clock. Let us run this place until we have heard everyone speak.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite, who is generously sharing his time with me.

It is a great pleasure to speak today to Bill C-76 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. Many subjects are debated in the House, and when we discuss democracy, and changes in how we operate and how members of the House are elected, I believe that it is a crucially important debate for everyone here. Furthermore, it is even more important that we take the time needed to debate these matters and that everyone have the opportunity to speak as long as necessary, because our democracy is at issue.

My party studied the bill thoroughly, but since we do not have much speaking time today, I will have to focus on just a few main themes.

Before I begin my more in-depth analysis, I would like to touch on the few things we think this bill gets right. First of all, Bill C-76 undoes some of the damage the Conservatives did with Bill C-23, such as preventing the Chief Electoral Officer from educating voters about the voting process and encouraging people to vote.

I think virtually all of us can agree with the basic principle that more voter participation is a good thing. The Chief Electoral Officer's job is to make sure that as many people as possible can vote. Preventing people from voting undermines and delegitimizes our democracy. On that, this bill is a good first step.

In addition, the bill gives the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections some powers that were also taken away from them under Bill C-23.

Bill C-76 contains positive measures to encourage members of the armed forces, young people and persons with disabilities to participate in the electoral process. We also welcome the government's efforts in this regard. Finally, we are particularly supportive of limiting the duration of the election campaign to 50 days, because that is what the Bloc Québécois asked for during the last federal election in 2015. In fact, the Conservative government used a loophole in the fixed election date bill to greatly extend the duration of the election campaign in order to circumvent the spirit of the legislation put in place. We had not seen such a long election campaign in hundreds of years. It did not make sense. We needed something that made sense. We had to frame that. For this reason, we are pleased to see the 50-day limit, because it is still a reasonable limit. We very much welcome these provisions and congratulate the government on having retained the position and vision of the Bloc Québécois on this issue.

Government Orders

Now, I want to talk about one of the biggest problems with Bill C-76. The problem is not necessarily what is in the bill, but what is missing from it, and some measures in the bill are not particularly interesting.

I want to point out four areas on which we disagree. If I have the time, I will then talk about what we plan to do later on. The first thing that we have a problem with is third-party involvement in the electoral process. The government is proposing greater oversight of third-party involvement in the electoral process. We think it is a good idea to have greater oversight of third parties, except that this oversight would allow for a higher spending limit for third parties, even though there is greater oversight during the pre-election period. There is also greater oversight over the money going to and from these third parties.

The government is over-complicating things. We do not think that third parties should be influencing the election by spending money during the electoral process. We think that is a bad thing. The political parties that spend money to get elected are the ones that should be involved in the electoral process. We are already supposed to be regulating spending and fundraising for political parties, so third parties should not be spending money to get other parties or a specific party elected. It is dangerous to get third parties involved since they could find roundabout ways to use money to support one party and undermine the others.

• (1620)

Interested parties could draw inspiration from what is happening in the United States with super PACs. We do not think that is good for democracy. We need to make much simpler rules that categorically ban third-party intervention in electoral spending. We hope the government and the other parties will be open to that idea.

Voter identification is another issue that is especially important to us. We got a chance to discuss it in 2015, during the last election campaign. Bill C-76 would have been a great opportunity to move the discussion forward, but unfortunately, it will not require Canadians to uncover their faces to vote, which is something the Bloc Québécois has been calling for for a long time. Some parties have supported us in calling for that. Candidates from other parties have even broken ranks to side with us.

In 2007, Michel Guimond introduced Bill C-465, which required every elector to identify himself or herself with his or her face uncovered before voting. When Bill C-23 was being debated in committee, MP André Bellavance, who is now mayor of Victoria-ville, also introduced some amendments specifically requiring voters to uncover their faces. Unfortunately, at the time, the NDP, the Conservative Party, and the Liberal Party banded together to veto the Bloc Québécois's proposal that Canadians be required to uncover their faces in order to vote. The end result was that during the 2015 election people showed up to vote dressed any which way. Some dressed up as clowns, Star Wars or Star Trek characters, or monsters, while others put on hockey gear. It was absolutely disgraceful.

The electoral process must be serious, secure, and secular, since our government must be secular. It therefore seems obvious to us that Canadians should vote with their faces uncovered. We are very pleased that the Conservatives seem to have had an awakening in

this regard. We hope that they will remain consistent in their views on this.

Another issue that we care about, and I hope I will have time to mention them all, is political party financing. Something must be done because not everyone can afford to pay \$1,500 to attend a cocktail party. After the Conservatives did away with the public funding for political parties implemented by Jean Chrétien in response to the sponsorship scandal, the Liberals promised that they would bring it back. However, once they took office, it seems they changed their minds. Perhaps they realized that there were a lot of people who wanted to make donations. Why then would they allow the other parties to compete on a level playing field? It is important to have a level playing field. The parties should receive funding based on votes, not just on the depth of their party supporters' pockets.

Another issue that we care about is government advertising. The government promised to do something about that, but there is nothing in this bill in that regard. We know how this works. We have seen a lot of quasi-partisan or questionable advertising in recent years. The government has a duty to take action on this issue.

There is also no framework for the leadership debate in this bill. It seems pretty clear to us that all parties represented in the House should have the opportunity to participate in the leadership debate. The bill also does nothing to reform the voting system. The government has broken its promise in that regard.

Finally, the Liberals are trying to let foreigners keep the right to vote. It seems obvious to us that the people who should be able to vote are the people who live here, in a riding in Canada, and not people from other countries. We understand the case of members of the armed forces or people who are temporarily out of the country. However, people who have been out of the country for years do not have the interests of people living here at heart. Those people should just vote in their new country, if they so wish.

• (1625)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, even if I do not agree with him entirely. This bill does not address the issue of government advertising, but the President of the Treasury Board did.

My colleague also spoke about the funding of political parties. One thing addressed by Bill C-50 was the transparency of fundraising, which is done by all political parties in the House. Will the members of my colleague's party support that proposal? Will they publicly state who attends their fundraisers?

My colleague also seems worried about the cap on donations, whether it is \$1,500 or \$100. I would like to know if he has a figure in mind or whether he would simply prefer to restore the former system where political parties received a per-vote subsidy, which would help the Bloc Québécois.

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Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, it is not that restoring public funding for political parties will favour the Bloc Québécois. It will favour democracy. There is a difference between the deep pockets of political party donors and the people who have an interest in contributing to a political party for reasons that might go against their personal convictions. This is one way to clean up politics.

In Quebec, public funding for political parties has changed things quite a bit. The maximum donation is capped at \$100, but we are open to it being \$200, \$300, or \$400. The important thing is that donations are capped in order to prevent people from having undue influence because they arrange to make donations together in order to get favours. We have a problem with that.

In Quebec, we have a fine example of a solution that would help resolve this situation and it would not cost taxpayers any extra. At the end of the day, we would have a healthier democracy where we do not spend our time chasing after money. Obviously, when donors say that they will no longer donate money to us if we do not do this or that, we tend to listen to them.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the hon. member's point about outside influences and a healthier democracy. I would like to understand his opinion with respect to third party influence and the fact that literally millions of dollars can flow into, in this case, Liberal Party coffers in advance of that writ period. I would like to know whether the member thinks that is fair to our democracy and whether that helps Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

There have been all kinds of scandals since the beginning of this term. There was something fishy about how the government obtained its funding. For example, a Chinese bank was approved, and within the following 48 hours, the government's coffers were thousands of dollars richer. A large number of Parliament Hill lobbyists for web giants fund the governing Liberal Party.

In our democracy, the party in power must avoid financial influence, since people are always going to appease a group that gives them a lot of money. The more we allow large donations, the more influence these groups will have. To maintain a healthy democracy, we must limit individual and corporate donations to political parties, and in particular to the party in power, since these donations can sometimes be made through the back door.

• (1630)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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, Public Services and Procurement; the hon. member for Drummond, Rail Transportation; and the hon. member for Lakeland, Natural Resources.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada

Elections Act. There is no shortage of criticism that can be made of this deeply flawed piece of legislation, but given the limited time that I have, I am going to confine my remarks to the issue of foreign funding, foreign influence, and foreign interference in our elections.

The sanctity and integrity of our elections and the integrity of our democracy depend on Canadians and Canadians alone determining the outcome of elections, without the interference of foreigners. This is something Canadians have taken for granted. Indeed, historically, our elections have not had outside forces and outside influence interfering and attempting to influence Canadian voters. That has changed, and there was a drastic change in the lead-up to the 2015 election.

During the 2015 election, various foreign entities, largely U.S.-based, radical, anti-oil sands organizations, had the express purpose of wanting to see Canadian energy kept in the ground, just like Gerald Butts, the Prime Minister's principal secretary, who also wants to see our energy kept in the ground. Those organizations funnelled a lot of money to registered third parties, which in turn used those foreign monies to promote the Liberal Party of Canada and to work to defeat the Conservative government of the day. We are talking about millions of dollars that were funnelled from the U.S. to registered third parties.

For example, the Tides Foundation funnelled \$1.5 million. Of that \$1.5 million, about \$700,000 was transferred to a Canadian shell entity based out of British Columbia, which in turn sent the money to Leadnow, which of course worked very closely with the Liberal Party during the last election. Another \$700,000 or so of the Tides money was transferred directly to eight registered third parties.

The Tides Foundation was hardly the only example. There were many U.S. sources of funding that went to a number of third party groups that were active during the 2015 election.

In light of that kind of influence and interference, many Canadians might scratch their heads and ask, "How is it possible that millions of U.S. dollars were rolled into registered third parties, and these third parties were able to use that money for all manner of political purposes during the 2015 election and get away with it?" The answer is largely because of loopholes that exist in the Canada Elections Act.

Perhaps the biggest loophole in the Canada Elections Act provides that there is no regulation whatsoever of foreign monies funnelled to registered third parties six months and a day prior to the issuance of a writ. Those monies can be transferred to a third party, and then the third party is free to use them for political purposes to directly influence Canadian voters.

• (1635)

For example, if a foreign entity transferred a million dollars to a registered Canadian third party six months and a day before the writ, those monies would be treated as having mingled into the funds of that third party. That third party would be free to use those dollars, and they would be treated as though they were Canadian dollars, notwithstanding the fact they clearly came from a foreign source.

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Now, what does Bill C-76 do to close this massive loophole? The answer is, absolutely nothing. It does absolutely nothing to close this loophole. It leaves it wide open. It gives free rein to foreign interests and foreigners to come in and influence the next election.

However, to the degree anything has changed, the government has made the situation worse, because under the existing Canada Elections Act, the period regulated is six months prior to the issue of a writ. Under this legislation, the pre-pre-election period that will be completely unregulated goes up to June 30. In other words, it will be closer to an election that foreign interests can donate to third parties.

As well, the government has doubled the amount third parties can spend during the election and provided that they may spend a million dollars in the pre-election period. We are talking about foreign money, and the government is free to simply transfer it over. It is really quite astonishing.

While we can blame the foreign interests and the third parties that have taken advantage of loopholes in the Canada Elections Act, there is another culprit. It is called the Liberal Party of Canada, which actively collaborated with third parties that were taking these foreign monies. I believe the Liberal Party had all the information available to it, knew this was taking place, and turned a blind eye to it. Now, under the guise of pretending to do something about foreign influence and interference in elections, the Liberals are saying that it is A-okay: just as long as the money is donated before June 30, third parties are free to take as much foreign money as possible.

While it is bad enough we had large amounts of U.S. money during the last election, who is to say that in the 2019 election it will not be Saudi, Chinese, or Russian money? Canadians should be alarmed and outraged. Quite frankly, Canadians deserve better from the government. Canadians deserve elections that are free from foreign influence and interference. Instead of doing that, Bill C-76 maintains a loophole that legitimizes and sanitizes this. For the sake of the integrity of our elections and of our democracy, Bill C-76 needs to be defeated out of hand.

• (1640)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I heard the member opposite say “absolutely nothing” a couple of times, I was reminded of what the previous Conservative government had done to strengthen democracy in Canada, which was absolutely nothing.

The member talked about the opportunity for third parties and money being generated by third parties. I have heard this come up quite a bit, because I have been in the House for the majority of the day, listening to the debate. What does the member propose? What would he do? What legislation would he bring in to prevent this from occurring?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the legislation could be very simply amended to prohibit foreign funding and to regulate this kind of money coming in. However, the government is not interested in doing that.

We learned today that, in fact, the Prime Minister has ordered Elections Canada to move forward with Bill C-76 as written, so the government is not interested in amendments. It is not interested in fixing the problems with this bill. It is prepared to ram it through

with its usual contempt of this House. Under the guise of pretending to do something about foreign interference and influence, the government is giving it the green light, probably because it recognized that it benefited the Liberal Party during the last election and is hoping it can get away with it one more time.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague would comment on the provision in the bill that would once again allow the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada to inform and educate Canadians about the electoral system, something that was taken away in the so-called Fair Elections Act that the Conservatives brought in in 2014. Many Canadians thought this was an egregious attempt to keep Canadians ignorant. Why should we not want to educate Canadians about the electoral system that is at the heart of our democracy?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to unfairness, and we have heard Liberal members talk about unfairness. What is unfair is seeing millions and millions of dollars of foreign money funnelled into registered third parties, which have used that money to try to influence how Canadians vote. That is a loophole that absolutely needs to be closed, and we are not going to back down. We are going to keep up the pressure in defence of the integrity of our elections, and in defence of the integrity of our democracy.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always in the House, my colleague speaks passionately and with a lot of knowledge. One of the issues that is increasingly concerning, and I know he spent a lot of time on this, was the aspect of foreign influence. The cynic in me notes that the Conservative Party of Canada is able to fundraise, as we saw in the last quarter, two times the amount of the Liberal Party, and that the Liberals are not dealing with this foreign influence of money coming in and ripping democracy out of the hands of Canadians. Does the member believe it is because of their ineptitude and their inability to raise funds?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil is exactly right. What it is also about is creating an uneven playing field. It is all about rigging the system as much as possible to benefit the Liberal Party. Therefore, the Liberals are going to maintain a loophole and expand it for foreign financing under the guise of doing something. They are then trying to impose restrictions on political parties in terms of how much money they can spend during the pre-writ period, while the ministers can continue to freely travel and the government can continue to advertise, all to the benefit of the Liberal Party.

I guess desperate measures are needed in desperate times, and for the Liberal Party, looking at its last fundraising quarter, its \$3 million to our \$6 million, it is pretty desperate over there.

Government Orders

•(1645)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make certain consequential amendments, also known as “the bill to change the rules to favour the Liberals because they cannot fundraise competitively, and other consequential amendments”. However, that is just the working title.

I appreciate that the minister for electoral reform has come back to the House. The job done previous to her by the treasury board president has been a mess. Now the treasury board president has shown once again that he is not up to the job, whether it is watching Bill C-58, the Access to Information Act, or his complicity in ignoring reports that Phoenix was not ready, or his attempt to pass off his \$7 billion estimate slush fund as transparency.

The acting Chief Electoral Officer had made it 100% clear to the government and Parliament a year ago that he would need legislative changes completed by April 28 in order to have time to be ready for the fall 2019 election, not starting debate and not introducing the legislation by April 28, but completely finished by April 28, through the House and Senate. However, here we are. Instead of having legislation debated and passed through the Senate by now, the Liberals are now just starting.

Let us go back a bit. Following the 2015 election, Elections Canada provided a list of recommendations for changes. The procedures committee was looking at these recommendations for a report to bring back to the House. Then out of nowhere the government dropped in our lap Bill C-33, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. Before the report from the committee was completed, the Liberals introduced a bill with incomplete information.

The Liberals rushed in a flawed bill, ignoring the procedures committee, and promptly did absolutely nothing for an entire year. If we add in the inability to appoint a permanent chief elections officer, the cynical Bill C-50 to distract from their cash for access scandals, and the desire to create a debates commission, we have typical Liberal ineptness. Well done, mission accomplished.

How did we get here? We went through the sham consultations a year and a half ago on the electoral reform. It was the same consultation meant to change the voting process from first pass the post to a system that would of course favour the Liberals. This is from their website, and it is still up, “We are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system.”

Henry James, considered by many as one of the greatest novelists in the English language, has said, “To read between the lines was easier than to follow the text.” If we read between the lines of “We are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, we get it and only if the Liberals get the system they want, one that would guarantee Liberal re-election, then 2015 will be the last under the first-past-the-post system. Further reading between the lines we also see, “If we don’t get the system that favours only the Liberals, then we’ll abandon the plan.”

It is funny that when we go to the Liberal mandate tracker it shows electoral reform as not being pursued. It is not a broken promise, or thrown into trash or not being pursued. If we go down a bit further on the mandate tracker and look under “Balance the budget”, which is also in their mandate letter to balance the budget by 2019, it says “Underway - with challenges”. There are tens of billions of added debt. Maybe the budget will be balanced by 2045, but we do not know as the finance minister will not answer.

The Liberals are adding \$43 billion in debt from when it was supposed to be balanced in 2019 in the mandate to the end of where the budget shows in 2022-23, with \$75 billion of added debt over the period from being elected to 2022-23. This is what they call “Underway - with challenges”.

At the operations committee, we asked representatives of the Privy Council Office about this. Privy Council runs this mandate tracker website. We asked them why they would put out this information. It was very clearly a lie and misinformation. They said that the finance department told them to. I feel badly for the Privy Council having to sit at committee and defend such disingenuous information.

•(1650)

Let us go back to Bill C-76 and look at some of the measures in the bill to change the rules that favour the Liberals, because they cannot competitively fundraise, and other consequential amendments. It allows the Chief Electoral Officer to authorize the voter information card as a piece of ID. This is not a voter ID card, as some people are trying to pass it off as; it is a voter information card. People can head to the polls with that piece, which was mailed to them, and vote.

Here are some fun facts from the last election. Non-Canadian citizens were sent the card in the mail, even though they were not eligible to vote. Cards went out with the wrong names. People were directed to the wrong polling station, sometimes 100 kilometres away. There was a 1.5% error rate on the 26.5 billion cards that were sent out, which means 400,000 people got cards with wrong names, wrong addresses, and so on.

In the 2011 election, before that one, three-quarters of a million Canadians moved during the 36-day writ period.

Elections Canada says that the voters list that it draws the cards from is just a snapshot in time. We are going to base the entire integrity of our election on a snapshot in time? Elections Canada says that it cannot even check the voters list to ensure that those on the list receiving the cards are actually Canadians.

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To summarize, hundreds of thousands of incorrect cards are going out and three-quarters of a million people are moving during a standard election period. Over a million people potentially could have the wrong card or have someone else's card. Elections Canada is stating that there is no way to check if the cards are going out to Canadian citizens. The integrity of democracy is based on what Elections Canada calls a "snapshot in time".

This bill would allow Canadians living abroad to vote regardless of how long they have lived outside the country and whether they intend to return. Right now it is five years. It is being challenged before the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has not even ruled on this yet and the Liberal government will bring in changes to allow anyone, regardless of how long they have been out of country, to vote.

Three million Canadians are living abroad, wonderful people, spreading the word of hockey in Canada around the world. However, should we allow those who have no intention of ever returning to Canada to help decide our policies in our country? The Ontario Court of Appeals, which ruled on the five year law, stated that it was democratically justified because it preserved the social contract between voters and lawmakers.

I know the Liberal government loves social licence, social licence for pipelines and for everything else, but I wish it would respect the social contract as has been decided by the Ontario courts.

There is no requirement that any of these expats have to vote in the last riding they lived in or even have visited one of the ridings. My brother, Bob, who left the country about 18 years ago, lives in New Jersey. He has never once stepped foot in my riding of Edmonton West. Should he be allowed to vote in my riding, even though he has never stepped foot in it and left Canada about 18 years ago? I have to wonder how many ridings across Canada in the last election were settled or won by less than 1,000 votes.

Concerted efforts by unfriendly foreign regimes could easily swing ridings by those with no skin in the game. Again, should people with perhaps no roots here and no family here and who perhaps pay no taxes and have not stepped foot in Canada for 10, 15, 20, or 30 years be deciding our foreign policy or what communities are getting funds for infrastructure? Should those who have zero intent of returning be deciding who sits in these chairs in the House?

I mentioned my brother. I love him dearly and still feel bad about knocking his teeth out playing hockey years ago, but I do not think he should be eligible to vote in Canada. He left many years ago.

I want to talk about the ID issue. We heard a lot of misinformation and saw hand-wringing throughout this debate about voter suppression under the Fair Elections Act. Let us look at the truth and the facts. Under the Fair Elections Act, we had an 11.5% increase in voter turnout in the 2015 election. It surged.

Here are some of the IDs that people could use: certificate of citizenship, citizenship card, Indian status card, band membership card, Métis card, old age security card, hospital card, CNIB card, credit card, debit card, and employee card. There is over 60 valid pieces of ID that can be used. People can even get a note from a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter to use as ID.

The bill would allow a maximum of third-party spending to soar through the roof, to allow Tides Foundation in the U.S.A., and Russian influence in Tides, to influence our election here. It is wrong. We have seen the issue of Facebook data misuse and Russian hacking. The bill would allow money from these groups to influence our vote.

• (1655)

We have seen the government try to change the rules when it falters. The Liberals changed the fundraising rules and they tried to change our rules in this place when they found the opposition to be too effective. They tried to change how Canadians voted to rig the next election. Now the government is botching this bill.

Bill C-76 is an omnibus of a mess and should be dismissed.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate all day. I have heard a lot coming from the other side of the House. We heard about the last election and how the voter turnout was huge. With respect to the opposition, perhaps the Canadian public was extremely disappointed with the previous government and as a result came out in droves. Nonetheless, we might disagree on that.

All day the opposition has been throwing red herrings out about one thing or another and why it is so bad. The one that really strikes me is about voter fraud increasing as a result of returning to voter cards. This has never happened. There has never been widespread voter fraud, and we have heard that from the experts over and over.

I have asked numerous other members this question today. Nobody has given me a direct answer and nobody has confirmed in the affirmative. Would the member please tell me of an instance where he is aware of widespread voter fraud that has influenced an election as a result of using voter cards?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, that question is a rather ridiculous one. The supposition from the Liberal government is that we do not have a lot of fraud and therefore we do not need laws to prevent fraud. We do not have a lot of car break-ins in the parking lot here, but that does not mean we should get rid of all the laws banning car break-ins. Just because there is a limited amount of it does not mean we should allow it.

For the government to say that because there is a small amount of it, we should not have any laws to prevent it is a ridiculous insinuation and it is wrong.

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[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I admit that it is not very often that I agree with my Conservative colleagues, but I have repeatedly said in the House that I appreciate the clarity of their positions. It makes the debate that much easier. These days, with the Conservatives and what we might call the new Conservatives, I admit that I have trouble keeping track. My question is quite simple.

When it comes to amending legislation as fundamental as the Canada Elections Act, do today's Conservatives, if we can call them that, still share the opinion of the Harper Conservatives that we can change such fundamental legislation through a simple government majority as the Liberals are about to do and as the Conservatives did in the previous Parliament?

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, we are here to discuss Bill C-76, not something that has gone on in the past.

The issues with the bill are very clear. The Liberals would blatantly allow an increase in foreign meddling in our election, which would serve none of us in the House and would not serve Canadians. The bill would allow a lot of issues that are blatantly wrong. What is even worse is that on such an important issue, the government is shutting down debate. It is wrong and we will continue to fight that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know from the industrious research by Vivian Krause that U.S. companies donate to organizations in the United States, which in turn fund organizations in Canada that provide resources to the Liberal Party during an election, and particularly the last one. If some of these companies are resource-based, for example oil companies, and United States companies are great beneficiaries of the Liberal policy not to allow pipelines to be built, could it be that the refusal of the government to allow pipelines to be built is a sort of payback, a thanks to the companies in the United States that donate to the organizations that in turn funnel money to campaign in favour of the Liberals?

• (1700)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. One of the biggest problems with the bill is that it would do nothing to limit foreign donations. U.S. treasury officials have stated that Russian money has made its way into the Tides Foundation in the U.S. It has given over \$40 million to Tides Canada for the Dogwood initiative, which has fought against Alberta energy and Alberta pipelines.

Here we have the Russian government sending money to the U.S. and that same money being funnelled into Canada to hurt Canadians. The bill would do absolutely nothing to address that. It is a disgrace and the Liberals should address it in the bill.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill C-76, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. Since elections are at the heart of our democracy, this is clearly an important bill for debate in this House.

The bill is a belated response to the Liberals' election promise to reverse some of the egregiously anti-democratic aspects of the

Conservative government's so-called Fair Elections Act of 2014. I say "belated" because the acting Chief Electoral Officer gave the government a deadline of the end of April for any election reform legislation if changes were to be made in time to be implemented before the October 2019 election. That deadline was for passing legislation, not for introducing it, so we have clearly missed the boat there.

Speaking of delays, it has taken the government two years to name an official Chief Electoral Officer. Since it is such an important position, one would think the government would make that a high priority.

This bill is another in a series of very large bills that the current government has tabled. At 230 pages, it is very much an omnibus bill. It absorbs Bill C-33, which was tabled 18 months ago and never acted on. Even the minister who tabled it seems to be unclear as to what is in it. It is ironic that the Liberals complained about the Fair Elections Act from the previous Conservative government and its propensity for omnibus legislation, when here they are doing the same thing.

Now I would like to touch on some of the provisions included in Bill C-76.

It limits the writ period of an election to 50 days, thus eliminating the chance for another marathon election campaign of more than 70 days, such as that which we were subjected to in 2015. That is great news. I would like to thank the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for suggesting this to the government in the form of his private member's bill.

Canada is far behind other countries in gender equity, and it is past the time when we should be taking concrete steps to improve this situation. The bill allows candidates to report child care expenses, but it falls short of promises to allow more candidates from equity-seeking groups to take part in our elections. The member for Burnaby South put forward his private member's bill, Bill C-237, which would have strongly encouraged parties to increase the proportion of female candidates in future elections. Unfortunately, the government voted that bill down and failed to include its provisions in this bill.

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I have been to many schools to talk about government and the electoral process, as I am sure many members here have, and I have always been impressed by the keen interest of many young people in civics. The questions I get at school talks are often much more informed than those that I get at open town halls. Therefore, I am happy to see that two parts of this bill encourage young people to get informed and to get involved in the electoral process. First, Bill C-76 would allow the registration of future electors between the ages of 14 and 17. This simple act has been shown in other jurisdictions to increase the proportion of young people who vote after they turn 18. That would be a good thing, since young people do not generally vote at the same rate as older adults. Second, the bill removes the ban on public education programs conducted by the Chief Electoral Officer through Elections Canada. Why this ban was put in place in the so-called Fair Elections Act is beyond me. However, I welcome the opportunity for Elections Canada to inform and educate Canadians on our electoral process.

Bill C-76 also brings back the process of vouching to allow electors without proper ID to vote, as well as allowing the use of the voter ID card for the same purpose. These were disallowed under the Fair Elections Act in an effort to solve a non-existent problem of voter fraud—of which there are vanishingly few, if any, examples—by creating a much more serious problem that inhibited Canadians, particularly disadvantaged citizens, from voting at all. We should be encouraging all Canadians to vote, and this will be a step in the right direction at last.

Also included in the bill are provisions to allow more expatriate Canadians to vote, effectively doubling that number. I think this is a very welcome addition.

While the bill institutes some rules around third party activity during elections, it does allow spending of up to \$1 million in the pre-writ period for third parties, which is hardly a restriction, considering that parties are allowed only \$1.5 million. As well, there is no limit on how much individuals can donate to third parties involved in election campaigns. If we want to get big money out of our election campaigns, this is not the way to do it.

• (1705)

I want to talk a bit now about the big thing missing from this bill, the elephant in the room, or maybe it is the elephant that is not in the room. Of course I am talking about real electoral reform. The Liberals, the NDP, and the Green Party all campaigned on a promise that 2015 would be the last federal election run under the first-past-the-post system. Over 60% of Canadian voters supported this idea. For many Canadians, it was the most important promise made in that election campaign. Canadians were tired of elections that gave parties with less than 40% of the vote 100% of the power under majority governments. The Harper government was an example and the present Liberal government is another, so creating a new system was very popular.

Unfortunately, once the Liberals were in power, they forgot about that promise. They created a committee that travelled the country and worked very hard to hear from as many Canadians as possible. The committee heard from electoral experts from around the world on best practices from other countries. The committee tabled a report calling on the government to create a proportional representation

system after consulting Canadians with a referendum. The Minister of Democratic Institutions asked all MPs to go back to their ridings and hold town halls to hear what their constituents had to say on the subject. We in the NDP caucus took that request seriously and did just that. We not only held town halls but also handed out questionnaires at the meetings to tally the preferences of the attendees. I sent similar questionnaires to every household in my riding.

We found that over 80% of respondents from across the country preferred a proportional representation system. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister did not like that answer. He did not like the committee's recommendations and announced that he was going to break his promise on electoral reform. The Minister of Democratic Institutions even insulted the committee by saying it did not do the hard work expected of it. The Liberals say they want to increase the participation of Canadians in the electoral process and that Bill C-76 is their answer to this, but the incredible cynicism of their lack of action on real electoral reform has already had a negative effect on how Canadians feel about their elected representatives and whether it is even worth voting in the next election.

I was talking on the phone with a constituent a while ago on a separate issue, and at the end of the conversation, she said how nice it was that the MP was calling her directly. She told of how she and her husband engaged their children in the election campaign of 2015. They listened as a family to the debates, they read the campaign platforms, and in the end the parents asked their children who they should vote for. She did not say who they decided to vote for, but she did say that electoral reform was the issue that the children felt was the most important to them. They wanted every vote to count and were devastated when the Prime Minister went back on his solemn election promise. She even worries that their children might never vote when they are old enough. That was exactly the opposite effect that she and her husband were hoping for when they got them involved in the discussion.

I will close by saying that I support many of the reforms contained in Bill C-76, but it falls short in so many other ways: in its size, in the short amount of time we have had to debate it, and above all in the complete lack of real reform. Let us get rid of big money in elections and get back on track to getting rid of first past the post so that every vote will count.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that New Democrats have some concerns and reservations with respect to the legislation, but they have, in essence, indicated they will be supporting it, and I see that as a positive thing.

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We see that the legislation would provide additional strength to Canada's democracy. Many of the things we see in the legislation are part of a series of recommendations from Elections Canada and have been thoroughly debated in committees. In fact, in much of the debate here this afternoon and this morning, we could have just read from *Hansard* the debates we had four years ago when Stephen Harper brought in the fair elections legislation, the issue of fairness. At the end of the day, this is a topic that has received a great deal of debate, discussions, questions, and so forth, at least for 90% of what is in the legislation.

To what degree does my friend and colleague across the way believe we should do what we can collectively, as much as possible, to pass this legislation so we would have a stronger, healthier democracy?

• (1710)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, the NDP is in favour of many of the provisions of the bill, but it is a big bill and we have not had time to review it, as I mentioned. Even the minister who tabled it was not clear on things. Some of the information given out when it was tabled was contradictory, so I think we need to spend the time to look at this bill carefully.

This is the heart of our democracy, and if the Liberals want us to pass the bill to get it enacted in time for the next election, they should have acted a lot earlier. They could have acted 18 months ago. They tabled another bill very similar to Bill C-76 but never really moved forward on it. Therefore, when they say that we are in a panic now, that they want all hands on deck and want the NDP to support the bill unquestioningly, we would ask them what the rationale is when they had 18 months to do this.

We want to get this right. Hopefully we can get some of these parts enacted in time for the next election, but it does not mean that we should blindly support everything in the bill, because we have not had time to look at it. We need to treat this subject very seriously.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion on the question of identification. I am on the Elections Canada website, which identifies acceptable forms of ID that can be used to provide proof of address, and it is a very long list. I will not read it in its entirety for the member, but it includes things like a letter of confirmation of residency; a letter of stay; an admission form or a statement of benefits from a student residence, senior residence, long-term care, shelter, or soup kitchen. It includes things like a library card, hospital card, blood donor card, and credit card.

It is hard to imagine that there is anyone who could not get one of these things. There may be some people who do not have them right now, but a homeless person can ask a soup kitchen or shelter for a letter confirming his or her identity. There are so many options.

Would the member agree that perhaps there are people who think they do not have the required ID, but maybe it is because someone has not given them the right information about how many ways they can currently demonstrate their identity?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, I agree that there are a lot of ways for electors to prove their identity. The fact is that a lot of Canadians do not know this. They do not go to the website. They get their electors' card in the mail and they go to the place written on the

card to vote. If they are turned away there because they do not have proper identification, then a lot of them go home discouraged and do not bother coming back. I think that is one of the main reasons people want to use that card. It is because they do not know any better. They think this card gives them the right to vote, and this bill would return that right to them.

As so many people have said here today, give us an example of someone who has shown up with that card and voted in a fraudulent way, has voted twice, or was not eligible to vote. When voters arrive, there is a list to which their card is compared. We all know this. We all know how scrutineering works, and there are safeguards in place to deal with that.

What we have to do is make it easy and fair as possible for all Canadians to vote so that we can have a democracy we can be proud of.

• (1715)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is important legislation as the Liberals try to fundamentally change aspects of our democracy through an omnibus bill that raises grave questions about the integrity of upcoming elections. There has been a great deal of shiftiness in the government's rationale, so I do want to set the stage by responding to some of the very partisan criticisms we have seen of the alleged motivations of past Conservative legislation.

Let us be very clear that our Conservative Party, the official opposition, wants to see more Canadians voting. That is for two reasons, a reason of principle and a practical reason. The reason of principle is that we believe that our democracy is strengthened when more people vote and participate, which is important for the good of our society and the effectiveness of the discourse we have here.

However, there is also a practical reason. It was something I was told in one of the first political training seminars I had when I came here as a Conservative staffer in Ottawa. Statistically if we look at Canadian history, Conservative Parties generally do better when there is a higher turnout. I am sure my friends across the way will gasp at this, but they can look at the data, which is very clear, that over the last 60 years, 40 years, and 25 years, Conservative Parties are more likely to win elections in which more people participate. In the last 60 years, the data shows that in elections won by Conservatives, there was an average turnout of 71% for Conservatives and 70% for the Liberals. In the last 40 years, in elections that Conservatives won, the average turnout was 68.5%, but only 66% when Liberals won. If we look at the last 25 years, the same two-point difference exists, 67% versus 65%.

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Unfortunately, there is also a general downward trend in voter turnout, and there tends to be a little spike every time there is a change of government. We can expect an increase in turnout in the 2019 election as well. There was one exception to that in a recent election, and that was the 1993 election when the Liberals last took power. Again, people voted for them but there was not a lot of enthusiasm, because there was actually a drop in turnout in the 1993 election even though there was a change in government.

Generally speaking, these were the trends. We see a slight spike when there is a change in government and a general downward trend, but overall, Conservatives are more likely to win elections when there is a higher turnout.

We have this hyperpartisan narrative coming from the other side. The Liberals tell us that Conservatives do not want people to vote. Actually Conservatives do want more people to vote, both for reasons of principle that reflect how we see the world and our commitment to democracy, but also for reasons that reflect a clear analysis of strategic realities.

When we look at election rules, we see that people are more likely to vote when there is clear information out there about where, when, and how to vote. The emphasis we put on the changes we made to the Elections Act were that Elections Canada would focus on communicating details about how to vote, about where, when, how to vote and what the requirements were.

It is interesting that when we had this discussion of identification, the NDP member who just spoke said that the problem is that people do not necessarily know they have so many options with the ID required. That is why we made sure there would be many options for the ID that people could use, but also on making sure we communicated the rules of voting. We saw a quite significant spike in turnout in the last election.

The Liberals will say this was not because of but in spite of the changes we made. That is a bit rich given that the rules were specifically designed to make sure that people had the information and ability to vote, and that the rules seemed to work. It does not seem to show much of a commitment to evidence-based policy on the part of the government that it makes claims that are clearly and verifiably at odds with overall voting trends.

On the other hand, here is data if one is trying to do this evidence-based policy analysis. In 2008, there was a campaign filing by a new Liberal MP, the member for Papineau, who is now the Prime Minister, listing among other things products and services provided by the party, the option for varying quantities of NDP or Conservative targeted voter suppression cards.

• (1720)

The Prime Minister used various quantities of NDP or Conservative-targeted voter suppression cards. Maybe the Prime Minister wants to explain what that means. I certainly have never been involved in a campaign where we distributed cards aimed at reducing the number of people who vote. That is something the Liberals have to contend with as they approach this issue.

We have good evidence based on campaign filings by the Prime Minister that the Liberals want fewer people to vote, whereas Conservatives want more people to vote. We might understand that,

since the Liberals are more likely to win elections in which fewer people vote and Conservatives are more likely to win elections in which more people vote. In that light, we understand why the Prime Minister has invested in voter suppression cards in the past. This is the context in which the Liberal government is now planning to move forward unilaterally with changes to the electoral process.

There are a number of different elements in this legislation that my colleagues have talked about. One is to change the rules for identification. Right now, we have incredibly generous identification rules, and Canadians need to know this because people will be misled if they take at face value what the government is saying.

The current rules are that people either present one piece of photo ID with an address, like a driver's licence, which many people have but certainly not everybody, or they present two pieces of ID. There is a long list of options. One of them has to include an address. They include things like a credit card or a birth certificate, a pension label, a utility bill, a letter of confirmation of stay or residence from a student, or someone in a seniors residence, a long-term care facility, a shelter or a soup kitchen. They include a library card, an employee card, a student ID card, a parolee card, a Métis card, a veterans affairs health card, or old age security card. It is a very long list. I could spend my 10 minutes just listing the possible forms of ID that could be used. Everybody either has enough ID to vote or they can easily get enough ID to vote.

The government members have related how some Canadians have said they were unable to vote in the last election because of lack of ID. To the extent that is the case, I think it is because people are not being given sufficient information or they are being given false information, perhaps by members of the Liberal Party, about what ID is required. Perhaps they are being told by Liberal members of Parliament that the ID requirements are actually presently more stringent than they are.

Anybody should be able to vote as a result of accessing the points about required ID listed here. If some have only one of those points of ID, there is a current process by which someone can attest to a person's identity if he or she does not have that proof of residency. It is a constrained process, but it is a process that is still currently allowed.

With their new bill, the Liberals now say that people can bring a voter information card. There is ample evidence that there have been many errors with those, such as polling cards being sent to the wrong addresses, or cards being sent to people who are not citizens. There have been many such problems. I am not going to have time to go through all the issues, although there are many different problems.

Let us talk about the lack of meaningful protections from foreign interference in elections, which, perversely, is something that the government has talked about.

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The foreign affairs minister for example has raised the spectre of possible Russia interference in an election. We know in fact that the Russian government has already tried to push out media stories to discredit the foreign affairs minister on the basis of allegations about her family, so the government should be aware of this issue, yet it has put in place a system that allows foreign entities to transfer money to Canadian organizations for use during elections, and as long as that financial transfer happens outside of a writ period, there is absolutely no rules to constrain it. The Russian government or American anti-industry groups or a Chinese organization, any foreign entity that wants to influence a Canadian election, can transfer money to Canada to influence the outcome of elections as long as that financial transfer happens outside of a writ period.

There are no limits on government advertising during the immediate pre-writ period, and yet there are constraints on what opposition parties can spend. If the Liberals want to limit advertising during that period, the same rules should apply to the opposition as apply to the government.

We have seen that the Liberals are not interested in more people voting. In fact, they have an interest in having fewer people vote and are changing the rules in a way that fundamentally threatens the integrity of our elections.

This is a terrible bill and I strongly oppose it.

• (1725)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, for his insightful intervention in this debate. He has laid out very clearly that the Liberals are opening up the electoral process to potential voter fraud. They are making it easier for foreign entities to influence our election process. We do not need Russian oligarchs, or the Kremlin, or the Communist Party of China buying votes and trying to undermine our democracy.

Our democracy is for Canadians first and foremost. We want to make sure that everyone has the right of franchise and is able to vote, but they have to be able to do it by proving who they are and where they live so we are not open to voter fraud. I also believe that we cannot allow international entities, whether governments or anti-development organizations, or those who oppose Canadian democracy to undermine our system, which is above and beyond the best in the world as far as democracies go.

Could my colleague elaborate further on how we could amend the bill the Liberals have brought forward? More importantly, could he lay out why he thinks the Liberals are bringing forward this bill without proper debate, ramming it through the House and not allowing us the opportunity to have a through debate so we can nail down and drive down the shortfalls within the legislation?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague said it very well and was able to ask a question because I guess no members of the government were ready to respond to my argument by asking questions themselves. He spoke very well about the issue of foreign interference in our election and asked why the Liberals, despite having talked about this issue, are not moving forward to act on it. I think it is because they realize that their ideological mentality, for instance their opposition to the development of the energy sector, is supported by many of these foreign intervenors, whereas our party

has been very forthright on issues of human rights, be they in Russia, in Russian occupied parts of Ukraine, or in China. We have been very vocal on these issues. The government has been comparatively much less vocal on human rights. The Liberals sees a dynamic in which foreign intervention in Canadian elections might be more beneficial to them and more harmful to us.

The Conservatives are prepared to make our case to Canadians because we know that our policies when it comes to standing up for human rights and standing up for energy development are reflective of what Canadians want to see, and reflective of the Canadian national interest.

Regardless of the ways in which the Liberals try to shift the rules to their advantage, we will push back against foreign interference. We will make our case to the Canadian people, and we are confident they will respond.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, they had an opportunity to deal with foreign interference, or the threat that Conservative members continue to bring up. They chose to do nothing about it. Rather, what they did was to get rid of the voter identity card. They did not want Canadians to be able to use a card that Elections Canada was sending out. That is what they chose to do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I believe the hon. member for Winnipeg North has the floor. I am hearing shouting going back and forth, and I am having a hard time hearing what he has to say. I am very interested in hearing his discourse.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, think about this. In 2011, we actually had the voter ID card. It was working quite well. Elections Canada did not have a problem with it. Stephen Harper came by and did have a problem with it. He took it away. In the last election, over 150,000 Canadians did not—

• (1730)

Mr. James Bezan: Wrong.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, it is right. Check with the procedure and House affairs committee. Mr. Speaker, they do not even know the facts and they are voting against it.

The point is that 150,000 Canadians did not have the type of ID that was necessary. This is something that ensure that more people participate in democracy. Why does the Conservative Party not stay in touch with what Canadians want? This legislation would strengthen Canada's democracy. It is legislation they should be voting for. Could the member clearly indicate why, specifically, they are voting against this legislation?

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, I am sure, has an answer, and I would like to hear it. I really had to struggle to hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I do not expect that anyone will run interference.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, in 45 seconds or less, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my friend across the way is clearly full of shiftiness in terms of the question he is posing. I spoke specifically about the issue of identification and the long list of forms of ID available, things like a letter from a soup kitchen or a student ID card. The member should not be giving Canadians misinformation about the present realities of the law. All Canadians either have the ID they need or can get it very easily.

The voter information card is an information card. We know that we have significant evidence of these being sent out in error, being sent to people who are not citizens, and being sent after there is a change of address. We know that there are problems with the voter information cards, so we set up a system in which anyone can prove his or her identity, but people have to prove their identity. They have to actually get that letter, bring that prescription bottle, or bring that Métis card or citizenship card, whatever it is. There are many different ways people can prove their identity, but they should have to prove who they are in order to vote.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-76, a bill that would, among other things, make changes to the way political parties, election candidates, and third parties could spend money both before and during elections.

Spending limits on candidates and parties for elections is not new. These have been around for decades. Contribution limits are a little more recent. Many Canadians remember the days when political fundraising was wide open. There was a time when political parties could hold a dinner in Toronto and banks, law firms, and lobbyists could buy tables at \$10,000 a pop, paying for them with company money, and perhaps even deducting the cost as a business expense, which it was, rather than as a political contribution.

Eventually, successive governments changed the rules to diffuse political financial support away from Bay Street and toward individual Canadians, more typically motivated by personal conviction, as it should be, rather than by self-interest.

It was the Chrétien government that brought in the first contribution limits. With the Federal Accountability Act of 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper reduced the limit to \$1,500 per person and banned contributions from corporations, unions, and charities. Later, he also got rid of the per-vote subsidy, recognizing that paying political parties for each vote rigs the system in favour of perpetuating the winner.

Another thing Prime Minister Harper did was tell his cabinet that he would not tolerate fundraising by his ministers from stakeholder groups that had dealings with their own departments. In other words, he would not tolerate cash for access fundraising.

The reason I bring up this brief history of political party fundraising is that the most important aspect of Bill C-76 is the way it would deal with election and pre-election spending.

The environment this bill is tabled in cannot be separated from the spending and fundraising environment the present governing party finds itself in. Make no mistake, the Liberals have struggled to raise money in the post-corporate-donation and post-per-vote-subsidy era, while at the same time, they have greatly benefited from spending by third parties. Some third parties are virtually Liberal proxies, and others are foreign entities with an agenda hostile to Canada's best interests.

When elected, the first thing these Liberals did was start holding these secret cash for access fundraisers, and we are not talking about a one-off. We are talking about a fundraising system wherein a significant part of Liberal fundraising relied on these kinds of events.

When the media and opposition parties criticized this practice over a period of months, the government House leader said, at least some 200 times in this House, that Canada's fundraising laws are among the strictest anywhere in the world. I agree with her. We have already mentioned this. I agree with her that the fundraising rules are strict. The problem is that the Liberals have tried to get around the rules, to get around the spirit, and in some cases the actual letter, of the existing elections law and fundraising practices.

Here are today debating Bill C-76, knowing that Canada, as she has said, already has very strict fundraising rules that make it very difficult to raise money any way other than through small donations from individual Canadians motivated by support for a party's ideas or its candidates.

What can a party in government do when it cannot raise enough money on the strength of its ideas and when it is carrying around the weight of its own dubious track record? When it is struggling to raise money, it can do two things: limit expenditures by political parties; or make it easier for third-party proxies, who are not subject to the same rules as a political party, and have these third parties do its job for it.

This bill would enable both of these things to happen. On the expenditures side, this bill would create a pre-writ expense restriction, which would help the Liberals, who are struggling to raise money. At the same time, this bill would allow registered third parties a similar cap during the pre-writ period, but then it would nearly double the amount these third parties could spend during the writ period itself, while doing nothing, absolutely zero, to address the broader issue of how foreign funding of registered third parties distorts our democracy.

Government Orders

• (1735)

This is the most important part of the bill. At an absolute minimum, the changes to the spending rules contained in Bill C-76 are a cynical attempt to compensate for the Liberals' inability to raise money on their own. At worst, this bill represents a wilful refusal to deal with attempts by foreigners to influence Canadian elections. The bill contains token lip service to the problem by creating a pre-writ election period in the summer before a scheduled fall election and by banning foreign contributions by third parties during that time. This bill would create an expense limit during that time, which, by the way, for third parties, would be nearly the same limit a political party would have. The government will, no doubt, claim that it has now addressed the problem by doing so, but nothing could be further from the truth. This bill would nearly double the amount third parties could spend during the writ itself, and again, would do absolutely nothing to address the much more serious problem of the way foreign organizations are undermining Canadian democracy.

How serious is the issue of foreign-funded third parties in our elections? How do we know that foreign interests are exerting influence in Canada's elections? The answer is simple. We know this because registered third parties that receive millions of dollars in foreign money openly bragged about their success in influencing the outcome of the last election. In the case of the Tides Foundation, which is the foreign paymaster of at least eight domestic third parties that campaigned in the last election, it openly states that its agenda is to shut down Canada's resource industry. Likewise, it claims credit for the substantial success that anti-energy agenda is currently enjoying under the current government.

Take the example of Leadnow. That is an organization funded by the anti-Canadian Tides Foundation. It boasts about the role it played in defeating the previous government. Its own published report following the 2015 election claimed, "We selected target ridings with field teams run by paid Leadnow organizers". This post-election "Defeating Harper" report went on to detail how it systematically targeted ridings based on detailed, extensive, and expensive professional polling research and focused its attention on those critical ridings. It further took credit for the defeat of Conservative candidates in 26 out of 29 targeted seats and for having a 96% success rate for its endorsed candidates.

There is no mystery. It received foreign money and is bragging about how effective it was in using it to pay organizers to help defeat the previous government. This is not a conspiracy theory. It is not speculation. Foreign-funded third parties are out there bragging about how effective they are at influencing election outcomes.

If the Liberal government agrees that such interference is a problem, or if it is in any way uncomfortable with the prospect of foreign money compromising the integrity of Canadian elections, it should have used the opportunity before it to actually engage in meaningful reform of how third parties engage with the public during and between elections. The government could have, for example, made registered third parties subject to audit between elections. It could have banned foreign contributions altogether by making it an offence for a third party that participates in an election campaign to receive money between elections instead of simply during the summer pre-writ period.

The government could prevent third parties from colluding to defeat the intent of the law. It could reduce, instead of increase, the limit on third parties during the writ period.

However, the Liberals have chosen not to do any of these things, because these Liberals have proven over and over again how much they prefer a rigged game when it comes to elections. They are the same Liberals who wasted enormous energy on their absurd electoral reform program, which they actually used to suck in various activist groups like Leadnow, Fair Vote Canada, some union groups, and The Council of Canadians. They used that issue to gain support from these third parties and then did absolutely nothing to follow through on their promise. These are the same Liberals who relied on secret cash for access fundraising until they were caught, the same Liberals who tried to eliminate opposition tools through standing order changes, and the same Liberals who tried to give themselves a \$7-billion slush fund through their so-called estimates reform. They are the same Liberals who are now trying to compensate for their failure to raise money through this bill.

• (1740)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the debate we just heard really underscores why this legislation is so important. This discussion has turned into "My wallet is bigger than your wallet, so if you want something I'm going to fight against you to get that", when really that is what we should be fighting against: getting the money out of politics.

To that end, I personally, speaking as an individual, tend to agree with some of what I have heard from the NDP today about the per-vote subsidy and taking money out of politics, because as long as we keep the money in politics like this we are going to continue to hear this rhetoric about "My wallet is so much bigger than your wallet, and therefore I'm going to be able to do this to you during the election." It does not serve Canadians to do that.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, the per-vote subsidy is a way to prop up a party in power. The more votes it gets, the more money it has, and so the more it is able to defeat the opposition. I reject the whole philosophy of the per-vote subsidy for that reason, and that in part is why the previous government got rid of it.

As for money in politics, there is a difference with small amounts. We know the fundraising rules are strict. We know that the spending limits are relatively low. These are tools through which money is taken, relatively speaking, out of politics. This bill makes the money in politics problem worse by allowing third parties, compensating for the fact that regular people motivated by ideas in Canada are not giving to this party.

Private Members' Business

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member's speech on the Liberals' bill to rig the Canada Elections Act and I heard him talk about how foreign entities or foreign companies or governments try to influence our elections by sending money to a particular party or in favour of a particular party. I would like to know how foreign companies or countries stand to benefit from donating money to a particular party through these circuitous means, and also how this could affect the everyday average Canadian worker.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, in my riding I have seen firsthand the effects of the damage that has happened to our resource sector through the unemployed energy workers, and we have to look at this. We have groups like the Tides Foundation that want to keep energy resources in the ground, an environmental movement that has an interest in shutting down our industries and seeing our workers thrown out of work. Foreign energy companies also benefit from our oil not getting to market and staying in the ground. It is potentially like an unholy alliance of environmentalists and industry that both want to shut down the Canadian oil industry, and by funding foreign third parties to help elect a government like this one, they got exactly what they had hoped for.

• (1745)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague how he could possibly defend the so-called Fair Elections Act, which did its best to disenfranchise disabled people, young people, and Canadians living abroad, and ask him about the strong and swift reaction we heard from Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I hope the member listened to my speech and found that I really feel very strongly about the financial aspects of this bill, but I also have to reject the premise of her question that the bill from the previous government did any of the things she has described.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:46 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

NET NEUTRALITY

The House resumed from March 27 consideration of Motion No. 168 on net neutrality.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle has seven minutes, since he already started his speech.

[English]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to pick up where I left off on the important issue of net neutrality.

We have all experienced the message of "This content is not available in your country" when content distributors or creators have

used various technologies to figure out where a user is and limit a user's access in order to drive a user to a different provider or place for that particular content, or to block a user from it altogether. Indeed, a lot of Canadian-produced content is virtually impossible to access in Canada while being available in much of the rest of the world. Try watching Canada's *Mayday*, for example, without a Bell account. It cannot legally be done. It makes me wonder on what grounds vertical integration of the media market is legal. The neutrality of the net is under threat from all sides already, and it will take a concerted effort to protect it.

Removing net neutrality gives companies that control over people's Internet access and control over their Internet content. Once they do that, companies can start shaping a consumer's opinion, tune marketing, and sell access to the consumer for a much reduced cost.

With the current Cambridge Analytica controversy surrounding Facebook, themselves the king of those who control what consumers do, see, think, and feel on the Internet, we can see that this is not just some kind of vague theory. It is important to remember that if one is not paying for a product, then one is the product. This data gathering and control is not conducted just for the fun of it. People's data is not being stored in a cloud. There is no cloud, just other people's computers, and they want your data for a reason.

Without mandated net neutrality, there is nothing to stop a company from paying someone's ISP to increase access to their own services or decrease access to their competitor's services. To my point the last time I spoke on this about overselling Internet connections, I do not have much sympathy for ISPs in that situation, and so the argument that net neutrality has to go because of capacity issues is spurious. In my view, ISPs should be required to market minimum, not maximum, sustained-speed capability to their first peer outside of their network at typical peak usage times.

Xplornet, for example, markets 25-megabit satellite service, but will not tell us that for most customers, this speed only applies at 3 a.m. on a clear night with no northern lights, and even then only during the full moon. I may be exaggerating, but only a bit. It is not that the satellites and ground stations cannot handle an individual connection at that speed most of the time, but that the connections are oversold, resulting in constant, bitter complaining in my riding from rural Internet users who are stuck between the Xplornet rock and the dial-up hard place.

Private Members' Business

It is not the service that bothers me, since it is essential to have companies like Xplornet provide service to remote regions that have no other options, and we need it. Rather, it is the honesty about what the customer is getting for their money, what is advertised to them versus what they actually get, that needs to be rectified. The company justifies all this very carefully, and in my years in politics as a staffer and in this role, it is the only company I have ever encountered that only lobbies with senior counsel present. I think that speaks for itself.

The highly profitable telecommunications giant Bell, which broke \$3 billion in profit in 2016 and built most of its infrastructure on public money in the first place, and Rogers, which made \$1.8 billion in net profit last year, are upping their Internet connection prices by as much as \$8.00 per month per customer, but are not investing significantly in deep rural Canada unless they get gifts from various levels of government to do so. These companies and the other large Internet providers will not even look at investing in a project unless they can get a return on investment in less than three years. I know of no other legal business that operates on quite such an efficient return on investment.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

This brings us to another important net neutrality issue that was recently brought to my attention by a professional digital rights advocate.

Net neutrality can, and perhaps should, be expanded further to encompass investment neutrality. It is not just access to Internet service that is important. Equal, or at least equivalent, access for Internet users is also vital.

Choosing to invest in a gigabit-speed network in a city and fobbing off the regions with five megabits is not neutral. Specific users are being limited instead of specific services, but the outcome is the same.

If we tell residents in the regions that we cannot give them access, it is not Netflix that is being limited, it is the entire Internet. It is their access to services. It is their access to the economy. It is their ability to participate in modern society. That is why we cannot say that we really have net neutrality until we also have neutrality in terms of Internet access, which will surely take billions more in investment from all levels of the private sector.

Let us imagine for a moment what would happen if access to electricity were viewed in the same way as Internet access is today. The regions would not always have full power, and remote communities would have no power whatsoever unless they had access to a river they could build a dam on.

As a society and as a nation, we have a responsibility to ensure neutral access, to invest in a neutral way, and to give every Canadian a chance to get connected. We will need the participation of government organizations to achieve that equality, as we did in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle with the Antoine-Labelle telecommunications co-operative.

[*English*]

If members would like to know what losing net neutrality looks like, try using an iPhone or an iPad, assuming that Apple has not slowed it down yet to coax people to buy a new one. If members have ever plugged an iPhone into a non-Apple laptop or wanted to copy pictures to a USB stick or watch something paid for through iTunes on an Android, Windows, or other non-Apple device, it is very difficult to do.

If one wants to use an application not approved by Apple, forget it. It is, by its very definition and design, not neutral. By giving itself the power to censor, Apple has found itself with the obligation to censor. In the words of Richard Stallman, the father of the free software movement, either the user controls the program or the program controls the user.

Apple, like many American corporations, strives not only to sell a product but to control what is done with it after purchase, just like region-encoded DVDs and players, which in my view should not even be legal. In essence, nothing that a person buys actually becomes theirs; rather, the person is paying for the dubious privilege of becoming a part of Apple's network.

John Deere, the tractor and farm equipment maker, is jumping on this bandwagon too, claiming that it is against copyright for farmers to fix their own equipment. The copyright issue and the DMCA and our equivalent Canadian Copyright Modernization Act's effects relating to technological protection measures, are a deeply worrying symptom of a wide-ranging offensive by corporate America against individual rights for people to use what they have bought and paid for.

If members think that has nothing to do with net neutrality, they would be mistaken. It is part of the same basic principle. If I buy a tractor, an iPhone, or an Internet connection, I expect to be able to use it where, when, and how I see fit, even if it was not part of the original design of the product.

Reverse engineering something one has bought and running a gopher server off their home Internet connection, if one feels like being that retro, are, at their core, the same right. Port or service blocking by ISPs is to me a violation of net neutrality, as is refusing to sell someone a static IP address or letting someone otherwise do what they want with the connection.

Ending rather than entrenching net neutrality would end the Internet as we know it, and we need to make a strong statement supporting the principle of net neutrality by supporting this motion.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise this evening to talk to Motion No. 168. I would like to thank the member for Oakville for bringing the motion forward. I would also like to thank the member for Beauce, who is our critic for innovation, science, and economic development, for supporting it.

Motion No. 168 is about net neutrality. It is about equal opportunity and equal access to information and the Internet.

Private Members' Business

Net neutrality is the notion that Internet service providers should treat all content that runs on their networks equally. That includes whatever the source or application is, in any direction the content is headed.

All content on the Internet should be available to consumers and it needs to be available at an equal cost and speed. These consumers include youth and people with disabilities. That is why equal access to information is so important.

I look to my own riding and to southwestern Ontario where we have seen an investment by the federal and provincial governments as well as the different wards throughout the region in the neighbourhood of \$200 million to \$300 million to ensure that high speed Internet access is provided. This investment mirrors what happens in many urban centres where we see infrastructure on smaller levels present for pre-WIFI and other opportunities to have free access or equal access to the Internet.

The reality is that much of the infrastructure that is brought forward and installed or implemented throughout Canada has some sort of source of government dollars. For this reason, the citizens of Canada are the ones who are actually investing in this infrastructure to begin with. We are the ones who are making it so that the Internet can be seen by so many across the country.

As the critic for youth sport and disability, I understand the positive impacts that net neutral brings for young Canadians and Canadians living with disabilities. The motion would help both groups overcome barriers they often had to deal with by allowing greater access and more equal access.

The motion calls on the House of Commons to recognize the importance of net neutrality as a main reason for the ongoing success of the Internet. Net Neutrality has the potential to significantly continue to benefit Canadians. It allows Canadians to access their content of choice without having unnecessary restrictions put in place by Internet service providers.

I will get into some specifics of the motion.

It is important for the House to recognize that the Internet has continued to thrive due to the principles put in place by net neutrality. These principles are transparency, freedom, and innovation. The motion is set to recognize Canada's strong net neutrality rules already in place. The rules are grounded in the Telecommunication Act and are enforced by the CRTC.

With an open Internet, there is a free flow of information for Canadians. The free flow of information is key for many aspects of a Canadian's life, and those are only becoming greater and greater year after year. They include freedom of expression, diversity, education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and democracy. These are the skills that youth can carry forward into their personal development, their business development, and their educational development. Access to more education online is vital to the development of our young people and vital to our ability to compete around the world. This is beneficial for the future economic and social prosperity of all Canadians.

We have no reason to limit the freedom of Canadians when it comes to access to the Internet. It would not make sense. The House

must express its firm support for net neutrality and the continued preservation of open access to the Internet, of equal access to the Internet.

The House must continue to support the Internet free from unjust discrimination and interference so people can access the content of their choice at the rate they choose.

● (1755)

There is not just bipartisan but multi-partisan support for the motion. In a sense, we have an obligation to see this motion pass. Members among all parties have supported and continue to support net neutrality. A Liberal member has written and moved this motion. Members from the NDP support Motion No. 168. Members from the Conservative Party support the motion. Net neutrality is one of the reasons for the continued success of the Internet, and it is getting support from all parties. It is up to us to ensure the next generation of Canadians has equal access to the information and opportunities that are found online.

We all have the opportunity to make a positive change in the lives of Canadians, especially youth and people living with disabilities, ensuring they have an equal opportunity to access all the information needed for the different matters they go through in their lives, and we have to do this collectively.

In order for this to happen, it is essential that we continue to support Motion No. 168 today and, quite frankly, in the future, at every opportunity reinforcing our support. All Canadians should have access to the content of their choice in accordance with the law. I feel this is something on which everyone in the House of Commons can probably agree.

Through our collective support, it also gives us an opportunity for net neutrality to expand in the future. It is important for net neutrality to be a guiding principle in both the Telecommunications Act and the Broadcasting Act. It should explore opportunities to further enshrine legislation and protect the equal opportunities that Canadians have. If this is to happen, the principles behind net neutrality must be included in new legislation. Principles of freedom must be enshrined.

We do not want to waste this opportunity. Our collective support would be for nothing and future generations, quite frankly, would be at risk. This is something simple that we can use to help our youth and certainly those living with disabilities.

Just a few weeks ago, we debated a motion regarding access to services for persons living with disabilities and having a single website. The motion was moved by the New Democratic Party to allow people at home to access a single website to find out what services would be available to them. This further falls in line with what we see with respect to net neutrality, ensuring that when they access that space, they are not overcharged because it is not perhaps something that falls in line with what the Internet service provider would want to put at a high speed or a low rate.

Private Members' Business

There is no reason for us to limit the freedom of Canadians to access information. As young people go through the education system, they need to be able to access information around the world to ensure they are competitive in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education. It is becoming more and more critical that this net neutrality be maintained. That is why we are calling on the government to continue working on this important issue. I, along with many others, will keep a close eye on the government's next steps.

I would like to thank all members of the House for listening to my speech. It is an important topic that will influence the lives of many Canadians. Youth will have more access to education. People with disabilities will have a greater quality of life and easier access to government programs. We can make a positive change for people in our constituencies and around the country. Net neutrality is a way to give Canadians more freedom and more information to make better decisions.

With better access to the Internet, Canadians are able to educate themselves more, innovate more, and freely express themselves in the means they choose. I thank everyone for listening to the importance of net neutrality today. I look forward to working with members to better the lives of Canadian citizens and maintaining equality in access to information.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Motion No. 168 on net neutrality and to support its sponsor, the hon. member for Oakville.

What is this motion about? It refers to the net neutrality that applies in Canada. Actually, we have a long history of supporting net neutrality. In fact, the NDP member for Timmins—James Bay introduced a first bill in Parliament in May 2008, Bill C-552. In May 2009, there was Bill C-398, the purpose of which was to protect Canadians by demanding net neutrality. This, therefore, is not new. We have been talking about this for a long time.

The hon. member for Windsor West has done an excellent job on the net neutrality file. He took part in developing the regulations related to the Telecommunications Act that has been protecting Canadians since 2009.

On November 22, 2017, this MP said the following about net neutrality:

The NDP reaffirms our support for net neutrality for the economic and social benefits for the entire online community. We call on the Government of Canada to advance this policy domestically and begin the discussion on how to protect Canadians against repercussions from global decisions that erode this right.

What is he referring to? To what has happened in the United States. As we know, Donald Trump has unfortunately threatened net neutrality. There is concern that this first breach could spread to other countries and that Canada could be contaminated by this problem.

What does the NDP want? We want the government to reaffirm its commitment to Canadian consumers through rigorous regulations that protect our right to net neutrality.

As mentioned, all we have right now is a hodgepodge of rules in the Telecommunications Act. There is nothing that is very clear, very specific, very robust, outside of the CRTC decisions. It is time to amend the act as promised in budget 2017, and to add a section on net neutrality. We would like these amendments to give the CRTC more teeth. Instead of waiting for consumers to complain and before launching an inquiry, we would like it to immediately apply the regulations to ensure that net neutrality is respected.

What is net neutrality? It is what we call the open Internet, which means that its content, no matter the form or source, is treated equally by the service provider. It is extremely important because the goal of net neutrality is to guarantee freedom of expression, stimulate innovation, and promote competition.

Imagine if there were websites that people had to pay a separate fee to access, sites that were not automatically available through our Internet service providers. That would have major implications for free and open access to information. This is an extremely important issue.

There are rules that prevent discrimination and content blocking, but, as I said, the CRTC does not enforce those rules unless a consumer, a citizen, complains. That is what we find so unfortunate and problematic.

We also need to consider Internet access in rural areas. I represent the riding of Drummond, where people in some areas still do not have high-speed Internet or have a hard time getting Internet at all.

● (1805)

There are some major plans in the works to expand Internet access. The Drummond regional government has a plan to bring Internet access to the whole RCM, and I hope the federal government will get on board. Let us remember that Internet access should not be restricted to the wealthy. It should be available to everyone because it has become so important to people and is practically an essential service. People need this service, and they need affordable access to reliable broadband service, to high-speed Internet. There are 18 mainly rural municipalities in Drummond, where I am from. Providing adequate service to those municipalities is extremely important. They must have access thanks to net neutrality.

Speaking of Drummond, I would just like to mention that, on Saturday, I was at the second joint annual review of Drummondville's cadet units. The parade included over 100 cadets. The event highlighted over a century of sea cadets history.

Two sea cadets had some experiences worth mentioning. The first is Valeria Aristizabal, who was chosen along with three other sea cadets from Quebec to work for five days as a sailor on the HMCS *Calgary*, a Canadian Armed Forces frigate based in Esquimalt, British Columbia. Congratulations to Valeria on being selected for this great opportunity.

Private Members' Business

I also want to talk about Mike Gagnon from the Drummondville sea cadets who qualified to represent the Quebec delegation at the national cadet marksmanship championship, which was held in British Columbia from May 6 to 11. Congratulations to Mike Gagnon on that achievement. I also want to commend all those involved, including Peter Catwright, Raymond Ouellet, Jean-Marc Chartier, and many others. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about these individuals.

Why is access to net neutrality important? As I mentioned, such access is extremely important for our regions, for example, to ensure that everyone has access to all the information they need at a reasonable price. We want the government to reaffirm its commitment to Canadian consumers that it will maintain strong rules that protect their right to net neutrality. Unfortunately, right now, all we have is the CRTC, which only takes action if someone files a complaint. The CRTC is not proactive. It has to wait until a complaint is filed, which is currently affecting net neutrality. As part of the amendments, we would like the CRTC to be able to enforce the rules right away. That would be a tremendous asset.

I want to reiterate that many Canadians are concerned because, in the fall of 2017, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, under the direction of President Donald Trump, changed the rules to do away with net neutrality in the United States. Canadians are very concerned because they are wondering what will happen next. Will Canada also adopt that approach? Could Internet service providers start exerting pressure that would result in a breach of net neutrality? That is not something we want to happen. We are completely against such breaches, because net neutrality allows all Canadians to have access to regional content, which is important for our regions, as well as any other content that they want to access.

● (1810)

[English]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my constituents in Guelph in support of Motion No. 168, proposed by the hon. member for Oakville. I would like to thank him for bringing the important subject of net neutrality forward to the House floor for debate today. It is good to see that we have general support around the House. As chair of the innovation and technology caucus, I know that this issue affects not only our public discourse in many ways but also the seen and unseen things that the Internet provides to all Canadians. We must recognize the importance this policy will have on ourselves and on future generations of Canadians.

Net neutrality has been called the critical issue of our times, much like the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression that came before it. Net neutrality ensures that Internet service providers enable access to all content and all applications regardless of their source, without favouring or blocking particular products or websites. This simple and seemingly uncontroversial statement is at the centre of modern public discourse and the digital economy.

Net neutrality is a key driver of the Internet, currently the largest information-sharing system in human history. The power of this platform to shape economies and public discourse cannot be ignored. Without this standard for open and neutral Internet, we commit a double offence, first at the expense of entrepreneurs, and second at the expense of Canadian citizens. Entrepreneurs are constantly on

the lookout to try to spread the word about their business. If access to the Internet is limited or controlled, small business owners who want to use the Internet to grow their business will lose one of their greatest tools for doing so. Canadians who want access to the services provided by our entrepreneurs or information provided by our colleges and universities will be denied that chance if larger firms outbid small businesses for marketing opportunities.

Net neutrality, in many ways, represents the best of capitalism and the best of our economy. Freedom of the individual, open access to markets, healthy competition, and diversity of goods and services are all values upheld by net neutrality. Protecting emerging markets for e-commerce is one crucial reason to support net neutrality. The second is preserving our democracy and the integrity of our public discourse, which depends on accurate information being available to everyone.

Information is the currency of democracy. We live in an age when new platforms for exchanging information are being developed. These new platforms can have a tremendous sway over our political system. Maintaining free and open communications is critical as we explore new ways to provide open government. Therefore, as legislators and representatives of Canadians, it is incumbent upon us to protect the avenues through which information flows. Net neutrality is a necessary tool to prevent any form of private enterprise from exerting undue control over the free flow of information. It also safeguards against attempts to bias the information available, as selected by private interests. Net neutrality provides access to public and private broadcasters alike and does not favour one political or business bias over another.

We have seen the harm done by concerted and sophisticated efforts to spread misinformation. While our government moves to make government more open and improve the democratic process through Bill C-76, we cannot simultaneously work against our own interests by limiting the flow of information on the Internet. In just over 20 years, the Internet has become the new forum for discussion on any subject. It needs to remain an open platform for public discourse, subject to our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and anti-hate legislation.

It is curious that we find ourselves here defending what should be an uncontroversial idea. However, recent efforts around the world to question and erode net neutrality are cause for great concern, particularly as discourse becomes polarized. Therefore, it is good that we have the opportunity to discuss this on behalf of Canadians.

● (1815)

Thankfully, in Canada we have a strong network of regulations and legislation to protect net neutrality. These come in the form of the Telecommunications Act and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC.

Section 27 of the Telecommunications Act prevents Internet service providers from providing undue benefit or discrimination for their services. As well, section 36 prevents Internet service providers from controlling or influencing the meaning of communications carried by them for the public. These sections need to be maintained to prevent throttling websites or blocking or in other ways controlling Internet traffic.

This legislation is backed up with a recent decision reached just last year by the CRTC, which outlined several guides and requirements. It found that charging different prices for different types of content, such as music, news, videos, or other types of content is prohibited. Consumer protection was also strengthened by mandating full disclosure of Internet traffic management practices. This ruling strengthens Canada's commitment to net neutrality by declaring that Internet service providers should treat data traffic equally. It reaffirms Canada's commitment to economic growth and entrepreneurship, and promotes the freedom of speech and diversity of views that Canadians cherish.

The Internet, as it exists now, is a shadow of its future self. It has already come to be an invaluable tool for growing commerce and spreading knowledge and culture. By its nature, the Internet is democratic. With it, musicians can gain renown and fame. Entrepreneurs can offer their goods and services at home and abroad, and Canadian culture and tourism benefit as the eyes of the world can see what Canadians have to offer.

Should Canada and other nations change their stance and participate in the emerging trend to privatize access to the Internet, we will all lose. Record labels could use their buying power to ensure that select artists are the ones available to consumers. Entrepreneurs could have difficulty competing with large firms that can afford to market themselves. Costs to promote Canadian culture outside Canada, and perhaps even within Canada, could greatly increase.

In a modern digital age, the free exchange of ideas and the free access to markets are what is at stake. Canada must take the initiative and show leadership on the international stage. Free and open access to the Internet is the cornerstone upon which democracy and the future digital economy will be relying.

Once again, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Oakville for the great work on bringing this motion forward and for having us discuss it tonight in the House. I encourage all members of the House to support this important motion.

• (1820)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to articulate our government's position on this important issue. I thank the hon. member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte for bringing forth this motion. I think the member for Guelph will agree with me when I say that we miss him at the INDU committee.

It is clear that the open Internet is a remarkable platform for economic growth, innovation, and social progress in Canada and around the world. It is essential to a modern digital economy and society. Many activities depend on it, including access to health care, education, employment, entertainment, and more. More broadly, it is

Private Members' Business

vital for freedom of expression, diversity, and our democratic institutions. A flourishing and vibrant democracy is possible only when citizens are able to communicate and access information freely.

The Internet is one of the greatest tools of our lifetime. It is a platform where citizens, consumers, and businesses can exchange ideas, products, and services. It has transformed our economies and our daily lives in unimaginable ways.

[*Translation*]

Our government supports an open Internet where Canadians have the power to communicate freely and have access to the legal content of their choice. The Internet has been very successful because it is not controlled by any government or private sector entity. The Internet allows innovation without asking permission. This means that no Internet service provider can act as a gatekeeper or discriminate on the basis of the type of user or the content they want to access. Internet service providers cannot arbitrarily block or censor content, either.

Our government's position has remained the same over time. Canada has long excelled as a leader in promoting net neutrality. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, was one of the first telecommunications regulators to implement a regulatory framework for net neutrality. This framework is based on the principles underlying the Internet: freedom, openness, transparency and innovation. The CRTC is actively studying issues as they arise, in light of the changing market and technology. For example, in April 2017, the CRTC opposed the practice of exempting certain applications and not others from data fees—a practice known as “tiered pricing”.

This means that Internet service providers cannot favour one application over another. Similarly, in 2015, the CRTC confirmed that telecommunications service providers could not give their own mobile video services an unfair advantage in the market by promoting data traffic on their networks. The principles of net neutrality are enshrined in Canadian law. By law, a company must be neutral and not discriminate against or control content that is communicated or accessed by Canadians.

This long-standing tradition of transport on a common basis, whereby goods and services must be delivered without discrimination, is important, particularly in sectors such as telecommunications where some players can control the flow of information.

Private Members' Business

•(1825)

[English]

I can say that Canada's approach to net neutrality is well regarded, both domestically and abroad. Telecommunications experts have said that Canada has strong net neutrality rules in place and praise the fact that Canada has legislated provisions barring unjust discrimination.

The issue of net neutrality is so important because fundamental freedoms of expression and communication are at stake. This is about making sure that we preserve the Internet as a progressive force for good and an open space without barriers. Just as important is to ensure that we have a fair marketplace, where Internet service providers compete on price, quality, and service rather than by discriminating against certain types of content, applications, or users.

I am pleased to stand here today to express the government's support for this motion. The government firmly believes that the net neutrality principles of openness, transparency, freedom, and innovation are essential to the continued growth of the Internet. As I have mentioned, Canada has strong net neutrality rules in place, which are enforced by the CRTC and based in the core principles of the Telecommunications Act. This has allowed the CRTC to respond nimbly and assertively to concerns as they emerge. The preservation of an open Internet and the free flow of information are vital to the economic and social prosperity of Canada, but this is not something we can take for granted. We must support the continued preservation of an open Internet free from unjust discrimination and interference.

This has been so fundamental to the evolution of the Internet we know today, and we must continue to be advocates for it in the future. That is why I am happy to affirm that net neutrality will be a guiding principle in the upcoming legislative review of Canada's communications legislation.

[Translation]

Canada's communications system is vital to our country's future. New technologies and new business models cause disruptions and, at the same time, create new opportunities. We have seen the growth of wireless technologies, the emergence of sensor networks and self-driving cars, and the Internet of Things. Some experts have estimated that there will be over 30 billion devices connected online by 2020.

Our review will aim to ensure that our legislative frameworks are able to respond to modern technology and needs, as well as future changes. In the review, we will consider net neutrality as an essential principle of our legal framework and how it can be strengthened. We want to ensure that we have a world-class legislative framework so that Canada can thrive in the digital age.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the Minister of Canadian Heritage worked together on this file, and our government looks forward to announcing further details on the review process shortly.

[English]

I would like to reassure the House and all Canadians that our government will continue to be a champion of the open Internet as a progressive force for good. We recognize the tremendous importance

of the open Internet as a critical enabler of economic growth, innovation, diversity, and social inclusion.

This goes beyond our simply being able to connect to the Internet. This is about ensuring that Canadian consumers and businesses have access to an open and level playing field so they can unleash their full potential. I think this is something we, as Canadians, can all agree upon.

•(1830)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The mover of the motion, the hon. member for Oakville, has five minutes for right of reply.

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak again to my Motion No. 168. This motion is aimed at strengthening and protecting an open Internet in Canada by ensuring that net neutrality is a guiding principle in the Government of Canada's upcoming review of the Telecommunications and Broadcasting Acts.

I do want to thank the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, the parliamentary secretary, and the government for their interest in and support for this motion, and once again thank Mr. Andrew Quinn for his work in identifying and doing research on this topic.

We must enshrine in legislation the principles of neutrality in the provision and carriage of all telecommunications services. As we have heard throughout this debate from members on both sides of this place, net neutrality is an issue that is important to Canadians and that it is imperative for the Government of Canada to affirm our commitment to preserving a fair and open Internet for Canadians.

I do want to thank the members who have risen to speak to the motion.

At its core, net neutrality means that all content and applications should be treated equally and that the choices made by users should be free from interference from Internet service providers.

Canada has emerged as a world leader in supporting policies protecting that neutrality. However, policies alone will not guarantee net neutrality. Requiring that net neutrality be a guiding principle in the review and update of these acts signals a clear commitment to placing consumers and content providers first. That is a very important signal to send to the industry.

As our neighbours to the south try to save their own net neutrality regulations, I believe it is time for Canadians to address this issue directly and act to protect our own. This motion would require the government, industry, and Canadians to have a robust conversation about enshrining net neutrality as an essential component in the review of the Telecommunications and Broadcasting Acts.

Two-tiered Internet, or a situation in which an Internet service provider actively discriminates against certain content or services by throttling the speed of delivery to enhance their own private business interests, gets to the heart of what could happen without strong net neutrality regulations in place.

As clearly expressed by Dr. Michael Geist, professor of law at the University of Ottawa, and the Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law, the average Internet user is not all that concerned about the policies that govern how their Internet is delivered. They just want to ensure that they can uniformly access all of the applications and services they have chosen at the speed they have paid for, and are not restricted in their access to services or content.

I agree with Dr. Geist. While in the past many Canadians probably were not aware of the term “net neutrality” and the majority probably were not interested in the governing policies for ISPs in the Internet, I do not believe that is the case today. Canadians are now very aware of what they do and do not want regarding Internet access. Canadians want to continue to use the services they choose without interference.

While we are leaders when it comes to net neutrality policies, we cannot rest on our laurels. Now is the time to enshrine this concept in legislation. Further, we cannot solve the current telecommunications competition or privacy concerns without a solid foundation of net neutrality.

I will say it again: Canadians expect to choose the applications and services they want to use, and they expect to be able to access them without interference from their Internet service provider.

Let us not forget that when we defend net neutrality, we defend much more than Canadians' ability to access online services. We are defending our democracy. We are preserving principles as fundamental as freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Preserving an open Internet and the free flow of information is vital to diversity, education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and the continued economic and social prosperity of Canadians.

Members must express their firm support for the continued preservation of an open Internet, free from unjust discrimination and interference. This is the critical issue of our generation.

Now is the time to stand up to protect the rights of Canadians. Now is the time to protect one of the pillars of our democracy. I hope every member will join me in voting in support of net neutrality in Motion No. 168.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

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.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

Adjournment Proceedings

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 23, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I cannot believe I am rising yet again in the House to talk about the Phoenix pay system fiasco. I especially cannot believe that the government does not see this as a priority or grasp the importance of taking action. Far from being resolved, the situation is only getting worse.

The federal government recently admitted that the Miramichi pay centre still has a backlog of more than 600,000 cases. Only 5,000 of the 600,000 cases have been resolved. That is unacceptable. However, for two and a half years now, the Prime Minister and his government have repeatedly claimed they are doing everything they can to make sure every federal public servant receives the wages they are owed. Somehow I doubt it. Of course, the government is going to respond that budget 2018 includes funding for modernizing Phoenix and for replacing this pay system in the distant future. The NDP, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, and the Public Service Alliance of Canada have been calling for Phoenix to be replaced for the past two and a half years.

Some say the February announcement about Phoenix was the government's attempt to improve its image. I did not say that. That is according to economist Jean-Pierre Aubry, who viewed the announcement as the government's attempt to make itself look good. He said it was a PR strategy. People affected by Phoenix do not need an image-boosting campaign though. What they need is their paycheque.

Adjournment Proceedings

Each so-called file is a person, a real person like the rest of us. To help the House understand how serious this is, I would like to share some stories gathered by the Public Service Alliance of Canada and my riding office. Quebec City resident Toufic talked about going three months without a paycheque and said it was a huge emotional burden to bear. Vanessa from Nanaimo said she did not get paid for three months. If not for her family's second income, she would have lost her house. Meera from Ottawa said that, because she was not getting paid, her manager personally loaned her money to buy a bus pass so she could get to work. Daniel from Shawinigan said that one of his colleagues, a father of four, nearly lost his house because he was not getting paid.

Alexandre from Saint-Hyacinthe said that his pay grade had not been adjusted since September 2014. He was supposed to be at pay grade seven as of September 27, 2016, but he is still being paid at pay grade five. His pay has not been adjusted whatsoever nor has he received any retroactive pay. He says it is very frustrating, financially speaking. He has to get his French drain repaired at home and he is going to have to refinance his house for more than he planned. He wonders why the government is not making Phoenix a priority. Chantal from Gatineau, which should interest my colleague, owes \$18,000 and is struggling to pay the bills. Mr. Massé, a carpenter at National Defence for the past 16 years, from Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, said that because of Phoenix, he is unable to help his 21-year-old son who has a very rare form of cancer. For weeks now, as thousands of public servants have done before him, he has been calling on the Liberal government to help and to settle the Phoenix issue once and for all.

How can the parliamentary secretary remain indifferent to what Daniel, Chantal, Mr. Massé, Toufic, Vanessa, Meera, and Alexandre are going through? I ask him: how can he remain indifferent to all these people? I am outraged that for months now the government has not been paying our federal public servants for the exceptional services they provide to the public.

• (1840)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to explain what this government has done to stabilize the Phoenix pay system.

I am holding more meetings with the representatives of public service unions, our partners, at all levels. As the member for Gatineau, I obviously represent many public servants, including some who have had very serious problems because of the Phoenix pay system.

I believe that I have risen to the challenge, not only in terms of the action we have taken, but also with respect to my understanding of the issue. Unfortunately, we inherited this problem. Mr. Harper and his government took a big gamble. They bet that they could save money by overhauling the government's entire pay system and opting for this new technology.

What I am pleased to tell my colleagues is that we are making progress. We are being very cautious; we are not claiming victory and we will not let up until every public servant receives every dollar and cent they are entitled to.

That said, there has been some very encouraging news. We opened the new pay centre in Miramichi two weeks ago, and we hired even more public servants than planned. The pay centre now has almost as many Government of Canada employees as it did before Mr. Harper let experienced pay advisers go. We have a whole new pay centre.

Furthermore, on Friday, I opened a new call centre in Gatineau, and now, for the first time, public servants will be able to call and get updates on their pay file. This is a huge step forward for our customers—in other words, our employees. I even listened in on some calls.

I am also very happy to tell my colleagues about the pay pods that are trained and have experience in specific departments. Four departments participated and huge progress was made on their wait-lists. This month, another 12 departments will have access to pay pods. We hope to see the same result as we did in the four departments that participated in the pilot project. Nine pays later, the wait-list has gone down, although not as much as we would like.

We are overcoming the challenges left to us by Mr. Harper and his colleagues, but we are up to the task. We will invest in the necessary technology and human resources. We will fix and stabilize the Phoenix pay system.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, I have learned that accountability means doing what needs to be done rather than laying blame.

Like Alexandre from Saint-Hyacinthe, I am wondering why public servants still do not feel as though the government is making Phoenix a priority. Alexandre, Daniel, Chantal, Mr. Massé, Toufic, Vanessa, Meera, and the 60,000 public servants affected are wondering when the government is going to fix this fiasco once and for all. The parliamentary secretary may be pleased, but public servants do not feel reassured by this supposed progress. Not enough clear progress has been made on this file to reassure all the public servants who are not getting paid.

It is vital that employees be paid for the work that they do. I do not sense any outrage in the answers I am hearing. I do not sense any urgent need to resolve this situation. I do not sense the same outrage that I sense when I read about people's experiences. I look forward to hearing something more than this meagre progress in nine weeks. We must continue to feel outraged in order to bring about the desired changes.

• (1845)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Madam Speaker, I would like to reassure my colleague. I do not need to read a speech to know what to say. Public servants are my neighbours. They are the people in my community. I meet with them and talk to them every day.

Adjournment Proceedings

I never claimed victory. I just gave an update on the progress that we are making thanks to the investments that my colleague seems to be calling for. We have fully responded to the demands of our public service union partners. We have invested hundreds of millions of dollars, hired thousands of employees, and put every effort into resolving this problem. If she does not sense the government's dedication and determination on this file, perhaps we should write something down for her to read. However, I can tell her, and I have been speaking without any notes since the beginning of this debate, that we are very determined and that we are going to ensure that every public servant in Canada gets every penny they are owed.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am always happy to come to the House of Commons for discussion, even for a late show, especially when we are talking about an extremely important and stimulating project that will lead to significant socio-economic progress in Drummond and throughout the Quebec-Montreal corridor or even the Quebec-Windsor corridor.

In this regard, on February 2, I rose in the House of Commons to speak about the high-frequency train project. Several players in the field and several members, such as my colleagues from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot and Trois-Rivières, are working very hard in this regard. There really is a consensus about having a high-frequency train. It would have two segments. There would be the north shore segment, which would include Quebec City, Trois-Rivières and Montreal, and the south shore segment, which would include Lévis, Drummondville, Saint-Hyacinthe and eventually Montreal.

This project is extremely important for the greater Drummond area. It would allow socio-economic development, as I mentioned. All local and regional actors are working very hard to make this project a reality. Unfortunately, we are still waiting, and we are a little tired of feasibility studies. It is time we started doing some work on the ground.

We were expecting more in the federal budget, which allocated just \$8 million over three years to study the feasibility of a high-frequency train. This is preventing the project from moving forward, which is unfortunate. It is not as if all the appropriate studies have not already been done. We are disappointed. The government must provide stable, predictable, annual funding to fulfill its mandate. We urgently need a good project like the high-frequency rail project.

The only good news we have now is that the outdated fleets of cars and locomotives will be replaced. This is a \$1.5 billion project, but we have some concerns. The member for Trois-Rivières is doing an excellent job as transport critic. He sent a letter urging the federal minister to include a local content clause in the international request for proposals and to ensure that Canadian taxpayers' money be used to create jobs in this country. We hope to hear back from the government soon. I do not understand why we have not yet received a response.

As I said, everyone in Drummond agrees that this great project would help the region retain young people and could also help grow the workforce. There is a labour shortage in Drummond. The project would improve labour mobility.

I want to congratulate stakeholders like the mayor of Drummondville; the outgoing president of the Drummond chamber of commerce and industry, Nicolas Martel; the new president, Linda Desrochers; the outgoing CEO, Nathalie Benoit; and the new CEO, Yves Chabot, who, with my assistance, are working on advancing this wonderful project. It is very important. As I said, we need this project to keep young people in the region and to deal with the labour shortage.

My question is this. When will we know whether the request for proposals will have a Canadian content clause?

• (1850)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

I more than welcome the opportunity to highlight the importance that our government places on maintaining and developing a safe, efficient and reliable transportation system for travellers. Meeting the needs of travellers is at the heart of the strategic plan for the future of transportation in Canada, and our government is working hard to ensure that everyone has better choices and better services when they travel.

We recognize the importance of rail in meeting the transportation needs of Canadians. That is why we have provided funding to support an in-depth evaluation of VIA's proposal for high-frequency rail service along the Quebec City-Windsor corridor.

The proposed service, which would operate on dedicated tracks, has many potential benefits, including economic and environmental. In economic terms, there would be a more efficient link between workers, customers and businesses, as well as a reduction in road traffic, which would promote regional development.

From an environmental perspective, the rail service would provide a better low-emission alternative to car travel. This proposal also promises more convenient and reliable service for travellers by increasing the frequency of service and improving on-time performance. Furthermore, improved services in the Windsor-Quebec City corridor could reduce the ongoing need for government subsidies, delivering better value for money for taxpayers.

It is clear that this proposal has the potential to be transformative for many Canadians, especially those in the Windsor-Quebec City corridor. At the same time, it is highly technical in nature and requires rigorous analysis to assess whether it, or an alternative, would be the best approach to enhancing the travel experience of Canadians in this corridor. After all, this is a multibillion dollar project that would affect millions of Canadians.

I am sure the hon. member would agree that Canadians expect us to do our due diligence to ensure that this option is the right fit for Canada.

Business of Supply

Our government is developing the best approach to deliver an efficient and effective rail transportation system for Canadians. Our government is on track to complete this assessment, and we look forward to presenting the results of this work to Canadians in the coming months.

• (1855)

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed that my hon. colleague did not answer my question. It was so simple. Will there be Canadian content or not? Will there be a Canadian content clause in the international request for proposals for replacing the railcars and the locomotives? It is extremely important to know that. This is about Canadians' money. At the very least we have to be able to ensure that jobs are created here in Canada. I did not get an answer to that.

My colleague mentioned that we will move forward quickly, in a few months. The government has allocated \$8 million for the next three years to conduct studies. I would not call that moving quickly. They are still in the process of conducting feasibility studies, but we certainly know where this is going. Via Rail told us where to go. It is their project and they have already analyzed every possibility. Let us move forward with a high-frequency train, something that everyone agrees on.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Madam Speaker, Canadians expect a travel system that is safe, efficient and reliable for all travellers. Our government understands that intercity passenger rail services are important to the communities involved. That is why we are conducting an in-depth assessment of Via Rail's high-frequency rail proposal to ensure that it is the right fit for Canadians.

It is clear that Via's proposal has many potential benefits, be they economic, social or environmental. However, Canadians expect us to undertake the necessary due diligence to ensure that we make the right decisions.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that their phones should not be on while they are in the House.

The hon. member for Lakeland is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn, and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering all votes under Department of Finance in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

[English]

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2018-19

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Finance in the main estimates, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair)

The Deputy Chair: Tonight's debate is a general one on the votes under Department of Finance. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportion rotation.

• (1900)

[Translation]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used for both debate or for posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least 5 minutes for questions to the minister.

When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, in other words, how much time will be spent on the speech and how much time will be used for questions and answers. Members should also note that they will need the unanimous consent of the committee to split their time with another member. When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, as that time counts toward the time allocated to the party.

[English]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language, and behaviour.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Finance in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be using the duration of my time for questioning and I will start with part II in the main estimates, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, an office that regulates about 1,200 pensions across the country.

The finance minister introduced a pension bill while owning about \$20 million of shares in a pension company. The minister is now under an Ethics Commissioner investigation for that alleged conflict. Has the finance minister spoken to the Ethics Commissioner and been questioned as a result of that investigation?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, yes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, if the Ethics Commissioner finds the finance minister is guilty of a conflict of interest, would he resign from cabinet?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we take the review with the parliamentary officials very seriously. I have worked with the commissioner to ensure I have no conflicts of interest and I am confident that allows me to comport myself in my job as appropriate.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, many would think inappropriate for a minister to own a pension company while simultaneously introducing pension legislation, but the Ethics Commissioner will decide.

These estimates provide for finance officials to administer a future carbon tax. The government has said that the carbon tax is not for the purpose of raising revenue, but rather for the purpose of raising prices. We can assume that this means the government believes gas prices as they currently are, absent this carbon tax, are too low. If the finance minister believes gas prices are too low, presumably he knows what they are.

What is the gas price for a litre of regular gasoline in the city of Ottawa today, minister?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I understand that the current price of a litre of gasoline in Ottawa is \$1.22.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, prices do fluctuate, so the minister may or may not have his facts right. As of the most recent check, I have them at \$1.31, which is not an insignificant difference.

That said, what would the price be today if the minister's full carbon tax were implemented in the present?

• (1905)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, as the member opposite might know, 85% of Canadians live in a jurisdiction in which carbon pricing already exists. Of course, Ontario would be one of those jurisdictions.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, if the price of the carbon tax were implemented at a \$50-per-tonne level, as the government's current budget legislation would have it, what then would be the price of gas in Ottawa today?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, as was stated, 85% of Canadians live in a jurisdiction in which there is already carbon pricing. What I can say is that Ontario is one of those jurisdictions. We know pricing carbon is appropriate to deal with the long-term impacts of climate change. We also know that in those jurisdictions, in examples like B.C., Ontario, and Quebec, which have introduced carbon pricing, the economy is doing very well.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, how much would the average Canadian family pay in taxes once the current proposal for a carbon tax in the minister's budget is fully implemented?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we proposed in our budget a backstop to carbon pricing in areas of the country that do not choose to have their own carbon pricing regime. What we can say as the federal government is that we expect that we would return those revenues to those provinces, so the amount of the potential tax

reduction for citizens in those provinces will be determined by the provinces themselves.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, does that mean the average Canadian family will get back as much in other tax relief as they will have to pay in new carbon taxes, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, again, it is important to know that about 85% of Canadians live in a jurisdiction where carbon pricing already exists. What I can say is that the provinces or territories that choose the federal backstop will have their own decision as to how to deal with that revenue. While we cannot say specifically yet how a given household might be affected, provinces with carbon pricing plans in place have produced household impact estimates. For example, in Alberta, a family of four with income up to \$95,000 would receive a rebate of \$540, which exceeds the direct cost of the carbon levy in 2018.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, the carbon tax that the government wishes to impose on all provinces that do not have their own is \$50 per tonne. When fully implemented, what would be the direct cost for the average Canadian family?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, we can only hope that the member for Carleton might understand what we mean when we say that we intend on having an approach to pricing carbon, but we intend on doing it in a revenue-neutral way. By sending those revenues back to the provinces, the provinces will have in their ability to reduce taxes for their citizens. Therefore, the level of those tax reductions, the potential that exists, will be determined by the provinces as they come up with their approach.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Therefore, Madam Chair, there is a real cost but only a potential refund to the individual taxpayer. Let us break those into the two respective parts. What will be the real original cost that an average Canadian family would pay in carbon taxes when the minister's proposal is fully implemented?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Again, Madam Chair, the member asked the question a different way. I am obliged to answer with the facts. The facts are that 85% of Canadians already live in a jurisdiction with carbon pricing. For those other Canadians, should the provinces or territories in which they live decide to use the federal backstop, the provinces or territories will send revenue to the federal government and we have committed to sending that revenue back to the provinces. To the extent the provinces decide to give that revenue back to citizens, they will be able to reduce taxes.

For the member opposite to understand the amount of potential tax reduction, he would need to go to those provinces or territories that seek to use the federal backstop. It is a simple approach and we will keep repeating it.

Business of Supply

● (1910)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, Canadians will keep repeating the question. It is the current government that is implementing this tax. The tax is found in the minister's bill. It is a failure to take responsibility for the minister imposing the tax to say to go and ask some provincial politicians to tell us what the cost is. He is asking this chamber for the power to impose a tax. What will that tax cost the average Canadian family?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Again, Madam Chair, as I have mentioned before, we recognize that we have seen 85% of Canadians already living in jurisdictions with carbon pricing. We have seen in those jurisdictions significant economic success. In British Columbia, in Ontario, and in Quebec, regions that have a significant lion's share of Canadians, there is a carbon pricing approach in place. Those provinces are experiencing strong economic fundamentals right now.

What we can say is that when we get to a more granular level and we look at what is going on in Alberta, for example, we can see that the rebate an average family of four with \$95,000 in Alberta is getting is in excess of what the cost might be. Therefore, our approach of returning those revenues has the potential to produce tax reductions for people in those jurisdictions using the backstop.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, not a single jurisdiction in the country has a carbon tax that has returned more in tax relief than it has collected in new taxes. In each of those jurisdictions, governments have more and taxpayers have less.

The minister can understand why taxpayers would be suspicious when he says he will simply collect this money from them in higher gasoline and home heating taxes, and then give that money to a bunch of provincial politicians to manage. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation says that the minister's new tax will cost \$2,500 per family. Trevor Tombe, a professor at the University of Calgary, says it will be \$1,100. Which of those two numbers is closest to the finance department's estimates?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I am happy to say that we believe the approach we have taken to pricing carbon, the approach that 85% of Canadians currently live under, is the appropriate way for us to deal with the long-term impacts of climate change. Climate change is real. We believe that dealing with this so we do not pass costs on to the next generations is critically important.

What we can say is that we find it astonishing that the members opposite would decide to attack this idea. We would like to understand if they actually have an approach to dealing with climate change or if this is entirely an approach to attacking those jurisdictions in which 85% of Canadians already live and the other jurisdictions as they decide how best to deal with those long-term challenges.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, the only jurisdiction in question is the federal jurisdiction. It is a federal budget bill that is imposing a federal tax in provinces that do not have their own. I am not aware of any finance minister in history who has imposed a tax like this without telling Canadians what it will cost beforehand.

I will ask one more time. Will the finance minister tell Canadians how much it will cost the average Canadian family to pay his fully implemented carbon tax?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I do not know how best to enable the member for Carleton to understand that in fact the approach we are taking is to return revenue to those jurisdictions that do not already have an approach to carbon pricing. If he is seeking a specific example, we are happy to provide one.

A specific example would be in Alberta. A family of four with income up to \$95,000 would receive a rebate of \$540. This exceeds the direct cost of the carbon levy in 2018, which is estimated, in their estimation, at \$500 for that family of four. That would be a net benefit. I am happy to do the math: \$540 minus \$500—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, the finance minister is now commenting on the provincial policies in the various jurisdictions. That is just fine. In Ontario, using the policies of the Wynne government, as he is proposing to send the Ontario government the revenues from his federally imposed tax if it does not collect its own, what would be the net cost to an Ontario family of this new carbon tax?

● (1915)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, simply put, Ontario has put in place an approach to carbon pricing, and that already exists. The approach we are proposing, the federal backstop, would not be applicable in the province of Ontario since it currently has an approach to pricing carbon. That would only apply to those jurisdictions that do not currently have a price on carbon, and that of course is the small minority of Canadians not already in that jurisdiction.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, he was able to comment on Alberta, but he cannot comment on Ontario. That is because the carbon tax, which he will mandate federally and which the Wynne government has already implemented provincially, is funding things like rebates for millionaires who can afford Teslas and also to buy carbon credits from California and other foreign jurisdictions. That is what provinces like Ontario, under the existing government, would do with this federally mandated carbon tax.

My final question for the minister is this. The distribution of the cost of the carbon tax is known to him. What would be the percentage cost of the carbon tax to a family living below the poverty line, and would that family living in poverty pay a higher percentage of its income in carbon taxes than would, say, a millionaire like the finance minister?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, as I have said, the reality is that 85% of Canadians already live in a jurisdiction in which there is a carbon pricing approach. What we are doing is creating a backstop and returning that revenue back to those provinces so they can decide what to do with it. It is entirely within their jurisdiction to decide to give that money back to reduce taxes. The distribution of those tax reductions really will be up to them.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, since coming into office, our government has been focused on the things that matter most to Canadians: growing the economy, creating jobs, strengthening the middle class, and helping everyone working hard to join it. This in turn builds confidence and success. Our most recent budget is the clearest evidence yet in support of this commitment.

[Translation]

This budget is good for business and good for middle-class jobs. It will ensure sustainable economic growth, set us on the path toward greater equality, and better support Canadians so they will have the confidence they need to succeed now and in the future. When people feel confident about their future and their children's future, they invest in themselves and their communities in ways that promote economic growth.

[English]

With budget 2018, we are putting more money into the pockets of those who need it most through initiatives like the new Canada workers benefit, which will take effect next year.

We are taking real, proactive steps to encourage gender equality and help more women and girls succeed so they can benefit from and contribute to a growing economy. We are unleashing the power of Canadian ingenuity by making the single largest investment in fundamental research in Canadian history. We are advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples for the benefit of their families, their communities, and all of Canada. We are safeguarding the natural heritage that means so much to us as Canadians. We are protecting Canadians, their companies, and our economy from cyber-threats. We are making it easier for businesses to do business with the government.

[Translation]

Budget 2018 is about investing in our greatest resource: our people. We are helping Canadian workers get the skills they need to get jobs in the new economy. We are helping middle-class families cover the higher costs of raising their children. We are giving people who are working hard to join the middle class more opportunities to succeed.

• (1920)

[English]

We are focused on these long-term challenges. At the same time, we know there is more work to do. We hear those in the business community who are concerned about Canada's competitiveness in the immediate term, especially at a time of uncertainty around the North American Free Trade Agreement, global trade, and the recent U.S. tax reform.

Our government is listening carefully to those voices. I am listening to those voices. This is an important conversation. Indeed, it is one I am looking forward to having with many of Canada's business leaders in the weeks and months to come. However, as I have also made clear, we cannot lose sight of the facts.

[Translation]

The facts clearly show that Canada and Canadians are competitive and that our plan is working. We see that in Amazon's decision to

expand its Vancouver tech hub, which will create 3,000 good, well-paid jobs in that city.

[English]

We see it when businesses, from General Motors to ABB Group to Microsoft, choose Canada, knowing that Canadians have what it takes to compete and to succeed. In fact, Canada had the highest stock of foreign direct investment as a percentage of gross domestic product in the G7 countries in the year 2016. We see it with the pickup in business investment, which grew at about 8% over the last four quarters, the fastest rate of growth in five years. We see it in rising business creation. The Bank of Canada's latest business outlook survey shows that business intentions to invest in machinery and equipment remain solidly positive, pointing to further investment growth.

[Translation]

We see it in our communities, where hard-working Canadians have created over 600,000 jobs since our government took office. In the past two years, our country's growth has been the fastest in the G7. Our unemployment rate is currently at its lowest point since 1976.

[English]

This success is in part because we have invested directly to make our businesses more competitive. That includes a recent cut to the small business tax rate, with a further reduction to 9% set for next January, 2019.

However, attracting business investment and supporting economic growth is about more than just low corporate tax rates. It is about people. By investing in our people and the things that empower them, we hold the potential to make Canada a global powerhouse for business investment. Our future prosperity depends on our ability to make these investments.

[Translation]

We have to provide Canadians the skills that businesses need to succeed. We have to continue building more modern and more resilient infrastructure so that people can get to their destinations more easily and products can get to market more quickly and more safely. We must invest in innovation and science, making Canadian businesses and workers more productive and more competitive on the global market.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

We must continue to successfully complete major trade deals that give Canadian businesses better access to global markets so that the benefits of growth are felt by more and more people here at home and around the world. We must continue to develop innovative, workable solutions to encourage greater investment, such as the Canada Infrastructure Bank and industry-led initiatives like the Canadian business growth fund. With these actions, we are building an internationally competitive environment for Canadian business, one that attracts investment, contributes to our economic growth, and creates jobs that support families and communities.

At the same time, budget 2018 maintains our steadfast commitment to a fair and inclusive society, one that all Canadians can contribute to and benefit from and one with a strong and growing economy. Economic growth must benefit all Canadians, not just the wealthy few.

We believe that our goals of a competitive economy and a fair and inclusive economy are complementary. They reinforce and strengthen one another.

- (1925)

[Translation]

Giving people the opportunity to succeed is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do for the economy. Budget 2018 takes us further than ever on the road to a more solid, more equitable, and more competitive Canada.

[English]

I would be pleased to take your questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, in his speech the minister mentioned so eloquently that budget 2018 continues on the path of budget 2016 and budget 2017 of investing in people, investing in Canadians, in order to ensure that we maintain a prosperous, fair, and equitable society, while creating the conditions to ensure the long-term success and prosperity of the Canadian economy. It is a balanced approach. We see other countries around the world taking a completely different approach, a take it or leave it approach with corporate tax cuts, sometimes to the detriment of necessary public investments.

[English]

There are those, of course, in Canada and elsewhere around the world, who seem to want to pursue a similar course of radical corporate tax cuts coupled with austerity and cuts to public services.

How does the minister intend to go about balancing tax cuts with the need for investments in the things Canadians care about, such as health care, education, and social services, and the things the minister has mentioned that can create a competitive advantage, such as investments in infrastructure, innovation, or science?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, these are the sorts of tough choices governments face every day. How we answer them is a clear reflection of our values as a country and of the vision we share of what kind of future we want for our children and grandchildren.

Fortunately, we are not alone in having to answer them. We depend on Canadians. We meet with them, and we discuss these issues both here in Parliament, and of course, in communities across the country.

With respect to creating the conditions for Canada's long-term competitiveness and success, I have already indicated that this will require a healthy dose of listening, which our government is fully committed to doing. It will require all of us to take a broad view of what competitiveness means and to make an honest assessment of all the factors that contribute to it.

There are factors other than taxation, of course, that support competitiveness. One need only look at some of the most successful countries in the world, with the highest living standards, to see that they also have very high degrees of investments in their people.

Yes, we need to take a look at our tax rules. We are doing that. We are listening to Canadians and Canadian businesses to understand the impact of the complex changes that were made in the United States. Competitiveness, as I said, rests on so much more than taxes.

When taking into account all the other factors, such as our openness to international trade, our wealth of natural resources, our low energy costs, liveable cities, and community infrastructure, the bottom line is that Canada is poised for success. We need to build on that, and we need to—

The Deputy Chair: Questions and comments?

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Finance.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, one thing about budget 2018 that really stood out to voters in my riding was seeing Canada recommit to science. For those who need reminding, during their decade in power, the Conservatives muzzled scientists and pulled the science and innovation funding Canada needed to ensure its long-term prosperity.

I know that our historic investments in science and innovation are strong points of budget 2018 that will to help Canada keep its competitive edge. I would like to hear the minister talk about how important these investments for fostering Canada's prosperity.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, that is an excellent and very important question. To have an economy that works and grows, we know that it is essential to make long-term investments in our infrastructure.

Science and research infrastructure is crucial for the future. We know how important it is to ensure that we are well placed for the future. In our 2018 budget, we made investments in Canadians to make sure that there is more research in our economy in the future.

Business of Supply

We decided to invest \$1.7 billion over five years in granting councils to make sure enough research is being conducted. We also invested in vital science and research facilities.

• (1930)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, I appreciate the minister's response. I would like to invite him to my riding, Louis-Hébert, which is lucky to be home to Laval University, which is in the greater Quebec City area. I have been warmly welcomed after a decade of massive cuts to science under the leadership of Mr. Harper and his team from the other side.

Could the minister tell us more about the impact that innovation and science have on Canada's economy and long-term prosperity, for all Canadians?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, that is a good question. We know that science must be taken into consideration if we want to see innovation in our economy and we want companies to invest.

In our budget, we made investments in research across the country. We also came up with an approach to intellectual property that would help companies find ways to market their ideas, to foster innovation and generate opportunities. This is very important. Research and innovation will help us achieve better economic growth in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Chair, on May 16, the finance minister said in the media that if Kinder Morgan bails on the project, the government would reimburse any financial losses related to British Columbia's political opposition incurred by any other investor willing to take the project on, as long as reimbursement is "sound and fair and beneficial for Canadians."

What is the range of the benefit or the bailout contemplated by the minister?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I want to say that we made a commitment that we want to move forward on a project that is in our national interest. We see that the Trans Mountain expansion project, which will create 15,000 jobs across our country, about 9,000 of them in British Columbia and 6,000 in Alberta and across the country, is critically important, not only for those direct jobs, as important as they are, but also for the advantage it would provide for our economy in allowing us to get our resources to international markets and to get a reasonable price for those resources.

What we have said is that we will ensure that the project can move forward. I am in discussions with the project proponent to do that in a way that is commercially reasonable and allows a private project to move forward, and to do that in an approach that meets the test—

The Chair: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I noticed that the finance minister actually answered a question I asked.

He has talked publicly about basically giving a cheque to investors. What is the lowest amount the finance department is currently contemplating for this cheque?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, again, we are in private discussions with the project proponent, and I will not go into those discussions in public.

What I can say is that we have been very clear that we are looking to deal with the delays and uncertainties caused by Premier Horgan that have introduced difficulties for the private proponent to actually move forward on this project. We believe that it is able to be done in a commercially appropriate way, and that means whatever approach we take will meet the test of being commercially reasonable and done in a way that benefits Canadians, creating the economic advantage, the jobs advantage, and the broader advantage for our economy.

• (1935)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, when we publicly say that we will reimburse any financial losses, we must have a figure in mind. As he has not answered my first two questions, I would like to ask if he can tell me the lowest amount and the highest amount currently being contemplated by the Department of Finance for reimbursement by the federal government.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, of course, my comments to the press have been mis-characterized by the member opposite. What I have said is that we will deal with the delays and uncertainty caused by Premier Horgan in a way that is commercially appropriate.

We believe that this project has commercial merit. We believe that what we put forward can meet the test of being done in that way, providing benefits for Canadians both directly in the project but more broadly for the economy and for those Canadians who will have the 15,000 jobs that will come from this project.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I did quote him from *The Globe and Mail*, so I do not think I am the one mis-characterizing his position.

The minister does not want to answer that question. He is willing to actually talk about the blank cheque and reimbursement without giving a ceiling or a maximum. I would like to know if he is contemplating that the Canadian government would actually buy an interest or a stake in Trans Mountain.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as I have said, I am having discussions with the project proponent. Of course, those discussions are ones we are doing in private, and I will not be negotiating in public.

As I have said before, we believe that this is a project that has commercial merit. We believe it is one that can be undertaken on that basis, and that is, of course, what we are seeking to achieve.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I do not believe I mis-characterized his announcement, when he said as long as the reimbursement is "sound and fair and beneficial for Canadians."

I would like the minister to tell me and Canadians in what circumstances giving a cheque to an oil company giant would be sound, fair, and beneficial for Canadians.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as I have said, we believe it is important that we deal with the delays and uncertainties created by Premier Horgan on a project that has been proved provincially and proved federally, has gone through a robust environmental assessment process, and has moved forward with a \$1.5 billion best-in-world oceans protection plan.

We are moving forward to ensure that we deal with the specific risk created by Premier Horgan, that risk of delay and uncertainty, so that a commercially viable project can move forward in a way that provides the kinds of advantages we have said it should provide, both on a project basis for those 15,000 Canadians that will have the jobs, and, of course, for the broader economy so that we can have access to move our resources to international markets and get world prices.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I would like to point out that Premier Horgan is actually respecting an election promise. I cannot say the same for this federal government, which actually promised to eliminate subsidies to the oil and gas industry.

[Translation]

On May 27, Quebec announced that it would impose the Quebec sales tax on intangible products and foreign digital service providers, including Netflix subscriptions.

When will Canada do the same?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we know that it is very important to have a tax system that works. We know that we must work with our international counterparts to have a system that meshes with systems around the globe. Multilateral efforts are under way to establish an international approach to major digital companies. That is very important. We want a coordinated approach by 2020 that works in the long term.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I am truly sorry, but I asked a question about the sales tax and his answer was about income tax. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance whether he knows the difference between a sales tax and income tax.

• (1940)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, all taxes are part of the tax system. We must find an approach to international digital companies that works in the long term. We have to consider the effects of each measure on the whole. At present, some measures are different in every country. We have to find a way to collaborate because tax systems are international. We obviously need to consider the system as a whole to determine how it will work in the future.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, we are talking about sales tax, not income tax. I would like to ask the minister a very simple question. He mentioned the G7, and I would like to know how many G7 countries do not charge sales tax for foreign digital services, such as Netflix and Facebook.

How many of the seven G7 countries do not charge sales tax?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, perhaps the member is aware that every country currently has a different goods and services tax system. We have to find a way to work with the other countries to ensure that our approach will be good for the future. That is what we are doing with the OECD, and we are going to find a solution. That is important for our economy and for the future.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, that does not answer my very simple question. There are seven countries in the G7. I would like the finance minister to tell me how many of those seven countries do not charge any sales tax on foreign digital services.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, the member is right. There are seven countries in the G7. Obviously, Canada is not the only country that does not have a specific approach right now. That is why we need to find a common approach. If he so desires, the member can find the answer in the information that is available to the public.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, I can actually provide the answer. Out of the seven countries in the G7, there is only one that applies no sales tax whatsoever to foreign digital services, and that is Canada. Does the minister know how much sales tax European Union countries charge on foreign digital services like Netflix or Facebook?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, it is vital to get the facts right in order to consider how we can work together. This is an example. The member's belief is incorrect, because now, there are two. That is the truth in the G7 at this time. We need to work together to find an approach that works for every country in the world. With international companies, there is a chance they could change their method of operation if there is no concerted approach involving every country. We are working to find an approach that works for all countries.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us how much sales tax CraveTV and illico, which are Canadian digital services, have to collect from their customers, which Netflix does not have to collect in Ontario?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I am not a subscriber of CraveTV or any such service, so I do not have the information the member is requesting.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, the answer is easy. The harmonized tax, which is Ontario's sales tax combined with the federal tax, is 13%. That is what CraveTV and illico customers get charged. Those companies offer the same services as Netflix. Netflix has a 13% competitive advantage over Canadian companies CraveTV and illico right out of the gate. Why give foreign companies that advantage?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I will repeat my answer. We have to have a coordinated approach for international digital corporations. That is very important. The OECD released a report for the G20 and the G7, and we are reviewing that report. There is still work to be done, and we will determine our approach together in the coming months and over the next year and a half.

• (1945)

The Chair: There are about two minutes left.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Business of Supply

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, since the minister talked about international coordination, why did EU countries, such as France, Germany, and Italy, and other countries, such as Japan and the United States, go ahead and tax foreign digital services without waiting for international coordination?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, our approach is to work with other countries to find a coordinated solution. Each country does indeed have its own solution. That is why we need to find a way to work together. That will lead us to an approach for big corporations that will work for the long term. That is what we need to do right now.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, Facebook and Google do not have to collect sales tax on ads purchased on their platforms, unlike Canadian media companies, which have to charge sales tax for advertising purchased from them.

Again, why the preferential treatment for foreign companies over our Canadian industries?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we believe it is important to look at our tax system as a whole. It is very important. This is our approach and it is viewed as the OECD approach. This is our way of ensuring that we are well positioned for the future.

The Chair: There is enough time for one question.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Chair, the government's wait-and-see approach is costly.

Does the minister have any idea how much the failure to charge tax or have Google or Facebook charge sales tax on advertisements is costing the public treasury? How much money is not being collected that could be collected if they were being treated on equal footing with our Canadian media?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, businesses claim refunds on GST for advertising, so there may just be a misunderstanding of our tax system by the member opposite.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise this evening. I will speak for about 10 minutes, after which I will ask one or two questions, at most.

My speech will focus on one of our government's main priorities, which is to strengthen and diversify trade. In doing so, we can ensure that more people benefit from trade, which helps strengthen the middle class and promote long-term economic growth.

In an increasingly global economy, Canada's economic success relies not only on the hard work of Canadians, but also on solid trade relationships.

Canada is, and has always been, a trading nation. Canadians recognize that, when done properly, trade can be a positive force for change. It can stimulate economic growth, create good, well-paying jobs for the middle class, and open up opportunities for Canadian businesses to grow and expand.

The Government of Canada is committed to adopting a progressive trade agenda that creates the greatest number of possibilities for everyone, including women and indigenous peoples, so that we can fully participate in and benefit from the global economy.

To ensure that trade benefits Canadians and that those benefits are felt by everyone, the government is actively deepening its trade relationships by entering into modern and progressive free trade agreements in North America, Europe, and new fast-growing markets in Asia.

Thanks to the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, commonly known as CETA, and the recent comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership, the CPTPP, preferential market access for Canadian goods and services abroad has more than doubled in 18 months, from 31% to 63% of global gross domestic product.

The government is also making new transformative enhancements to Canada's export programs to help Canadian businesses find customers around the world.

Perhaps the most significant point is that the government is working hard to ensure that trade is done responsibly and is rules-based. No one benefits from a race to the bottom.

I will now review in greater detail Canada's main export markets to explain how the government is strengthening and diversifying trade with key partners.

Let's begin with the market closest to home, the North American market. Since coming into effect in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, has been a significant factor in growth and job creation in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It has improved the lives of workers and families in all three partner countries.

Trade among all three countries tripled in value during that period and is now worth about \$1 trillion U.S. per year.

Because of NAFTA, North America is the largest and most comprehensive trade bloc in the world. With only 7% of the global population, it represents 28% of the global GDP.

Thanks to our interconnected supply chains, Canadians, Americans, and Mexicans not only sell goods to each other, but also produce goods together and sell them to other parts of the world.

Even though NAFTA has produced strong economic gains for all three countries, it needs to be reviewed.

Business of Supply

● (1950)

It should be modernized for the 21st century, to ensure the benefits of trade are shared more broadly, with more people. That is why we are working hard to renegotiate an updated and improved NAFTA that is win-win-win, one that will foster greater opportunity for the middle class and those working hard to join it in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Our government will always uphold and defend Canadians' interests and values, and we are committed to reaching a good deal.

Furthermore, in the face of increasing globalization, the government knows that we need to look beyond North America and establish closer trade relationships with large and emerging markets around the world.

In Europe, this has meant the delivery of CETA, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. As of September 2017, all economically significant parts of CETA had been brought into force, deepening our ties with the world's second-largest single-market economy and providing Canadian businesses with unprecedented access to a market of more than 500 million people, with a GDP of \$22 trillion.

With commitments on labour rights, environmental protection, sustainable development, and cultural diversity, CETA represents a model for a modern, progressive trade agreement.

Let us go a little farther with regard to geography and trade. Our government is actively pursuing trade opportunities for Canada in the fast-growing Asia-Pacific region. Its landmark achievement in that regard is the comprehensive progressive agreement on the trans-Pacific partnership, or CPTPP, which together with the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement that came into force in 2015, will solidly anchor Canada's place in that part of the world.

The CPTPP, the largest regional trade deal in history, will establish a network of open markets in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region, which represents 495 million people with a combined GDP of \$13.5 trillion. This agreement includes large Asian markets, such as Japan, and emerging markets, such as Malaysia and Vietnam, with significant potential for further growth over time.

The government has been focused not only on opening new markets but also on ensuring that the trans-Pacific partnership protects cultural identity and diversity and promotes corporate responsibility, gender equality, and indigenous rights. It also contains the strongest labour and environmental provisions of any trade deal in history.

Unfortunately, I have to wrap up. As we focus on strengthening and diversifying trade, Canada is building on a position of strength. Canada is open for business and open to progressive, inclusive, and rule-based international trade.

There are many good reasons to invest in and do business with Canada. I do not have time to list them all, but I would like to mention at least two. First, Canada offers businesses and investors a real openness to international trade, and second, foreign direct investment is welcome in Canada. That is not to mention the fact that we offer international companies the help they need to navigate our trade environment.

● (1955)

In conclusion, Canada is in a unique position in the world. The time has come for us to be more ambitious and to seize all opportunities. The time has come to enhance and diversify trade and to put it to work for the people. This will contribute to building a solid middle class and economy in the long term.

The Chair: We will now move on to questions.

The hon. member for Bourassa.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Chair, I have a question for my colleague.

Let me start by coming back to my speech. Canada and the United States have many things in common in terms of their history, language, and identity. These commonalities grew into a wonderful friendship that has not faded with time. Both countries offer a better life to the middle class on both sides of the border. The best way to maintain a strong and prosperous middle class is to further strengthen the already close economic and social ties between Canada and the United States.

I would now like to briefly list a few facts. First, Canada is the United States' largest and most reliable customer. We buy more from the United States than China, Japan, and the United Kingdom combined. Canada is the biggest export market for 35 states and is among the top three in 13 other states. That has a huge impact. In fact, the jobs of nine million Americans depend on trade with Canada. Similarly, two and a half million good Canadian jobs rely on trade with the United States.

Can my colleague explain to the committee how NAFTA modernization will contribute to enhancing the relationship between Canada and its closest neighbours?

● (2000)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague from Bourassa for his passionate and very interesting speech, and also for his question.

As members know, the economies of Canada and the U.S. are highly interconnected. Our supply chains are so connected that a product sold by a Canadian or American company could have crossed the border five or six times. Take, for example, a Ford transmission.

First, pieces of Canadian scrap metal are sent to Metaldyne, in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where they are forged by American workers. These materials are then returned to Linamar, a Canadian auto parts manufacturer in Guelph, whose factory employs about 560 people, to be manufactured and assembled. These pieces then cross the border a third time to the Ford plant in Sterling Heights, Michigan, where they become parts of a fully assembled transmission. The transmission is then sent to the Ford assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario, where it is installed in the vehicle. Then, when it crosses the border for the fifth time, the product is sent to an American dealership.

Business of Supply

Some products take a long journey before entering Canadian and American markets. Because our countries are so interconnected, we have one of the largest and most mutually beneficial relationships in the world. It is very important for our government to strengthen this relationship. It is important for all North Americans that we sign a NAFTA agreement that is beneficial to all parties, so that we can continue to grow trade between our two countries.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask my colleague a supplementary question.

We are talking about these agreements, whether NAFTA or others, but we know that in other budgets, the government brought forward some measures to help the middle class and those who want to join it. This also applies to these agreements. I know that my colleague can speak about measures to help families, whether it is the Canada child benefit or summer jobs, but these agreements also lead to more growth.

Would my colleague speak more about all this economic growth in Canada generated by these events?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, it goes without saying that trade with the United States and Mexico is very important for Canada's prosperity.

My colleague from Bourassa referred to our government's vision, namely that prosperity is important and must be inclusive. When all Canadians have the opportunity to reach their full potential, thanks to the Canada child benefit that reduced child poverty by 40% compared to 2013 levels, for example, we are ensuring that not only do we have the conditions to attain prosperity across the country, but this prosperity trickles down and is inclusive. Thus, we are ensuring that we have a strong and prosperous economy for all Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Chair, my question is for the finance minister. The minister's office reportedly called the Canadian Association of Mutual Insurance Companies and told the group, which the office regulates, not to testify at the finance committee on the budget. Does the finance minister think it appropriate for his office to tell witnesses not to speak up on his budget?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, just to be clear, no stakeholders have been told by the minister's office not to engage with parliamentarians or appear before a committee. We are always open to engaging with stakeholders directly at the department, but no such thing has ever been said to any stakeholder. In fact, it is the prerogative of the member for Carleton to invite whomever he wants to committee. He invited Jason Kenney, and we were happy to welcome Jason Kenney to the finance committee. The department and the minister's office would not discourage stakeholders from engaging with parliamentarians, and it has not been done.

● (2005)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, on the issue of the Trans Mountain pipeline, the minister announced that his government is prepared to "indemnify the project against any financial loss that derives from Premier Horgan's attempts to delay or obstruct the project". If the premier causes losses to the project, who will pay for those losses?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Chair, I think the minister was clear. We will not negotiate a possible indemnity for the Trans Mountain expansion in the public arena. Our goal in the negotiations is to mitigate the risks arising from a unique situation created by the premier of British Columbia and his actions so that we can have a commercially viable project that is useful for the Canadian economy and that will create 15,000 jobs. That is our position.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, it really is sad that the minister has gone into hiding. I have now placed three questions to him. He will not stand up and answer those questions. This is an occasion when the minister is supposed to come here and answer for his spending, but he has apparently snuck out the back door and is refusing to answer those questions.

I appreciate that the parliamentary secretary is very articulate and knows his files, but if the minister really believed in what he was doing and had the competence to implement his agenda, he would be here to answer the questions. Therefore, the question—

The Chair: Order. I would just remind hon. members that the same rules apply to references to members being in their place, references to either their absence or their presence, in debate as in committee, in this case.

The hon. member for Carleton can go ahead and finish up his question, and then we will go to the minister or the parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, if Premier Horgan's delays to the Trans Mountain pipeline cause losses, who will pay for those losses?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am happy to say that we believe the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion is in Canada's best interest. We believe this project is one that creates economic benefit for the country and is also a commercially viable project. We have said that we will find a way to make this project move forward in a commercial way that will allow for those 15,000 jobs and allow us to get international prices for the resources we have in this country.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, if Premier Horgan causes losses for the pipeline, who will pay for those losses?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, what we can say is that we recognize that the government that was in office before we came to power was absolutely unable to get a pipeline built that would go to international markets. We are going to find a way to do that, and do it in a way—

The Chair: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, if Premier Horgan blocks or delays the pipeline, leading to new costs, who will absorb those costs?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as we have said, we believe this project can be done through a private sector actor, through a commercial actor. We will make sure that we find an approach that creates the benefits we seek, and to do that in a way that is absolutely going to create the advantages in a commercially acceptable approach.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the finance minister says that if there are any losses resulting from Premier Horgan he will indemnify those losses. In that case, who would pay?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, indemnifications are used fairly regularly in business transactions between commercial actors. We believe that the approach we can take here is one that can be commercially viable, finding a way to create an indemnification that would allow this project to go forward, thereby creating the benefit for Canadians we want to create.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, has the finance minister discussed the Trans Mountain pipeline with any official at the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board or any of its employees?

• (2010)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I am not going to go into discussions with the proponent or any other discussions going on, whether they are happening or not. That is something we are doing privately at this time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the finance minister has slipped into the back of his 500-plus page omnibus budget a provision that would allow accused white collar criminals charged with bribery, fraud, insider trading, and other offences to have all charges dropped by merely signing something called a “deferred prosecution agreement”. This amends the Criminal Code.

Why does the finance minister think it is appropriate to amend the Criminal Code through a budget bill?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we have put forward a budget, and of course in the budget there are things about how we can make sure our economy works well. That is the function of this budget. What we have said is that we believe that our approach to deferred prosecution agreements will enable us to pursue an approach that is functioning and doing well in other economies, one that will result in more effective continuation of business success by companies once they have paid their dues to society.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, how much will taxpayers spend on interest on the federal debt this year?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as this House will know, we put forward a plan each year to best manage the finances of the country, and that includes our treasury function. We issue new debt each year, and that debt is issued in order to seek the best available approach to laddering our debt, to protect, and also to pay the appropriate amount of—

The Chair: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the answer is \$26 billion, at least according to the government's budget. His planning horizon goes to 2022-23. That is the farthest out it goes. In that year, how much will the government be spending on interest on debt?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I believe the member is asking me to recite from the budget a number that was in the document. I would be happy to do that. The number is, in fact, a projection. I believe

that \$33.1 billion is the number he was seeking, which he can seek himself in his private time as well on page 319 of the budget, “Equality and Growth”. I would actually be happy to sign one of these books for him.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I wonder if he would also be willing to sign for me a copy of the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, which says it will actually be \$39 billion, a massive increase in debt servicing costs. In fact, that is more than we now spend on health care.

Does the finance minister have any concerns that his plan will see Canada spend more on interest on the national debt than the federal government currently spends on health care transfers?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we believe it is important for us to come to a fiscally responsible way to manage the Canadian budget. We have made investments that have led to a very strong economic position. We have done that in a fiscally responsible way. We will continue to do that. We will drive to a lower amount of debt as a function of our GDP. Notwithstanding the \$150 billion of debt put on by Stephen Harper's government, we believe we can continue to manage that down in a responsible way.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the minister is so unconcerned about the level of debt he is piling up that he did not even know how much interest we are paying this year and had to resort to help from his officials. He did not know how much we will be spending at the end of his planning horizon and now does not even seem concerned that we are going to be spending more on debt interest in that year than we now spend on health care as a government.

That higher debt interest means higher taxes for Canadians. The finance minister has already raised taxes on middle-class Canadians, 80% of whom pay more income tax than they did when he took office. How much extra tax will he have to impose to finance interest on the national debt over the course of his plan?

• (2015)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, the facts are wholly incorrect there. The fact is that nine million Canadians actually pay less taxes than they did before we came into office. The fact is that nine out of 10 Canadian families have significantly more. There is \$2,300 more on average for families as a result of the Canada child benefit.

I understand that the member opposite does not want to announce the fact that we have reduced taxes, but that is actually the fact. We will continue to manage our economy in a way that creates the kind of robust growth and job opportunities that we have seen, and allows us to do so in a fiscally responsible way, reducing our debt as a function of GDP over the course of our planning horizon.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the Brookings Institution estimates that a deficit of 1% of GDP drives up interest rates by approximately 0.6%. That might seem like a small amount, but actually is a very big cost to someone who has, say, a \$300,000 mortgage. It is over \$1,000 in extra interest payments for or that family every single year.

Business of Supply

The finance minister, with his borrowing binge, is competing with Canadian borrowers when he runs these deficits and putting upward pressure on interest rates. Does he at all worry that his spending binge could contribute to higher interest rates and, therefore, higher costs for Canadians trying to own a home?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I know this is inconvenient for the member opposite, but the kind of investments that we have made have created the lowest unemployment rate since 1976. Canadians appreciate that we have been in a strong growth position, with the fastest growth among G7 countries. These are very positive positions that our country and individuals are in. We have been able to do that while continuing to reduce our debt as a function of GDP. The fact that we are in a positive economic situation is good for Canadians, and we will try to manage the risks in a prudent way as a result of that positive situation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, fixed mortgage rates are linked to government bond rates. Does the finance department have any information on how much the government's existing deficits contribute to increasing mortgage interest costs for Canadians trying to afford a home?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I will assure Canadians that we will continue to think about their best interests, which include having jobs. That is a starting point. Their best interests include creating economic growth. That, of course, is critically important. What we will do along the way is to ensure that we continue to think about the risks that are present in our economy. That is something we have done since day one. Housing is critically important for Canadians, so with our carefully managed approach we have been very carefully managing the risk of any housing imbalances to see that things are going in a way that protects people's biggest assets.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, when will the budget be balanced?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we will continue to manage to reduce the amount of debt as a function of GDP. While we see other countries taking a different approach, we believe that is the prudent approach for Canada.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am hoping we can take a break from adventures in prosecution and talk a bit to Canadians tonight about some things they care about: things like pensions; things like health care; things like infrastructure; and what I intend to spend a lot of time in my remarks talking about, which is skills training. Skills training is so important.

[Translation]

Last week, I visited Compétences Outaouais. The Des Draveurs school board, which represents most of the students and the school system in my riding, does an excellent job of managing Compétences Outaouais. I visited all the classes, including hair-dressing, welding, information technology, and building maintenance classes. Whatever the profession or occupation, Compétences Outaouais is there. I spoke to students and to teachers, who told me that they have never seen such a tight labour market where the demand for their students and graduates was so high.

● (2020)

[English]

We have a very good situation in Canada. Frankly, having spent a long time either observing or participating in government and politics, I never thought we would have this problem of periodic and episodic labour shortages. We have it throughout Quebec. We have it across the country. It is a looming big demographic challenge for our country. Some may describe it as the challenge of the age. I do not think the member for Carleton would describe it as the challenge for the age; he is too busy asking the finance minister, with his valuable time, to read to him from page 47 of the budget document. However, tonight I would like to spend a bit of this House's time to talk about the future.

[Translation]

I am pleased to speak to how the government is investing to ensure that Canadians have the skills they need to succeed in the economy of tomorrow.

The world is changing more rapidly than ever before, and our economy is rapidly changing too. New opportunities and new technologies are engines of growth that transform our workforce.

Last week, I spent time in Montreal with a well-known academic in Montreal's university community. He told me that every profession would be affected in the next five to 10 years, whether because of artificial intelligence or simply because work and the nature of work are changing.

We need to be on the leading edge. In Canada, we need to find our way of adding value, always being resourceful, and always knowing what is coming. However, first we have to prepare our young people. We need to get young people in Gatineau and the rest of Canada used to the labour market. We need to give them a taste of the adventure of work and the opportunities that work and a career can offer.

Fortunately, we have a government that is aware of this situation and that is determined to lead the way and take advantage of opportunities in the interest of all Canadians. To make the most of these new opportunities, we need to unite our efforts and ensure that Canadians have the skills they need to succeed in a changing economy.

That is not what we are hearing from the other side of the House. They are not focused on the big picture. They are not thinking about the future. They are not thinking about our young people. They are not thinking about the challenges presented by the changing world and the challenges that the careers of tomorrow will pose for all Canadians.

It makes good economic sense to ensure that young Canadians are able to get good, well-paid jobs and have rewarding and meaningful careers.

One important way we can help young Canadians transition into the workforce is to assist them in finding a summer job. I have no doubt that most of the members here had summer jobs when they were younger. The valuable experience we gained in those first jobs often provided a stepping stone to a full-time job and a successful career later in life.

Business of Supply

[English]

A summer job gives all students the ability to perhaps pay for their studies, to acquire experience, and to know what it means to have a routine and keep a job after their studies.

[Translation]

That is why, starting in budget 2016, the government supported 35,000 additional summer jobs. These really were additional jobs under the youth employment strategy's Canada summer jobs program. In our last budget, we committed an additional \$448.5 million over five years to the youth employment strategy across Canada starting in 2018-19. This funding will make it possible to double the number of Canada summer jobs placements in 2019-20 and allocate additional resources for a modernized youth employment strategy in the following years.

That is what we call a good investment. However, we need to go further. We need to give our youth and labour market analysts the ability to know and, in a way, to predict the future. As that university student told me last week, the nature of work itself is changing. The needs of the labour market are changing. Things are going well today. We even have a labour shortage problem—and it is a problem.

We need to look to the future to figure out where we should be. In this day and age, it can be hard to distinguish between real information and fake information, some of which we heard this evening. When people choose a career path and are looking for work, it can be hard to separate fact from fiction. We need better information. Better information leads to better outcomes. That is why the Government of Canada invested in a digital platform to provide the accurate and up-to-date information Canadians need to make informed career decisions. The government is investing \$27.5 million over five years starting this year, and \$5.5 million per year ongoing, from Employment and Social Development Canada's existing resources to support an education and labour market longitudinal linkage platform.

I am happy to say that this platform will be housed within Statistics Canada, which is also doing very good work on the census and the long-form questionnaire that we brought back thanks to the Minister of Finance.

• (2025)

[English]

As I indicated, since 2016 we have had great job growth in this country, with 600,000 jobs, almost all of them full-time jobs. The unemployment rate has never been lower in 40 years. Salaries, as we found out last week, are increasing at the fastest rhythm that they have in over five years. This is an economy that is on the right track. It is one that we cannot keep our eyes off, for all the reasons that I have indicated.

We have to continue to work as we do with our provincial partners and continue to increase our co-operation and partnership with them as we transfer money for labour market training and labour market programs. That is especially true in Quebec, but it is true all across Canada. We need solid partnerships there. We need solid partnerships with professional organizations and others.

We need to keep our focus on skills training as we continue to work on infrastructure and continue to work on increasing pension benefits for Canadians, but we are decidedly on the right track.

[Translation]

We are decidedly on the right track. Our plan is working. Canada is doing well. Our economy is strong, and we have the Minister of Finance and our government to thank for that.

The Chair: It is time for questions for the minister.

[English]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, I am afraid I am going to change the subject rather abruptly and turn a bit to the other important involvement of our finance minister. Thanks to some of his predecessors, such as Mr. Martin, our incredible presence on the global stage, and our incredibly important presence at global institutions like the G20, which I know Mr. Martin had a lot to do with, and also the IMF, the World Bank, and others, our finance minister continues to make sure that Canada's voice is heard. He is a leader at those gatherings and forums, and I know that all Canadians look with no small amount of pride as our Minister of Finance participates confidently and with the support of Canadians in all of those global forums.

Evolving global market conditions, in particular the effect of increasing U.S. policy rates and a rising U.S. dollar, have left some emerging markets adversely impacted, unfortunately. Among the more vulnerable emerging market economies has been one of our OAS partners, Argentina, which has been hit particularly hard by recent selling pressures in the market. The Argentine government announced on May 8 that it was seeking financial assistance from the IMF in order to quell market pressures. Therefore, I ask my colleague, the minister, if the Government of Canada supports ongoing discussions with the IMF on a financing arrangement to help the Argentine government navigate through this bout of market volatility.

• (2030)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I think it is quite important that we address this issue and address it publicly. We know that the decision that was taken by Argentina to approach the IMF has taken a significant amount of political courage. It is a country that has been working to get itself into a better economic position after some years of significant economic challenge. I can say that from Canada's perspective, we welcome the measures the Argentine government has undertaken over the last two and a half years to support the economic recovery in its country, to transform its economy, and to rebuild transparency and efficiency in its government. These were all important measures for Argentina and the Argentinian people.

We support the ongoing discussions with the IMF on a financing arrangement to backstop efforts to strengthen the Argentine economy. That is something, in our role as a supporter of the IMF, that we think is important to get on the record. We hope that these discussions between the IMF and Argentina can be both quick and successful, and enable it to continue on its path to improving its economic progress.

Business of Supply

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Chair, I know the minister will continue to brilliantly represent Canada as it has its voice heard on all of these global stages.

[*Translation*]

As I have finished my speech, I want to go back to provincial transfers. We know that this is one of the main ways that Canada has invested in skills training for adults, and in training in general as well. These payments are made to the provinces in order to provide skills training. Quebec has a certain autonomy in this area, but all the provinces enjoy a certain autonomy.

It is obvious to me that we will not be spending much time discussing the real issues facing Canadians listening to us.

Can the minister talk about the importance of our partnership with the provinces and territories, government transfers, and the increases in amounts allocated for skills training? How does he see this evolving over time?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, that is an extremely important question. Given that our economy is changing because of artificial intelligence and future automation, the nature of work will change drastically. Jobs will be different in the future. This means that we need training now to meet the needs of our economy. It is crucial that people have the opportunity to succeed in the future. That is why we are working with the provinces and territories. We have added money for training. We will continue with our approach of considering how we can quickly evolve with the changes in the economy. Training is at the centre of our approach.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to take part in this exercise. It is a first for me. It is quite nice to be able to speak directly with the Minister of Finance.

First, I want to compliment the Minister of Finance on his French. It is always good to be able to speak both official languages and to do so as elegantly as the Minister of Finance does. I am talking about style, because in terms of content, we have major differences.

It has been almost 31 months since the current government was elected and the Minister of Finance was sworn in. Let us not forget that these people were elected on the following electoral promise, found on page 76 of the Liberal Party's electoral platform: "With the Liberal plan, the federal government will have a modest short-term deficit [for the first three years]". Then, it concludes by saying, "return Canada to a balanced budget in 2019/20".

That was a promise. In reality, the deficit is three times bigger than planned, and he has no idea when we will return to a balanced budget.

Earlier, the Minister of Finance was proud to say that he was ready to sign a copy of his budget. Is he ready to sign his electoral platform?

• (2035)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I would like to begin with a word of thanks. It is important to have a good relationship between parties.

We explained that investing in Canadians was our first priority. That is clear. We have made investments and created jobs across Canada. We are in a very good position.

We know that it is possible to make investments and be fiscally responsible while lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio every year at budget time. That is our approach, and it is good for Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, those were some nice words, and the minister's French was great, but this is not why the minister was elected. The Minister of Finance was elected on promises of small deficits and a return to a balanced budget in 2019. Ultimately, the deficit is three times bigger than expected, and he has no idea when we will return to a balanced budget.

What does a promise mean to the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, as I said, we made some major promises. Canadians clearly want good jobs so that they can support their families. We have helped them make that happen.

We must invest to grow the economy, and that is what we did. We are now in an excellent fiscal position, which means that the debt-to-GDP ratio will go down. We are strong enough to meet the challenges of the future.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, it is too bad that the minister turned down my suggestion to sign his electoral platform. It is too bad that the minister is unable to explain his broken election promise to Canadians.

When will the government return to a balanced budget? On what date?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, it is always important to consider our country's position in the global context. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Not only is our ratio the lowest, but it is also about one-third of the average ratio of the other G7 countries. We are in a great position.

When managing an economy, we must consider the challenges of the future, our situation, and our track record. This is exactly what we did. Our debt level is very low, and we are strong for the future.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Finance knows full well that he inherited that situation when he became the finance minister. Our government left the house in order. Our country had the best debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7 when Canadians decided to make a change.

My question is this. Since the finance minister had a successful career on Bay Street, has he ever met a company head, an entrepreneur, or a manager who said they had no idea when they would balance their budget, as he is doing now?

Business of Supply

• (2040)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, what I can say is that, in 2005-06, there was a \$13.2-billion surplus, but after that the Harper government did things very differently. It ran a deficit for a number of years. When we took office, there was a very high level of unemployment and a \$1-billion deficit in the first year. That was the situation left by the Harper government. Our level of growth was very low. Now, we are in exactly the opposite situation. We are in a good position in terms of employment and economic growth, and our debt is dropping every year.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, that is the Bay Street baron's selective memory at work. Surely he knew, back when he was the Bay Street baron, that there was a global economic crisis. Luckily, the Conservatives were in power at the time, and the Conservatives managed the Canadian economy properly. Our legacy was the strongest in the G7. We are not ashamed of that. I will reiterate my question for the Minister of Finance, whose management career on Bay Street was brilliant. I am being completely sincere when I say that. He was a baron of Canadian industry. Kudos to him.

Can he tell me if, during his career, he ever heard someone in charge of a business say they had no idea when their business would be in the black? Did he hear that even once in his career?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, when I was in business, I invested. I made big investments to grow my company. It worked out very well. When I started, our revenue was around \$20 million. During my last year with the company, our revenue was around \$500 million. That happened because we invested to grow our company. That is exactly what we want to do for our country. We want to invest in creating more jobs and making things better. It is really working. That is exactly where we are at. Our debt-to-GDP ratio is on the way down, our record is strong, and our growth rate is good for Canada and Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, when the minister was in business, when he was the champion of Bay Street, did he ever leave a deficit as massive as the one he is leaving now as Minister of Finance? Could he tell us whether he left his company with a deficit and no idea when it would be able to balance its books, just as Canadian taxpayers have no idea when they will see a balanced budget?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, there are always differences between the private sector and the public sector. What I can say is that I invested in the future, just as we are doing for Canadians. In that respect, my approach is the same. The question is, is it working? Clearly, it is, because we are doing well. It is true that the global economy is doing well, but last year, in 2017, we had the fastest growth in the G7, which means we were doing better than the rest of the G7. Our investments created a good situation for Canadians. Now, we can look ahead to the future with greater resilience.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, the minister claims investments are going great, but I have a reality check for him and for Canadians. Over the past 31 months, since the Liberal Party took the reins of government and the Minister of Finance was appointed, Canadian investments in the United States have risen by 66%. American investments in Canada, on the other hand, have dropped by 50%.

Are things really going that well, minister?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, these are the facts. In 2017, business investment in Canada rose by 8% over the previous year. That increase signalled an improvement in our situation. That is a fact. It is true that we can always do better, but we had more business investment in 2017 than the previous year.

• (2045)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, the reality is that Canadian investors realize that investing in Canada is less profitable than investing in the United States. The Americans realize this also. That is why, and I will repeat the figures that they seem to have forgotten, Canadian investments in the United States have increased by 66% since the Liberals came to power whereas U.S. investments in Canada have declined by 50%. A little earlier, his parliamentary secretary boasted that his government is doing the opposite of other administrations, which are lowering personal and corporate taxes; without saying so, he was speaking of the United States.

Is the Minister of Finance prepared to say that he is ready to lower taxes and the burden on business to help Canadian investors rather than sending Canada's money elsewhere?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we know it is very important to listen and to think about our country's competitiveness. We have already lowered taxes for SMEs. The SME tax rate was lowered on January 1, 2018, and it will be lowered again on January 1, 2019. Now we are going to listen to what companies across Canada have to say about the changes happening in the United States, so that we can stay competitive in the future. I will be listening to them so I can find a way to keep us competitive in the future. However, at the same time, I will be making sure there is something besides taxes to guarantee that Canada stays competitive. We are going to consider every situation important for ensuring our future.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I think that is the reason the minister increased pension costs for businesses, among other things, and abolished the investment tax credits our government had implemented.

Does he think the right approach is to increase costs and abolish investment tax credits for companies?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, the corporate tax rate in Canada is the same as it was before we came into office. It is 15% for large companies but lower for SMEs, because we lowered their tax rate. It will continue to be lowered until it reaches 9% federally. I do not understand the question. The facts on Canadian businesses are there.

The Chair: We have two minutes left.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, we know the facts. The fact is that the Liberal government increased pension fund costs for employees and employers. The fact is that the government reduced and eliminated investment tax credits. It eliminated the tax credit for people who ride the bus. This government prides itself on its lofty environmental principles, but it reduced access to public transit and eliminated measures our government put in place to help bus riders. That measure helped people directly.

Does the Minister of Finance remember last summer's full-on attack against business people? Does he remember having to backtrack in a big hurry because he was about to lead Canada toward a financial disaster?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we will stay the course with business tax rates that keep us competitive. The fact is that we lowered small business taxes. That is clear. We will listen to what businesses have to say about changes happening in the United States, and we will determine whether things are different here. That is our approach. It is clear that we are well-positioned for the future in terms of our retirement plan for Canadians. It is improved. Our approach is working. Things are good for businesses and for Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have this opportunity to rise in the House to address the somewhat unique debate we are having this evening.

I would like to take the opportunity to highlight one of the central initiatives in budgets introduced by this government, and that is the important role our government is playing in supporting innovation in Canada.

In budget 2017, as part of our plan to build an economy that works for everyone, an economy where Canadians have access to high-quality jobs and where Canadian businesses are well placed to compete in a rapidly evolving and competitive global marketplace, the government launched the innovation and skills plan.

I should have mentioned at the beginning that I will be reading some prepared notes, and then after that I will have a couple of questions for the minister.

Even though that initiative was launched only a little more than a year ago, there have already been many successes. For example, as part of our plan, we launched the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy to ensure Canada would remain a global leader in this exciting field. We also launched the global skills strategy to make it easier for companies to access top talent from around the world.

As part of our plan, we also created six new economic strategy tables that would serve as a new model for industry-government collaboration, and five new innovation superclusters around the

country that would create tens of thousands of well-paying middle-class jobs.

At the foundation of this plan is science. Strong science is the pillar for transformative discoveries and innovations that improve our world, such as new medical therapies, quantum computing technologies, new agricultural practices, and more.

The government has heard the strong and united message from the research community on the need to restore and make new investments in the future of Canadian science, one that supports young researchers and embraces the increasingly international, interdisciplinary, and fast-breaking nature of leading-edge research.

I would like to commend the good work done by members of the fundamental science review, who last year presented a report on the state of Canada's fundamental science ecosystem, a review the likes of which we had not seen for over 40 years.

Informed by this work, the government took action in budget 2018 to help make Canada a world-leading centre for research and innovation. We did this by making a historic investment in the next generation of researchers. The next step of our innovation and skills plan will be to ensure Canada has the talented people needed to make important discoveries and to compete in a global economy.

In budget 2018, it was announced that we would invest nearly \$4 billion over five years in support for researchers, big data, and state-of-the-art tools and facilities to ensure Canadian researchers would have everything they needed to succeed. This will ensure that as we build a forward-looking economy, the next generation of Canadian researchers are qualified for jobs they are excited to have. This includes \$1.2 billion for the granting councils, the most ever given in new funding for fundamental research through the granting councils in Canadian history.

As we are on the topic of fundamental research, I note that on April 16 I attended the Queen's University Education Downlink with NASA. This wonderful event featured Canadian astronaut Drew Feustel, live through the first-ever video feed between the International Space Station and a Canadian university. Drew answered questions from attendees and shared his empowering stories. His success is an inspiration to the next generation of Canadian researchers. I am certain the innovation and research funding proposed in budget 2018 will empower more Canadians to reach the heights that he has.

Investments will be tied to clear objectives and conditions so Canada's next generation of researchers is larger, more diverse, and better supported.

I would like to take a few minutes to get into some of the specifics of this new funding.

Business of Supply

We know that research expands our basic understanding of the world, generates new ideas, and helps build a workforce that is better able to respond to challenges with creativity and confidence. Through Canada's granting councils, we are doing just that. The government is making a historic investment in the granting councils. This means better opportunities for students and researchers. This investment will provide increased support and training opportunities for roughly 21,000 researchers, students, and high-quality personnel across Canada every year.

• (2050)

The granting councils are also tasked with developing new plans to achieve greater diversity among funding recipients, ensuring that funding reaches a more diverse group of researchers, including more women, members of under-represented groups, and those early in their careers.

To attract and retain leading early career researchers at post-secondary institutions across the country, the government announced new funding for the Canada research chairs program. This new funding will be targeted to early career researchers whose diversity better represents Canada's population.

Better support for Canada research chairs means more support for people like Jason Moffat at the University of Toronto, whose research will help identify new cancer cell vulnerabilities, increase understanding of how cancer begins, and ultimately aid in developing tools to help diagnose and treat cancer; or Gilles Gerbier at Queen's University, whose research on particle astrophysics will help unravel the mysteries of dark matter and deepen our understanding of the universe's vast complexities.

Researchers need access to state-of-the-art tools and facilities at Canadian universities, polytechnics, colleges, and research hospitals so they can carry out the groundbreaking research that makes Canada a leader on the global stage. Through budget 2018, the government took the important step of providing ongoing, stable funding for research tools and infrastructure, supported through the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Providing Canadians with the opportunity to realize their full potential is not just the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do for our economy.

In Canada, fewer than one in six small and medium-sized enterprises, 16% in fact, are majority-owned by women, and businesses owned by women tend to generate less than half the revenue generated by businesses owned by men. This can change, and it needs to change if we are to unlock economic growth for all Canadians.

To address ongoing barriers and advance the growth of women-led businesses, the government announced in budget 2018 a new women entrepreneurship strategy, which will be a comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting women-led businesses across the country.

To improve access to capital, skills, mentorship, procurement, and networking opportunities, all important factors for growing businesses, the government announced \$105 million over five years to support women-led businesses, to be delivered through the regional development agencies.

Because we know that growing businesses need customers, the government announced that it intends to introduce measures to increase the participation of women-owned SMEs in federal procurements.

Finally, we know that turning new ideas into world-class companies requires lots of capital. This is why the government announced \$1.6 billion in new financing over three years for women entrepreneurs through the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada, and an increase to \$200 million for investments in women-led technology firms through the Business Development Bank of Canada's women in technology venture capital fund.

Combined, these initiatives will give women entrepreneurs a greater chance to grow, hire, innovate, and succeed.

Canada has a reputation as a global leader in science and innovation. Ensuring that Canada remains this way is why our most recent budget is making historic investments in the next generation of researchers, whose diversity also better represents Canada's population, to lead to breakthrough discoveries that will improve the quality of life for all Canadians.

• (2055)

The government's initiative and skills plan, as I indicated, will help build an economy where Canadians have access to high-quality jobs and where Canadian businesses are well placed to compete in a rapidly evolving and competitive global marketplace. This certainty seems to be working, given that, as mentioned, the plan has already led to the launch of the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy, the global skills strategy, six economic strategy tables, and five innovation superclusters across the country.

The measures our government announced in budget 2018 would help to make Canada a world-leading centre for research and innovation, including by investing nearly \$4 billion in new money over five years for support of researchers, big data, and state-of-the-art tools and facilities so that Canadian researchers have everything they need to succeed.

For example, through budget 2018 the government would strengthen the National Research Council by convening large-scale teams of Canada's top scientists to reinforce its research-strength role as a trusted partner of firms of all sizes and of academia. This would advance the high-risk, high-reward research with potential for game-changing scientific discoveries and technological breakthroughs and, in the end, take our ideas to the global marketplace.

My question for the minister relates to the historic investments we have been making. There are so many more different opportunities and so many more different items in the budget that address specifically how we will continue to build on this innovation. I wonder if the minister would like to take the opportunity to comment a bit further and highlight some of the things related to investment in innovation that were addressed in budget 2018.

Business of Supply

• (2100)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canadians as innovators certainly seek answers to difficult questions and are always looking for new ways to apply what they have learned. For example, the desire to understand how the human heart works led to pioneering efforts in open-heart surgery and the invention of the artificial pacemaker. Curiosity about how we learn and think led to breakthroughs in machine learning and artificial intelligence, discoveries that are improving our quality of life and putting Canada at the leading edge of research and discovery.

However, as we build a forward-looking economy, better focused on science and innovation and inclusive of women and under-represented groups, we need to ensure that all of our communities are well positioned to benefit. To help foster economic growth in communities across Canada, the government proposed in budget 2018 to provide an additional \$511 million over five years, starting in 2018-19, to the regional development agencies to support the innovation and skills plans across all regions of Canada. This means more and better-tailored programs and support for workers and communities, delivered in a way that makes the most impact. This initiative would also tie into the women entrepreneurship strategy to provide nationally coordinated, regionally tailored support for women entrepreneurs, as well as help workers and communities in the west and in the Atlantic region adapt to Canada's transition to a low-carbon economy.

These are just a few more examples of how our government plans to help create the industries and the jobs that will strengthen and grow Canada's middle class for years and for generations to come.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, being from a riding that has three post-secondary institutions, I have directly seen the impact that these research dollars have. Quite often, when we talk about these investments we do not fully value the economic benefit that we can get later on down the road from these investments. I wonder if the minister can comment a bit more on why these investments are so important so that we can actually see changes in the future, and how those changes can better benefit our economy as a whole.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, what the member is getting at is at the heart of our government's plan. We said, back in 2015, that we knew we needed to make investments in making our country more innovative, and we knew that to do that, we needed to start with how we could ensure that firms had the potential for success.

First of all, we thought about people and how we could ensure that people are in a positive situation so they can go out and get the training and the jobs. Then, we thought about the fact that people need to have the opportunity and the funding for science and research, as individuals, that would allow them to come up with the kind of discovery research that will bring innovations to them and to the marketplace, whether it is through universities or into business. Then, of course, we need to think about commercialization. That is one of the things that are important in this particular budget, where we have thought about commercialization, for example how we can come up with an intellectual property strategy in a way that we can ensure that we actually drive the success through into companies so we can create more innovation for the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, we will continue our conversation on the Liberal carbon tax.

For months now, we have been calling on the government to come clean on the real impact of the Liberal carbon tax. The reason is quite simple: the government has on hand a document that I am currently holding, but unfortunately, the Standing Orders prevent me from presenting it to all Canadians. I have asked the government over a dozen times to table the document in the House, but unfortunately it refuses. It is a simple document. It was published on October 20, 2015. The government has therefore had it on hand since October 20, 2015. It spells out precisely what the financial impact of the Liberal carbon tax will be on Canadian families. Unfortunately, the information we have is completely redacted, struck out.

Why is the government being so secretive?

• (2105)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, what I just heard is quite interesting. The document in question is from October 20, 2015. Since we were elected on October 19, 2015, I can say that the contents of the document predate our approach to improving our situation with regard to the climate.

We decided that the way to improve the situation for our children and grandchildren is to have a national price on carbon. We know that 85% of Canadians already live in a region with carbon pricing. This approach applies to other parts of the country, where there currently is no price on carbon. With our approach, any revenues could go to the provinces and territories, which may choose to give their residents a tax cut. That is important. That is our approach, and it will likely result in a tax cut for people in places where there is carbon pricing.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, the minister is being a wise guy about a simple document. It reads as follows: "the potential impact of a carbon price on households' consumption expenditures across the income distribution. The key findings are:" It ends there. The rest is blacked out. It is impossible to read anything else.

Why is the minister ashamed of a study that gives Canadians the facts?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, that is obviously not our approach. Our approach involves putting a tax on carbon in regions where such a tax does not exist. Provinces that already have a carbon tax, like British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario, have experienced healthy economic growth.

I will give a very simple example. In Alberta, a family of four with an annual income of \$95,000 will receive a \$540 tax cut in a situation in which they pay \$500. This means that carbon pricing will put an extra \$40 in the family's pockets. This is one approach the provinces can take, but we will see what they do.

I think it is a good idea to offer a tax cut with the money generated by the price on carbon in provinces and territories that do not currently have a carbon tax.

Business of Supply

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, it is quite remarkable that the Minister of Finance can give specific figures in a provincial example. He has the specific figures for all Canadians in the document that he refuses to release, because he is ashamed of the findings and knows that it will be too costly for Canadians.

The minister keeps saying that this tax is revenue neutral for the federal government. Can he say that his Liberal carbon policy is spending neutral for Canadians?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, 85% of Canadians live in a province that already has a price on carbon. We now want to put the other 15% in the same situation by establishing a federal carbon tax if necessary. The provinces and territories will be able to use the revenue returned to them to lower their tax rates. By determining exactly what they are going to do, we can anticipate what the reduction will be.

I suggest that the member ask the premiers of provinces that do not have a carbon tax whether they are going to cut their citizens' taxes.

• (2110)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I was a member of Quebec's National Assembly in 2011 when the bill was being voted on, and I voted against it. The people in my riding considered what I had done and then voted me in three more times with an absolute majority. It does not bother me in the least to talk about my record.

I have a very simple question for the minister. A few weeks ago, in Vancouver, in reply to a question about rising gas prices, his leader answered that this is exactly what he wanted because he believes it will make people use less gas.

Does the Minister of Finance feel the same way?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I believe it is of the utmost importance that we consider how to improve the economic situation of Canadians. It is also important to address climate change, since it will be a real challenge in the future and there will be costs associated with it.

This evening, I am being asked whether the provinces will consider lowering taxes. That is up to them. The question I have for the members here is this. Is there a better approach than putting a price on carbon? I have not heard any suggestions from the members opposite. If they have a plan, we are listening, but in our opinion, and from what we have heard from economists and others who know how to deal with climate change, we need to set a revenue-neutral price on carbon. That is our approach, and it will allow us to reduce carbon emissions in the future while ensuring that Canadians are in a good situation.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, what does the finance minister believe is the ideal price for a litre of gas?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, there is a market, and the price varies depending on the global context. It is therefore impossible to answer that question. Of course, we want Canadian families to be in a good position. We believe that jobs are the most important thing, so that is where we are starting. It is also important to have a good level of economic growth to create opportunities. Fortunately, unemployment is very low, and we have the highest growth in the G7. That is a good position.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, my question was very simple and was directly related to what the Prime Minister of Canada said. He said that higher gas prices were exactly what he wanted. The Minister of Finance was unable to answer my question about what he thinks the ideal gas price is. Canadians can see right through that kind of evasion.

Let's talk about evasion. Two and a half years ago, the government promised to save \$3 billion. In March, a Department of Finance investigation revealed that not a penny of that \$3 billion in savings ever materialized. That was in March.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us how much money he has saved since March through public spending cuts?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the question. What I can say is that we will keep going with our fiscally responsible approach. Clearly, our approach is working. We are in a positive situation, but of course we need to look at how we can position ourselves for the future to keep the country competitive. That is why we are listening. We have done a lot, but we still have a lot to do. We will keep going with an approach that prioritizes Canadian families, the future, and people who want to have important jobs in the future. We will keep going with an approach that works.

• (2115)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I am going to repeat the question, and I suggest the minister listen this time. The Liberal government promised to find \$3 billion in savings. In March, a government report found that not a penny of the promised \$3 billion has been saved.

My question for the minister is perfectly simple. Since March, have the Treasury Board, the Department of Finance, or the Liberal government saved so much as a penny of the \$3 billion the Liberals promised?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we always need to consider how we are managing the economy and how we can produce a budget that works and that improves our future prospects. In our budget, we considered each measure and how it could contribute to the efficiency of our economy and boost our growth rate. That is an approach that has delivered results. It is working. We are going to continue with our responsible approach, with a declining debt-to-GDP ratio, and with investments that are good for the economy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Finance is the undisputed champion of reckless spending and out-of-control budgets. He promised small deficits, but he ended up with deficits three times bigger than expected. He promised a zero deficit in 2019, but he actually has no idea when Canada will see a balanced budget. When asked about his commitment to find \$3 billion in savings, even though a March report concluded that not a single penny of that \$3 billion had been saved, he cannot even name one example of savings realized by his government.

Business of Supply

How can he expect to be taken seriously?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, our approach involves a significant amount of accountability. We explained that we can continue with a record that is the best in the G7. I said that we are already in a good position, since we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, which is about one-third the average of the other countries. At the same time, during our fiscal-planning process, we can continue to work towards lowering our debt-to-GDP ratio. We are in a good position, with a debt-to-GDP ratio around 30%, and this figure will be around 28.4% in the fifth year. We are therefore in a good position, since the other countries are seeing their debt-to-GDP ratio increase. We are resilient. We will continue to invest in growing our economy in a responsible way.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, Canadians understand that this government was elected based on its promises. It has gone from small deficits to big ones. The government promised that we would have a zero deficit in 2019, but in reality, it has no idea when it will balance the budget. It claimed that it would be transparent, but in reality, it is hiding information from Canadians about the federal carbon tax.

This is my last question, and once again, it is a very simple one. Can the Minister of Finance give Canadians an example—just one example—of the \$3 billion in savings he projected two years ago?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, it is always important for us to be fiscally responsible. We will continue with our approach, which is working, and look at the situation facing Canadians and their families in the future. Fortunately, we are in a good position, but there are still things to do, which is why we will continue with our approach.

• (2120)

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canadians revere nature and are recognized for that. Our desire to conserve, restore, and protect the natural environment is part of who we are, and with climate change upon us, we especially recognize the need to make significant investments in Canada's air, water, and wild spaces for our children and grandchildren.

We also recognize that creating a world-leading clean economy is the imperative of our time. Putting a price on carbon pollution is a foundational aspect of achieving a clean energy economy. The balance between the natural environment and building a cleaner, greener economy is our collective challenge. Therefore, our government has allocated \$5.7 billion over 12 years in support of the implementation of the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change. This plan, developed with the provinces and territories and in consultation with indigenous peoples will build a healthy environment by supporting a strong, clean economy, fostering innovation, and creating good, well-paying jobs for the middle class.

In November 2016 the government also launched a \$1.5 billion national oceans protection plan to improve marine safety and responsible shipping, protect Canada's marine environment, and unlock opportunities for indigenous people and coastal communities. Budget 2018 has proposed further investment to help grow a healthy

and sustainable clean economy. Canada has committed to conserving at least 17% of its land and inland waters by 2020 through networks of protected areas and other conservation measures. Both protected and conserved areas will ensure healthier habitats for species at risk and improve biodiversity.

To that end, budget 2018 proposed a historic investment of more than \$1.3 billion over five years, one of the most significant investments in nature conservation in Canadian history. This investment would contribute \$500 million from the federal government to create a new \$1-billion nature fund in partnership with corporate, not-for-profit, provincial, territorial, and other partners. Through this collaboration, the nature fund would make it possible to secure private land, support provincial and territorial species protection efforts, and build the capacity of indigenous peoples to conserve land and species for our benefit and that of future generations.

The government is also investing \$1 billion over five years to establish better rules for the review of major projects that will protect our environment, fish, and waterways; rebuild public trust; and help create new jobs and economic opportunities. This is an example of delivering on a promise to protect the environment, restore public trust in federal environmental assessment and regulatory processes, and provide predictability for businesses.

Budget 2018 proposed even further investments to help grow a healthy and sustainable clean economy. We are advancing efforts to better protect, preserve, and recover endangered marine life in Canada, with an investment of \$167 million over five years. This includes funding for research to help us better understand the factors affecting the health of endangered whale species, as well as actions we can take now to help address threats arising from human activity. Whales are vital to healthy marine ecosystems and an important part of eco tourism in Canada's Pacific and Atlantic coastal regions and in the St. Lawrence estuary.

To keep people and communities safe we also need to improve the networks that collect data and monitor changes in weather, climate, water, ice, and air. Budget 2018 proposes to improve Canada's weather and water services with \$120 million over five years to help protect people and communities from the devastating impacts of extreme weather events. These events, such as the wildfires and flooding we have unfortunately seen recently, are having and can have a devastating impact on people, communities, and our economy.

Business of Supply

Therefore, another proposed measure of our government is our plan to extend for five years the existing accelerated deduction for clean energy generation and energy efficiency equipment to property acquired before 2025. The deferral of tax associated with this measure is expected to provide businesses with a benefit of approximately \$123 million over five years.

Finally, to ensure that a price on carbon pollution is in place across Canada, we are developing a federal system that would apply in provinces and territories upon request, and also in those that do not have a pricing system in place that meets the federal standards, by the end of this year. The government is also supporting the federal carbon pollution pricing system with \$109 million in new funding over five years for Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency to develop, implement, and enforce the federal carbon pricing system.

• (2125)

As a member of Parliament from British Columbia and the former mayor of West Vancouver, I remember former British Columbia premier Gordon Campbell's leadership well. I know how British Columbia, as North America's first jurisdiction with an economy-wide pricing policy on carbon in 2008, has led and succeeded, and as a government, we know what British Columbia learned. Members can read all about it in a recent 2015 report I participated in. It is called "How to Adopt a Winning Carbon Price".

Here are some key recommendations: one, a carbon tax and a thriving economy can coexist; two, strong leadership matters; three, start with a low price; four, commit to a schedule of price increases; five, revenue neutrality helps to address private sector concerns; six, a carbon tax is one component of a suite of climate policies; and finally, expect a clean environment, an enhanced reputation, and a thriving clean-tech sector.

The results of British Columbia's decade-old initiative to put a price on carbon are well understood. In 2012, at a tax rate of \$30 a tonne, more than \$1 billion a year is collected because of pricing carbon, and each year it is accompanied by an equal or greater tax cut. The opportunity created by pricing carbon pollution in British Columbia meant a reduction in tax rates for large and small businesses, a reduction in personal income tax rates, a climate action tax credit for low-income British Columbians, and an annual \$200 benefit for rural and northern homeowners. These are the choices B. C. made.

Under our plan, the provinces, under the leadership of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, may make their own choices too. When we began, the public supported pricing carbon by 54%. This steadily grew to 64% in 2012 as B.C.'s economy slightly outperformed the rest of Canada throughout. For the clean-tech sector, the shift has been positive.

In conclusion, our quality of life as Canadians and our present and future prosperity are deeply connected to the environment in which we live. The extraordinary beauty of Canada's nature, parks, and wild spaces are central to our identity as Canadians. As Canadians, it is a public trust.

We are forging ahead with determination and ambition toward a more prosperous future for all Canadians. Our government is making

significant investments toward a strong and sustainable low-carbon economy, one that creates growth and good middle-class jobs while preserving our safety, security, and natural environment for future generations.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Does the parliamentary secretary have a question or a comment?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Chair, the protection of Canada's natural heritage is in the interest of all Canadians. On behalf of the community I represent, I am proud to aspire to sustainable environmental policies that can lead to a strong economy. It is the role of our government to set an example for sustainable development in supporting businesses and contributing to a green economy.

The government is investing \$1.4 billion in projects through the low-carbon economy leadership fund, which will generate clean growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions while creating jobs for Canadians for years to come. Also, the greening government strategy sets an ambitious target to reduce direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions from Government of Canada operations, so I would like to ask if the Minister of Finance could please tell us more about the federal carbon pollution pricing system.

Climate change is one of our most pressing challenges. The impacts are real, including coastal erosion; thawing permafrost; and increases in heat waves, droughts, and flooding. At the same time, it seems evident that climate action creates an opportunity for Canada. It would be helpful to hear more about actions the government is taking in this regard.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I know the hon. member would agree Canadians understand the effects of pollution are not free, because I know she spent a significant of her career talking about that. She also knows that polluting the air we breathe and the earth and the oceans that feed us must come at a cost to those who do the polluting.

Pricing carbon pollution is simply one of the most effective ways to reduce emissions. It creates incentives for businesses and households to innovate more and pollute less. That is why putting a price on carbon pollution is central to the government's plans to fight climate change and to grow the economy.

Business of Supply

Through Bill C-74, which is currently before Parliament, the government is taking action to reduce emissions by introducing the greenhouse gas pollution pricing act, which would put a legal framework in place for the proposed federal carbon pollution pricing system. The pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change I mentioned earlier includes a collaborative pan-Canadian approach to pricing carbon pollution, with the aim of having carbon pricing in place in all provinces and territories this calendar year.

Right now, a price on carbon pollution is in place in four provinces—Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta—covering over 80% of the Canadian population. These provinces are leading Canada in economic growth. Simply put, we are putting a price on what we do not want, which is carbon pollution, while encouraging more of what we do want: clean innovation and lower emissions.

• (2130)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Chair, I would also like to ask, because of the experience in British Columbia, how the minister sees this benefiting Canada's reputation in the world.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, it is an important question and it is opportune right now, as we are the president of the G7 countries.

One of the initiatives we are putting forward as the president of the G7 is a focus on the assurance that a strong economy and a strong environment go hand in hand. We recognize that in order to be a leader around the world in responsibly extracting resources, we also need to think about how we responsibly ensure that we lower emissions over the long term. That is why we are looking at how we price carbon and showing not only Canadians but the world that a country like Canada has taken the approach of making sure that we are environmentally conscious and doing that while we also have growth in the economy. We are making sure that Canadians have opportunities today and that we are responsibly providing opportunities for tomorrow through an approach that will encourage clean technology options and lower emissions as well as help the economy.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Chair, I would also like to congratulate the minister on the integration of his budget. Perhaps he could comment on how cities and communities are benefiting from the infrastructure investment that is the corollary of putting a price on carbon pollution.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we know that in making investments for the long term, some of the investments that have the most significant positive impact on our economy are infrastructure investments. They have that impact because they create jobs today and make our economy more productive and efficient over the long run. Also, new investments in infrastructure often create the opportunity for us to be more environmentally conscious over the long term. Investment in public transit is a good example.

The kinds of investments we are making together with municipalities and provinces are intended to make the lives of Canadians better, to enable cities to have better public transit systems, and to enable provinces to have a better way of approaching the challenges they face in collaborating with cities to get these projects done. We are finding a very responsive and effective way of working together with provinces and municipalities and getting

things done. As a result, in direct answer to the question, we are getting to agreements with them that are showing the benefits that we want for Canadians.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Chair, another aspect of our investment that is really exciting and synergistic and shows tremendous potential is our superclusters announcement. It offers a lot of hope for the kind of clean, green economy we are wishing to build. Perhaps the minister could comment on that.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to talk about what we are trying to achieve with the superclusters approach, which, as the member mentioned, is about growing our economy. It is also about finding ways to grow our economy in an environmentally conscious way.

We have said that in order to find ways to accelerate economic growth, we need to consider the nexus of investment required between companies large and small, research institutes, and universities, so that we can create more economic advantage through those investments. We have chosen some recipients for that supercluster funding through a very competitive process, and that includes one recipient that is focused on clean technologies and how we can significantly improve our ability to generate opportunities in that sector.

We will continue with this approach. We are convinced that we will be able to accelerate our economic opportunities in specific sectors that will be positive in the long term for our economy.

• (2135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will be using all of my time to ask the Minister of Finance questions. I would first like to thank him for being here today.

My questions are primarily related to taxation. The first ones concern the tax treaties Canada has signed with almost 97 countries, if my memory serves me well. The Minister of Finance stated that he was proud of that number.

What is the main purpose of a tax treaty for the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to answer the member's questions.

In our view, we need tax treaties with other countries in order to be part of a global community. Companies considering investing in other countries need an approach that puts them in a good position. Therefore, we need these agreements.

Our strategy of entering into agreements is essentially the same as that of all developed countries. Our approach seeks to facilitate investments. We will continue with this approach, which has worked for a long time.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, I take it that the answer is basically to avoid double taxation.

Business of Supply

Can the Minister of Finance confirm that we have such an agreement with Barbados?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, given that the purpose of tax treaties is to avoid double taxation and that we have a signed a treaty with Barbados, as the Minister of Finance just confirmed, can he tell us what is the tax rate for foreign corporations established in Barbados?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, what I can say is that we have agreements with other countries, as we have a territorial tax system so that we can ensure that business investment can happen in those countries. That is an approach that allows our businesses to compete on equal footing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, I was just looking for a percentage. It takes no more than five seconds.

We have had a tax treaty with Barbados since 1980. I hope the minister has had the time to look at that rate.

Once more, what is the tax rate for foreign corporations established in Barbados?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I can say that I am enormously privileged to be the Minister of Finance. One of the things that I have not taken upon myself is to memorize the tax rates of every country in the world. I am happy if the member opposite would like me to recite Canadian tax rates, on which I have a pretty high level of fluency.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, I thought that 30 seconds would give the minister and his colleagues enough time to find the answer.

Can the minister confirm the amount, in Canadian dollars, of Canadian foreign investments in Barbados currently, or the latest available figures according to Statistics Canada?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I can say again that in my efforts to memorize the global economy, I have not taken it upon myself to try to memorize the specific amounts of investment into Barbados, but certainly I am happy to inform the member that there is this thing called “Google”, and if he would like to use it, he can find that information for himself.

• (2140)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, I looked and the amount of investments in Barbados was \$68 billion in 2016.

Can the minister tell us what types of investments are made in Barbados?

Barbados is still the third or fourth country where Canada makes the most foreign investments after the United States and England. Why does Barbados always rank third or fourth?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, what I can say is that the Canadian tax system contains rules to ensure that Canadian corporations do not escape their tax obligations here by shifting Canadian-source income to low-tax countries. I clearly do not know about every business investment into every other country, but we do have rules that make sure that a Canadian corporation could not avoid paying taxes in Canada on investment income simply by moving passive assets abroad. Such income would continue to be taxed in Canada, even if earned abroad.

I am happy to have more information for the member on our approach internationally.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, it is simple math: $1 + 1 = 2$. Corporations in Barbados are taxed between 0.5 and 2.5%. We have a double taxation agreement with Barbados. I believe that the calculation is $1 + 1 = 2$ here as well.

In March 2017, the Minister of Finance voted in favour of a motion calling for tax agreements such as the one with Barbados and 96 others to be renegotiated.

Has the minister renegotiated the tax agreement with Barbados?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we have been working with partner countries at the OECD to develop and implement common approaches or standards to better share information and limit the ability of large multinational corporations to use tax avoidance strategies to minimize their global tax liabilities. This is an important initiative that will allow us to make sure that organizations pay their taxes in the place where those revenues are earned. This is an effort that is ongoing. We are collaborating closely with other countries. The best approach, in our estimation, is to ensure that we tax companies in the jurisdictions in which they should be taxed.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, on another related topic, the government signed two new tax information exchange agreements with Antigua and Barbuda and with Grenada not that long ago, in 2017. Can my colleague, the Minister of Finance tell us the tax rate of these two countries with which we recently signed agreements? It was under his mandate, so I imagine that he has the information right now.

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we will continue to sign tax exchange agreements with countries that give us information and allow us to assure ourselves that corporations are paying the appropriate level of tax.

For specific questions on tax rates around the world, I would again direct the member to a source of information that will provide him with that information in his leisure time.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, the answer is zero, and the foreign companies established in those countries pay zero taxes. He is saying that the purpose of the tax information exchange agreements is to exchange tax information. That is obvious.

Did the Minister of Finance know that foreign companies in Grenada do not have to pay taxes and do not have to file an income tax return with a revenue agency?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, the point we are trying to get across is that companies cannot avoid paying taxes here. The issue, really, is that we have an agreement with those countries to facilitate trade. Our agreement does not allow them to avoid paying taxes in Canada; it allows them to make investments in other countries. We have a territorial tax system, pretty much like every other country on the planet. The U.S. is now moving to that approach. This is an approach that clearly is a consensus among other countries and one that is working for the global community.

• (2145)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, I am going to quote the agreement because the minister does not seem to understand all the ramifications and effects of such an agreement. The backgrounder for the agreement that was tabled in the House says that the active business income from a Canadian company's foreign affiliate can be paid to the Canadian parent company in the form of dividends that are exempt from Canadian taxes.

Can the minister confirm that, under these provisions, the dividends paid to the Canadian parent company are exempt from Canadian taxes?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we have a territorial tax system, which means that should a company make an investment somewhere else and make profits, it is subject to the tax rates in that other place. Should it make investments in Canada and make profits, it is subject to the tax rates in Canada. We have international agreements to make sure that we have insight into how monies flow between countries. It is an approach, a territorial tax system, that is consistent with the approach of virtually every other country on the planet.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, in the time I have left, I would like to move on to another topic and another Liberal government promise. The Liberal government voted in favour of one of our motions on the stock option deduction loophole. The minister himself used the stock option deduction in his company, Morneau Shepell, and he promised to review and cap it.

What does he believe is the tax objective of this stock option deduction?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, to be clear, I have never myself had a stock option.

What I can say is that we have not made any decisions with respect to possible changes in this regard. We have come forward

with approaches that we know have been enabling Canadians to be in a positive situation, with tax reductions for nine million Canadians. We will continue to ensure that our tax system provides advantages to middle-class Canadians that allow them to be successful in raising their families.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, it is unfortunate that the minister did not answer my question about the objective of this tax tool that is used by hundreds of business executives.

What is the Department of Finance breakdown of the heaviest users of these stock options in Canada by income?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we have taken an approach that has looked at the importance of tax fairness. As a very first measure, we decided that we would raise taxes on the top 1% of Canadians. We used that revenue to lower taxes for nine million Canadians. We then moved forward to improve the situation of nine out of 10 families by increasing the Canada child benefit.

Our approach has clearly been to create an environment that makes sense while allowing us to continue with broad-based support for businesses in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Chair, it is unfortunate that the Department of Finance does not have the breakdown of such an important tax tool.

According to the information we have, \$500 million in stock option deductions were used by 75 senior business executives. Obviously, we are talking about the most profitable companies in Canada. That is an average of \$6 million per executive.

Can the minister confirm whether those numbers are correct?

[English]

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I am not in the practice of memorizing numbers, as I have said before. What I can say is that we will continue to support innovative businesses, but we will also make sure that our system creates tax fairness for all Canadians. We think that by ensuring that middle-class Canadians, people raising families, are in a very advantageous tax situation, we can provide incentives for them to continue to create value for themselves, their families, and our overall economy.

• (2150)

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the committee. Tonight I would like to take my time to raise an issue that I personally find especially important: reconciliation with indigenous peoples. I propose to allocate my time with remarks of about 10 minutes, to save some time for questions and answers.

Business of Supply

The government is committed to reconciliation with indigenous peoples, and we have backed up this commitment with important action. In our time in office, our government has taken real and concrete steps to advance reconciliation, improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples, and promote skills and opportunities that will empower first nations, Inuit, and the Métis nation. Together, Canada and indigenous peoples are forging a new relationship, a relationship based on trust, respect, and a true spirit of co-operation.

The first step toward this new relationship began with budget 2016, which included investments of close to \$8.5 billion over five years to expand opportunities for indigenous people, to improve the socio-economic conditions in communities, and to bring about real transformational change. Budget 2016 helped turn the page. With our first budget, we offered investments to better support indigenous children in achieving futures as bright and as prosperous as every other child's future in Canada. The 2016 investments in education, infrastructure, training, and other programs are contributing to a better quality of life for all indigenous peoples and to helping build a stronger and better Canada.

Our government did not stop there. Budget 2017 created even more opportunities for indigenous peoples, with another \$3.4 billion over five years to increase access to post-secondary education, support better health services, and improve community infrastructure. The latest budget, tabled in February, builds on these significant investments. It takes further steps towards reconciliation by investing in priority areas that were identified by first nation, Inuit, and Métis nation partners. Yes, partners.

Through budget 2018, the government will help remove barriers to indigenous peoples' success by supporting them as they build and refine their skills, by helping them have access to high-quality education, and by enabling them to fully participate in the economy, leading to more prosperous communities. By increasing the contribution of first nations, Inuit, and Métis to the Canadian economy, the 2018 budget will help narrow the gap in the quality of life of indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians.

We know that our latest budget will have an impact, because we can already see results from our past investments. For example, since we came into office in November 2015, more than 60 long-term drinking water advisories for public water systems on reserves have been lifted.

To understand why it is necessary to act, we all must be aware of the extent of the work that has yet to be done. I would like to put things in context.

● (2155)

First, no one in Canada should be afraid to drink the water that comes out of their taps. As I just said, over 60 drinking water advisories have been lifted, but a lot of work remains. About 75 long-term advisories are still in place on public systems on reserves. The government is committed to ending all those long-term drinking water advisories by March 2021. To this end, budget 2018 provides an additional \$173 million to ensure this happens more quickly in many communities.

Second, no Canadian should be forced to live in overcrowded and unsafe housing. Unfortunately, one in five indigenous people live in

a house that is in need of major repairs. One in five also live in housing that is overcrowded. Access to adequate and affordable housing is a particular challenge for indigenous women. Budget 2018 included funding to support distinctions-based housing strategies for first nations, Inuit, and the Métis nation.

Third, there is no greater priority than ensuring the safety, security and well-being of children. Indigenous children under the age of 14 make up less than 8% of all children in Canada, but they represent more than half of those in foster care. To help address this, budget 2018 included more than \$1.4 billion in new funding for first nations child and family services.

We cannot ignore the significant gaps in health outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous people. Compared to the Canadian population, infant mortality rates of first nations and Inuit children are up to three times higher. Diabetes rates are up to four times higher. Suicide rates among first nations youth is up to seven times higher. This is unacceptable, as I am sure members will agree.

Then there is the issue of tuberculosis. This disease was once the leading cause of death in Canada, back at the end of the 19th century. Thanks to medicine and antibiotics developed in the 1950s, this disease is now eradicated. However, among Inuit, the reported rate of active tuberculosis in 2015 was over 270 times higher than the rate among the Canadian-born non-indigenous population. That is 270 times higher, in Canada, in the 21st century. This is unacceptable.

Budget 2018 provides \$1.5 billion over five years to keep indigenous families healthy. This will help end tuberculosis in Inuit communities, enhance the delivery of culturally appropriate health services in first nations communities with high needs, develop a health strategy with the Métis nation, and close the gaps in health outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Renewing the relationship with indigenous peoples also involves recognizing that members of the first nations, the Inuit and the Métis nation have an important role to play in Canada's economic prosperity. Indigenous peoples are less likely to be employed than non-indigenous people, and those who work typically earn less. This is another gap that must be closed. It is the right thing to do.

That is why it is so important that budget 2018 provides \$2 billion over five years for the creation of an enhanced skills and employment training program for indigenous peoples. It is the right thing to do for indigenous people in Canada and it is the smart thing to do for Canada's economy.

● (2200)

These investments are good investments. The government is taking action so that all indigenous communities have access to clean drinking water, so that delivery of culturally appropriate health care services for first nations continues, and so that jobs continue to be created for indigenous people. All Canadians should be proud of budget 2018 for these measures alone.

Business of Supply

The government's investments are enabling first nations, Inuit, and Métis nations to have a better future. Too many generations of indigenous people have suffered and lived in subpar conditions for too long. It is clear that actions were needed to ensure a better quality of life for indigenous people and to promote their skills and opportunities. Work remains to be done but a lot has already been accomplished.

It is true that the last three budgets addressed areas of critical need in indigenous communities. The recent announcement to connect 16 remote first nations in northwestern Ontario is another example of an investment that will improve the quality of life for indigenous communities.

I wonder if the Minister of Finance could elaborate on how much progress is being made in regards to self-determination and self-government agreements between Canada and indigenous people. This is also an important aspect.

I think we all agree that the recognition and implementation of rights is another essential part of advancing reconciliation. However, the pace of progress has been uneven and many indigenous communities are forced to take on debt in order to participate. This is probably not the best way to facilitate agreements.

Could the minister explain the government's plans to shorten the time it takes to successfully conclude these treaties, to lower costs to all parties, and to support the recognition and implementation of rights and self-determination?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, there are times in the House when a member comes forward with a question or a speech that is truly exceptional. The member for Newmarket—Aurora in this instance exceeded even his own very high standard with the calibre of that question.

He does raise a very important point. Canada has advanced a number of modern treaties and agreements since the 1970s, but in many cases the pace of progress has just been too slow. Negotiations can take a decade or more. To my colleague's point, indigenous communities are forced to take on debt to be able to negotiate. The government recognizes that this is not right. Budget 2018 includes new measures to increase the number of modern treaties and agreements.

For example, the government will replace the use of loans with non-repayable contributions to fund indigenous participation. The government has also created separate permanent bilateral mechanisms to better serve first nations, Inuit, and the Métis nation. This will allow us to enable crown-indigenous co-operation on priority setting and joint policy development.

The government is also moving forward with the dismantlement of old colonial structures, including replacing Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada with two new departments.

Moving forward, Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada will ensure there is progress on the recognition of existing rights and that new treaties and new self-government agreements are consistent with the principles underlying reconciliation and a renewed relationship.

At the same time, Indigenous Services Canada will work with indigenous partners to improve the quality of life of first nations, Inuit, and the Métis nation and close the gap between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous Canadians on issues such as housing, education, health care, and access to clean water.

• (2205)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Chair, in 2016, foreign investment in Canada fell by 42% overall and again by 27% last year. U.S. investment in Canada decreased by half, while Canadian investment in the U.S. is up two-thirds since the Liberals were elected.

Brett Wilson, Canoe Financial chairman and co-founder of FirstEnergy said, "Americans aren't investing here because they've got a choice of tax rates. You pay 30, 40, 45 per cent in Canada, or 20-21 per cent in the U.S. You're not going to come to Canada by choice."

How can Canada possibly compete with the United States, which is cutting taxes and red tape, while the Liberals are doing the exact opposite in Canada?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, the member opposite brings up an important point. We always need to be listening to ensure we maintain our competitive edge. We are competitive today. We have shown that level of competitiveness through our ability to grow at the fastest pace among G7 countries. What we know to be true is that this is having positive results on Canadian families. We are getting more people working, which is supporting our business sector. We are seeing wages go up. We are actually seeing wage growth, a sign of a positive situation for Canadians.

We realize that changes in the global economy, changes in trading opportunities are important for us to consider. We are working hard to deal with NAFTA and find a way to get to what we hope will be a better situation. We also are ensuring that our tax rate is staying competitive by looking at where the U.S. is today versus where it was yesterday and how businesses can compete. This is an ongoing exercise, and we will certainly have more results to share in the future.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, the consensus of economists, experts, investment firms, and private sector proponents is that Canada is getting obliterated with respect to its competitiveness. Even last week, the president of ATCO said:

...governments in Canada "are busy" bringing in "multiple and compounding policies and regulations" that are "layering considerable costs on businesses and individuals alike, undermining the confidence of investors, eroding the attractiveness of our industries and weakening the confidence of the public."

It goes without saying that in our increasingly globalized economy, capital flows will continue to seek certainty.

In 2016, the energy sector accounted for approximately 10% of Canada's GDP, but the Bank of Canada predicts new energy investment in Canada will decline in 2018 and then drop to zero the next year.

Given the importance of energy investment to the Canadian economy, does it concern the finance minister that Canadian energy investment is dropping dramatically, which is a fact? Specifically, what measures in the federal budget will stop energy investment from leaving Canada?

Business of Supply

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we will continue to work toward ensuring Canada is a competitive place to do business. We have now a situation where our tax rates for small and medium-sized businesses are the lowest among G7 countries, significantly lower than we see in other countries. We know that the U.S. changes in tax rates create a different situation of competitiveness than was the case prior to those changes.

That said, we still have a competitive tax environment, one that we are examining to ensure we get it right and have the opportunity for businesses in the future. We know that our positive results have put us in a position so we can consider those changes from a position of strength. What we will not do is move forward without doing the appropriate analysis and without listening to Canadians to ensure we get this right. That is the approach we are taking. We are listening. We will ensure that the competitiveness we have had for so long continues.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, speaking of analysis, earlier tonight the finance minister said that the purpose of this budget was to help the economy work well. The fact is that more than 100,000 energy workers have lost their jobs under his watch since 2015. According to economist Trevor Tombe, young people, especially 55% of Canadian males between the ages of 15 and 24, have been disproportionately impacted and unemployed as of April 2018.

Given the finance minister's emphasis on his budget's gender-based analysis, what does he say to the young men in Lakeland and across Alberta and in the energy sector across Canada who are struggling to make ends meet?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we are continuing in our efforts to ensure that Canadians across the country, in all sectors, find themselves with successful opportunities for the future. We know that in the oil and gas sector this has been a challenging time. We had a significant change in oil prices during the course of 2015 through until recently where oil prices have started to climb. However, the challenge remains.

We know, however, that from an employment situation, we are in the best situation we have been in since about 1976, a 5.8% unemployment. We will continue to work. There is always more to be done, but that is a very positive situation, better than was the case for the entire time during the previous government.

• (2210)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, in fact, more energy investment has left Canada under the Liberals than in any other two-year time period in 70 years, more than half a century. The collateral damage of this is that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are out of work, and job losses have rippled throughout other sectors.

What would create jobs in the energy sector are pipelines. The Trans Mountain pipeline was approved as being in the national interest a year and a half ago, but there is chaos and uncertainty around pipelines in Canada right now. The deadline for the Trans Mountain expansion is nine days away, seven of which are sitting days. It is important for government budgets. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that the Trans Mountain pipeline construction in its first 20 years of expanded operations will deliver \$46.7 billion in provincial and federal government revenue.

The messages from the government have been all over the place. Since April 8, the Prime Minister, the finance minister, and the natural resources minister have all promised legislation on the Trans Mountain expansion. I hope the finance minister can provide clarity tonight.

On May 16, he said that the federal government was "willing to indemnify the Trans Mountain expansion against unnecessary delays that are politically motivated." Will the finance minister bring forward another piece of legislation or revise the budget estimates to account for expenditures on, or indemnification of, the Trans Mountain expansion?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I would like to acknowledge the importance of the Trans Mountain expansion project, a project we see as being in the national interest of Canada.

I would like to acknowledge that we have moved forward with federal approval of this project, which was followed up by provincial approval. We have moved forward with a robust environmental assessment process that has led to a significant investment in oceans protection. We see this as being in the national interest.

We have been clear that we are seeking a financial approach to ensure this project gets done, and I have a level of confidence that this will happen. I was in discussions today. I am not in a position to provide more colour on those discussions, but sufficed to say, we believe this can be done in the commercially appropriate way.

We will be able to do something that the previous government was not able to do in 10 years, which is to get approval to construct a pipeline that will allow us to move our resources to international markets.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, Kinder Morgan has already invested \$1 billion in the Trans Mountain expansion and estimates that it has lost \$200 million for every month of delay.

Could the finance minister at least answer whether the indemnification will be retroactive?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I can reiterate that we see this project as commercially viable. We see it as being in Canada's national interest. We see it creating 15,000 jobs. We will provide more information on that subject as more information is available.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, there is no question that the project is commercially viable. That is why Kinder Morgan has been willing to invest billions upon billions of dollars into completing the expansion that it initiated.

The finance minister said earlier tonight that indemnification was something regular in business transactions, but of course it has not been regular, standard, or required to build pipelines in Canada until these Liberals came to power. They are destroying the energy sector, now claiming that the only possible solution to get an expansion that has already been approved is through a direct equity stake, putting taxpayers on the hook, or investing pension funds or some sort of insurance plan or backstop, about which he continues to refuse to be accountable and transparent to Canadians.

Business of Supply

Could the minister at least provide an answer on who will pay? Does he expect taxpayers to foot the bill for a direct equity stake in Trans Mountain, or will the minister gamble pension funds or will he do both of those things?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, this project is in the national interest. It is economically viable, it adds value to the shippers of product, and it will create 15,000 jobs. We see the project as one that has commercial value. That is why I am in discussions to ensure this project moves forward and is not in any way impeded by the delays and uncertainty caused by Premier Horgan. That would not be in our national interest.

• (2215)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, of course it has already been severely obstructed and impeded by multiple delays and roadblocks from opponents, and the Prime Minister and the finance minister have sat on their hands for a year and a half since the approval.

Could the finance minister at least give some clarity around why there are mixed messages coming from his ministers? Last week he said that whatever their plans were, which he still will not divulge, and which is sort of like the carbon tax cover-up, they would not cost taxpayers a thing. However, a couple of days after that, the infrastructure minister indicated that it would cost taxpayer. Canadians just do not know what those costs will be after there is a deal. Of course Kinder Morgan says that there is still no deal.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we believe this project needs to go forward. We have given federal approval. We have ensured that we have protected our oceans with a best in class \$1.5 billion oceans protection approach that we know will ensure that we are environmentally appropriate as we embark on this important expansion project.

We are in discussions to ensure that the delays and uncertainties caused by Premier Horgan will not preclude the proponent or the private sector approach from moving forward. We believe that this is an appropriate way to move forward responsibly with a commercially viable approach.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, what is also concerning is that a senior Department of Finance official commented that the finance minister's announcement of possible indemnification or taxpayer dollars being sunk into the Trans Mountain pipeline was a so-called test of Kinder Morgan's commitment to their expansion. I would say that is a pretty high-stakes game of poker to play with the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

The CEO of the Surrey Board of Trade says they continue to support the Trans Mountain expansion with the 15,000 jobs it will create, mostly in the trades, but that "The Canadian government should not be using taxpayer money to compensate for project delays and to indemnify financial losses."

Again, can the minister confirm whether or not they will be bringing forward legislation to ensure that the Trans Mountain expansion goes ahead, and if they even have a ballpark figure of what this might cost taxpayers?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I can confirm the importance of this project. I can confirm that we believe that creating jobs for 15,000 people is the right thing to do. I can confirm that ensuring that our natural resources have access to international markets to

allow us to get more appropriate prices for those resources is important. I can confirm that we are in discussions with the project proponent and that we are looking to find a way to ensure there is a private sector, commercially appropriate way to move forward with this project.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, Kinder Morgan's response to the finance minister's announcement was that they are not yet in alignment, which means that this scheme the finance minister is cooking up with nine days left is not actually the answer for Kinder Morgan because, of course, the problem was never money. The problem is clarity, certainty, and being able to move ahead when a federal project has been approved under the highest standards and most stringent regulatory regime in the world. The federal Liberals should not have hesitated but acted to assert federal jurisdiction and ensure that the rule of law applies.

The finance minister has made some vague references to other potential investors, or a company or groups of companies they would also indemnify if the colossal loss of Kinder Morgan abandoning the Trans Mountain pipeline were to happen. Could the minister name any investor, or investors, or groups of companies that are interested in taking over the Trans Mountain expansion if Kinder Morgan abandons it as a result of the failure of the Liberals' leadership?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, I can appreciate that the member opposite and her party probably feel anxious, knowing that they were unsuccessful for a decade in getting a pipeline built to take our resources to international markets. They recognize that their lack of success creates a level of anxiety, because they can see that the commitment of this government to getting this done is clear, not only in our words but also in our actions. We will ensure that we actually deliver on a promise to Canadians that a project in the national interest will get done. We are sorry that we are creating anxiety for them because of their previous failure, but our success will highlight that there is a way to do this, and it is our way.

• (2220)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canadians deserve to feel confident that their hard work will be rewarded with greater opportunities and a fair chance at success. A fair tax system is fundamental to instilling this confidence.

[Translation]

When middle-class Canadians have more money to invest, save, and grow the economy, all Canadians benefit. From day one, our government has been taking steps to strengthen and grow the middle class and offer real help to those working hard to join it.

[English]

In fact, one of our first legislative actions was to raise taxes on the wealthiest Canadians in order to cut taxes for the middle class. Nearly nine million Canadians are benefiting from this middle-class tax cut. Single individuals who benefit from the middle-class tax cut are saving an average of \$330 per year, and couples an average of \$540 each year.

Business of Supply

We then moved to provide simpler, more generous, and better targeted support for those Canadian families who need it the most. That included replacing the old child benefit system with the new Canada child benefit, or CCB, in 2016. During the first benefit year, more than 3.3 million families received more \$23 billion in CCB payments. As a result of the CCB, nine out of 10 Canadian families are better off. During the first benefit year, these families received on average almost \$2,300 more in benefits tax free.

[Translation]

I am proud to be able to say that since its creation, the Canada child benefit has lifted roughly 300,000 children out of poverty. To ensure that the Canada child benefit continues to play a key role in helping Canadian families, the government is going to enhance it by indexing it to the cost of living starting in July. This measure is being implemented two years earlier than expected, due to the growing economy and the government's stronger fiscal position. This is a significant achievement not only for those working to build a better future for their families, but for all Canadians.

[English]

Following this success, the government went even further to deliver tax support to those who need it most. We know that low-income Canadians are sometimes working two or three jobs so they can give their children and grandchildren a better quality of life and better shot at success. Like all Canadians, they deserve to have their hard work rewarded with greater opportunities and a fair shot. That is why budget 2018 introduced the new Canada workers benefit, a new tax benefit that would allow low-income workers to take home more money while they work. The new Canada workers benefit builds on the former working income tax benefit, WITB, to give even more people greater financial benefits from work.

• (2225)

[Translation]

Compared to the working income tax benefit, the new Canada workers benefit will increase both the maximum benefits received and the income level at which the benefit is phased out completely.

This measure will offer real help to more than two million Canadians who are working hard to join the middle class, while raising roughly 70,000 more Canadians out of poverty. A low-income worker earning \$15,000 a year will receive nearly \$500 more from the Canada workers benefit in 2019 than he or she would have received in 2018 from the working income tax benefit. All of the measures our government is taking amount to nearly \$1 billion in extra support, to enhance the Canada workers benefit, starting in 2019 for low-income workers from coast to coast to coast.

[English]

By cutting taxes for Canada's hard-working small businesses, we are helping to create the jobs that people need, the jobs that can provide a ladder out of poverty for so many. Small businesses are a key driver of Canada's economy, accounting for 70% of all private sector jobs.

We know that low and competitive tax rates allow Canadian businesses to invest in their success and to create more good, well-paying jobs. That is why our government is supporting hard-working small business owners by reducing the small business tax rate to

10% effective January 1, 2018, and to 9% effective January 1, 2019. For the average small business, this will mean an additional \$1,600 per year for entrepreneurs and innovators to create jobs and reinvest in their businesses and communities. By 2019, the average combined federal, provincial, and territorial income tax rate for small businesses will be 12.2%, the lowest in the G7 and the third lowest among OECD member countries.

[Translation]

These major investments demonstrate our firm commitment to creating a fair tax system that will serve as the foundation of an economy that works for everyone. For this tax system to work, everyone has to pay their fair share. Tax evasion and tax avoidance cost the government and all taxpayers dearly. By cracking down on tax evasion, and especially on people who stash money in other countries, the government will acquire the funds it needs to deliver programs that help the middle class and those working hard to join it. That is why every one of our budgets has included measures to strengthen the Canada Revenue Agency's ability to crack down on tax evasion and combat tax avoidance.

[English]

In our first two budgets, we invested close to \$1 billion to support the efforts of the CRA in this area. These investments are expected to deliver more than \$5 billion in additional federal revenues over six years, which is a great return on this investment for Canadians. Budget 2018 announced additional funding of \$90.6 million over five years to support the CRA in its continued efforts to ensure taxpayer compliance.

In budget 2018, the government proposed measures to strengthen international tax rules, including those that prevent taxpayers from avoiding Canadian income tax by shifting property income into foreign residence corporations.

We will continue to work with our international partners to combat aggressive international tax avoidance, including through the enhanced sharing of information between tax authorities.

[Translation]

Canada's finance ministers made a similar commitment in December 2017. They committed to working together to ensure appropriate authorities know who owns which corporations in Canada, and to better harmonize corporate ownership record requirements between their jurisdictions.

Business of Supply

That information will help Canadian authorities take appropriate legal action against those who are using corporations to conceal criminal activity, such as international tax evasion, money laundering, and other criminal activities.

[English]

These are all tremendous achievements for Canadians. Ensuring a fair tax system in which we all pay our proper share is the foundation of a stronger middle class and a growing economy. It instills confidence in Canadians and helps to create opportunities for everyone. However, it is also a complex process, requiring ongoing engagement with a wide range of partners, both at home and abroad.

[Translation]

Our government has made a strong commitment to this process. We will continue to do what is necessary to assure Canadians that their hard work will be rewarded with more possibilities and equal opportunities to succeed.

[English]

I know that a lot has been accomplished by this government to support a fair tax system for Canadians. I think I have covered a lot of ground, and I could have gone well beyond my time.

I would like to talk a little more about aggressive international tax avoidance. This is typically perpetrated by transnational corporations that can move money internationally and take advantage of the sorts of shadows that exists in the space between government borders. The strategies that may be used to shift profits to low- or no-tax jurisdictions are generally referred to as base erosion and profit shifting, or BEPS, strategies. These strategies are often undertaken by transnational corporations to avoid paying their full and fair share of taxes owed.

[Translation]

As members know, Canada, along with its international partners, is part of the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, also known as Multilateral Instrument or MLI. The multilateral convention is a global initiative developed as part of the joint Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, and G20 project to counter base erosion and profit shifting.

Could the minister tell us more about how this process will help end base erosion and profit shifting and about Canada's role in this process?

• (2230)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the member for his excellent question. I want to tell him that this is obviously a very important question.

This question has to do with the important sector in which the government is taking action to protect Canadians. In its efforts to deal with base erosion and profit shifting, the OECD identified a number of specific situations in which the terms of existing tax treaties could potentially be abused.

The OECD then developed effective measures to counter base erosion and profit shifting, measures that the countries can choose to include in their tax treaties to effectively close these loopholes.

However, given the large number of existing tax treaties and the long period of time that would be required to bilaterally renegotiate such an agreement, a new approach was created so that these changes can be implemented more quickly and effectively. This new approach is the multilateral tool that was mentioned.

[English]

The MLI would allow signatory nations such as Canada to quickly modify their bilateral tax treaties to work more effectively together in the fight against aggressive international tax avoidance. At the same time, the MLI would improve the functioning of the international tax system and provide greater certainty for Canadian taxpayers by improving dispute resolution under Canada's tax treaties. It was developed and negotiated by more than 100 countries and jurisdictions, including Canada. Budget 2018 confirmed that, this year, Canada would take the steps necessary to enact the MLI into Canadian law and to ratify the MLI as needed to bring it into force.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we see that Canada's international efforts are consistent with what we have observed in the country since coming to power in 2015 after the last federal election. We arrived with measures to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lower them for the middle class, for nine million Canadians. We transformed the child benefit system to make the benefit much more progressive, by no longer sending cheques to families who did not need them and instead sending more generous cheques to those who need them the most.

I see the impact that has had in my riding. I see the impact this would have had on my younger self. I see it in the Saint-Vincent de Paul stores and at the food banks that tell me that this has had a real impact on families. Our government's desire for improving tax fairness is inherent not only in the measures the minister takes with his OECD partners to come up with a system that is generally more equitable, but also through the actions we observe here at home.

I would like the minister to say a few words about the impact that this greater equity has had on the Canadian economy and on Canadian families as he sees it in his riding, but also from coast to coast.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I would like to tell the member for Louis-Hébert that he asked a really good question. It is always a pleasure to field a question from him because he always makes some very important observations about our economy, Canadians, and how we can improve their lives.

Business of Supply

On the subject of what we have done for Canadians, the tax changes are definitely very important. It is obvious that it is much easier for a family to be in a good position thanks to the tax cuts for the middle class. With the addition of the Canada child benefit, families with children are much better off from a tax perspective. Our approach of growing our economy, considering the concerns of the middle class, and determining how we can work together to improve economic growth sets the example for other countries. That is our approach and we are talking with our counterparts around the world to see how we can improve Canada's situation and also how we can improve the situation of families in every country and facilitate international exchanges with the assurance that economic growth will benefit families and individuals in all countries.

• (2235)

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Chair, trouble is to man what rust is to iron. The longer I have listened to the debate so far, the more I have noticed that the minister has gotten rusty with his answers.

I want to start with the New Brunswick gas tax. The premier has proposed to simply rename the gas tax as the carbon tax, which means it would apply only to gasoline and diesel. Will this meet the federal requirements set out in the budget bill, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, as we gladly mentioned this evening, we decided to establish a price on carbon, which is already in place for 85% of Canadians in many communities across the country. We believe that this is an effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We believe that co-operative federalism is the best way to approach this issue and, therefore, the provinces have the opportunity to choose the model they wish to adopt.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed that the Minister of Finance did not bother to get up to answer my question.

We are told that an assessment has to be done by September, and that by January 1, 2019 a federal carbon tax will be imposed on all the provinces that do not comply with it. Could the minister tell me whether New Brunswick will be in compliance on January 1, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we expect to analyze the provinces' proposals by September, once we have received them all.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed again that the Minister of Finance did not get up to answer my question.

The New Brunswick premier, Brian Gallant, has said that the carbon tax in his province will respect the economy. Does the proposal, then, in the budget bill not respect the economy?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we believe that the proposal put forward in Bill C-74, the budget implementation bill, is very good for the economy because it will stimulate innovation by putting a price on carbon pollution. At the same time, it will enable us to

improve the fate of our environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is just one of the many measures a government can take to manage the economy and the environment at the same time.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed again that the Minister of Finance did not get up to answer my question.

The New Brunswick gas tax the premier is proposing to impose on the people in his province is simply a rebranding exercise to now call it the carbon tax. On January 1, will it be in compliance with federal rules, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, my opposition colleague is not happy to see me or to hear my answers, but I am pleased to be here with him tonight debating carbon pollution pricing.

I would like to know what the opposition's plan is. That is something that has not yet been mentioned, and I think Canadians would also like to know.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed again that the Minister of Finance chose not to get up. This is the one time when constituents in my riding have an opportunity to hear directly from the Minister of Finance, and he is choosing not to stand. Earlier today he spoke about indemnification for Kinder Morgan, which is pursuing the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. Members on this side of the House have repeatedly tried to ask the basic question of how much that indemnification will be. How many dollars are they willing to spend? Is it half a billion dollars, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we already said that we do not negotiate in public. We will not negotiate in public the principles guiding the Minister of Finance in his discussions with Kinder Morgan. It is in Canadians' best interests to ensure that this major project, which will create 15,000 jobs in this country, moves ahead.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, perhaps the parliamentary secretary or the Minister of Finance could answer this question. Is it between half a billion dollars and a billion dollars of taxpayer money they are willing to give away for their own screw-ups on the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline?

Business of Supply

• (2240)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, I would argue that the biggest screw-up is that for 10 years they were not able to build one single pipeline to export markets. They should look no further if they want to look for a screw-up. That is the mismanagement we have witnessed over 10 years while they were in government.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, again, the Minister of Finance chose not to stand and answer the question.

I will remind the parliamentary secretary, though, that under the current government, 7,000 kilometres of pipeline have been cancelled, whereas the previous government approved and saw built over 5,000 kilometres of pipeline.

Moving on to the main estimates directly, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is being given another \$52.3 million, money going to an infrastructure bank in Asia that will build three pipelines overseas. Why is the Government of Canada financing pipelines overseas instead of ensuring that pipelines are built in Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, Canada decided to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank because we believe this promotes global growth and improves our relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. We made this commitment to show that Canada is back on the world stage. We think it is good for global prosperity and Canada's prosperity.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, the AIIB's mandate is prioritizing cross-border infrastructure, ranging from roads and rails to ports, energy pipelines, and telecommunications, across central Asia. When we have problems right at home just getting a simple pipeline built, twinning over an existing pipeline, why is the Liberal government throwing away a total of half a billion dollars in Asia?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, Canada is not the only country to have joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Canada is one of many industrialized countries that joined the bank to support global growth and prosperity. We think this will create opportunities both in Canada and abroad. That is why we re-engaged with the international community, and this is one of the many tools enabling us to do that.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, again I noticed that the Minister of Finance refused to stand up and answer the question.

We are financing the construction of three pipelines through the purchase of these shares. I notice that the members on the other side are heckling, and I know it is a late hour. However, the very minimum we could give here is an opportunity for this issue to be debated clearly. Through the purchase of these shares, the government is financing three pipelines, in Azerbaijan and also in the suburbs of Beijing through the People's Republic of China, a country that is not lacking in resources.

What we are lacking, though, is the attention of the Liberal government to ensure that the NDP Government of British Columbia stops obstructing the construction of the Trans Mountain line.

Why are the Liberals so focused on ensuring that middle-class energy jobs continue to be created in Asia instead of middle-class energy jobs in Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we believe it is important for Canada to position itself on the world stage. This is one of many ways in which Canada is re-engaging internationally, and it will benefit Canadian businesses.

I can say that Canada is not alone. Australia, France, Germany, India, Italy, South Korea, and the United Kingdom are also members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. We see this as a way to create more prosperity, more benefits, and more opportunities for Canadian businesses. That is why, unlike the previous government, we think it is important for Canada to re-engage and to fully engage on the world stage.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, earlier in the debate, the Minister of Finance, when speaking about the calculation of the average cost to residents in listed provinces, spoke of the example of Alberta. I find it interesting that he would use Alberta as an example, as having successfully calculated the average cost to an Alberta family. Why can the Canadian government not do the same?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, as we have heard numerous times in the House this evening, we pledged to ensure that carbon pollution pricing is revenue neutral for the federal government. That means we plan to transfer all the revenue to the provinces, which will decide how best to use that money to meet their needs. They may choose to cut taxes, which, as my colleague pointed out, is what Alberta did, or to invest in innovation. It is up to the provinces to decide. We think they are in the best position to do that.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, the parliamentary secretary avoided answering my question directly.

I was specifically asking, if the Alberta government is able to calculate the average cost of the carbon tax to an Alberta family, why is the federal government not capable of doing the exact same thing for the average Canadian family? Wait, it does have that information; it just will not share it with us. It is part of the carbon tax cover-up.

Why will the federal government not reveal that information to us?

Business of Supply

• (2245)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, first it is important to remember one thing that seems to have escaped the opposition, and that is that 85% of Canadians live in an area where there is already a price on carbon pollution. Now, as for the impact this will have on Canadian families, that will depend on the choices that each province makes.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, in the budget bill, the government is actually giving itself an opportunity to give carbon tax rebates not just to persons in a listed province but to any organization, corporation, union, or association that could be defined as a person.

Why did the finance minister not make it clear in the legislation that the carbon tax rebate would go only to individual income tax filers?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we made a very clear commitment to put a price on carbon pollution. This will have a very positive impact on the environment and the economy by fostering innovation. As I mentioned, 85% of Canadians live in an area where there is already a price on carbon pollution. Take for example British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario, which have very successful economies within the Canadian federation. I think they are concrete examples of how advantageous it can be to put a price on carbon pollution.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed again that the Minister of Finance did not stand to answer my question.

At the finance committee, there was a Liberal MP who, when speaking about the contents of how the carbon tax would work, said that this was a partnership with the provinces. Well, that cannot be true, because on January 1, 2019, any province that chooses not to impose a carbon tax on its residents will be forced to do so by the federal government.

Is this the type of partnership that the Minister of Finance envisions for all other future projects?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we have a very good partnership with the provinces. We work closely on the Canada pension plan, for example. Our government actively works with the provinces on every file that requires federal-provincial collaboration. We are trying to reach an agreement that is good for the environment, and I believe that the provinces definitely share that objective.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, part of the costs associated with paying for the carbon tax for a Canadian family, whether in a listed or unlisted province, is knowing what the carbon tax rate is set at.

Also, the other concern Canadians have is that although a great number of them want to do something to help the environment, this

particular something will cost them an exorbitant amount of money and seriously affect their ability to pay their monthly bills.

We have heard the Minister of Environment say in the past that it could go up to more than \$100 a tonne or \$200 a tonne. When will it be enough, and when will the Minister of Finance reveal what the cost will be for the average Canadian family from a \$50 a tonne carbon tax, a \$100 a tonne carbon tax, or a \$200 a tonne carbon tax?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, as I mentioned, since we are committed to returning revenues to the originating jurisdictions, the impact of carbon pricing will depend on what provincial elected officials choose to do. In Alberta, a family of four with a total income of \$95,000 would receive a \$540 tax cut, while the estimated cost would be \$500 in 2018. That is a net benefit of \$40.

That is an interesting example that may inspire other provinces. That is where we will leave it up to the provinces to decide in a spirit of collaboration and co-operative federalism.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, returning to the AIIB for a moment, did the Department of Finance do any analysis of the benefits for Canadian workers and Canadian companies from half a billion dollars being gifted to the AIIB?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, as I have said many times during this discussion, we are convinced that Canada's involvement in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank will benefit Canadian businesses. It will contribute to growing prosperity here and abroad, including by allowing the construction of major infrastructure. It is not just Canada that will be taking part in it, but also several other countries around the world. I named them earlier.

• (2250)

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I noticed again that the Minister of Finance did not get up to answer my question.

On the AIIB again, does the ministry of finance know the impact on the Canadian energy market if all three pipeline projects in Asia are built?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Chair, we believe that Canada's participation in the bank will have benefits for Canadian companies and workers.

Business of Supply

[English]

The Deputy Chair: Before I continue, I just want to remind members, and the member for Avalon in particular, that no heckling is allowed, even though I know it is getting late. When they have the floor and are answering questions, I am sure that everybody is capable of making their speeches and answering questions. If he wishes to stand for questions, he should do so.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the House. I propose to allocate my time by taking the first 10 minutes to speak and then following that with a couple of questions.

To begin, I would like to highlight one of our government's greatest achievements: putting Canada back in the game in terms of its engagement with the rest of the world.

The proof is in the numbers. An Ipsos MORI poll of 18,000 respondents from 25 countries released in July of last year found that Canada is seen as the most positive influence globally. The IMF has hailed Canada as an economic model for the world, with IMF's managing director Christine Lagarde saying that the world needs more Canada.

Our government could not agree more. Canada's economy is strong and growing, making Canada an excellent place to live, work, and invest. Among the G7 countries, Canada has led in economic growth since 2016 and has the lowest total government net debt-to-GDP ratio. Canada's federal debt-to-GDP ratio remains firmly on a downward track, and our government's debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to reach 0.5% in 2022-23.

Canada offers global investors many advantages, such as an openness to international trade and foreign direct investment. Our FDI rules are transparent and offer global businesses the help they need to navigate Canada's business landscape.

Canada also has a workforce that is diverse, innovative, highly skilled, and well educated. We have a wealth of natural resources, low energy costs, and livable cities with modern, efficient infrastructure, and our historic investments in infrastructure are building stronger links to world markets.

Canada is also home to a very stable financial system and efficient, open, and soundly regulated capital markets. This year Canada has a special opportunity to showcase these strengths to the world by hosting our G7 colleagues.

G7 countries share a responsibility to ensure that all citizens benefit from the global economy and that we leave a healthier, more peaceful, and more secure world for our children and our grandchildren. As G7 host, Canada looks forward to making this goal a reality.

Canada's G7 presidency offers us an opportunity to bring our people-first approach to growing a strong middle class to the international stage. By engaging other G7 countries on pressing global challenges, we can demonstrate how taking care of each other can lead to stronger growth and better outcomes.

Canada is using its G7 presidency to advance the following five key priorities.

The first is investing in growth that works for everyone. This means championing innovative and gender-responsive solutions to address common challenges, such as growing inequality, the changing nature of work, and persistent poverty.

The second priority is to prepare for jobs of the future. The Government of Canada and its G7 partners have a responsibility to ensure that the opportunities created by the economy of tomorrow are available to all their citizens and that the benefits of economic growth are shared broadly.

The third priority is to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are critical to building peace, reducing poverty, growing our economies, and achieving sustainability.

The fourth priority is to work together on climate change, oceans, and clean energy. The interconnected world that we live in requires us to work with international partners to develop truly global solutions to these shared challenges.

The fifth and final priority is to build a more peaceful and secure world for the benefit of people today and for our children and our grandchildren.

● (2255)

In addition, the Gender Equality Advisory Council for Canada's G7 presidency, co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Ambassador Isabelle Hudon, is ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment are integrated across all themes, activities, and initiatives of Canada's G7 presidency. In particular, Canada recognizes the importance of investing in ways that can help those in need around the world.

In June 2017, the government released its feminist international assistance policy, focusing on six interlinked areas: gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human dignity, peace and security, inclusive governance, environment and climate action, and growth that works for everyone. To strengthen the impact of Canada's new feminist international assistance policy and to advance our international leadership in key areas, the government announced that it would provide an additional \$2 billion over five years, starting in 2018-19, to the international assistance envelope. These new resources will support humanitarian assistance and Canada's core development priorities, in particular supporting women and girls, and will reinforce Canada's commitment to reduce poverty and do its part to support a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous world.

Canada's new feminist international assistance policy represents a turning point in the government's approach to international assistance. Through it, Canada has made clear its commitment to eradicating poverty and building a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world.

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In support of the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the feminist international assistance policy puts women and girls at the centre of its plan, recognizing their important role as agents of positive change for their families, communities, and countries. Gender equality will be a focus of all of Canada's international assistance investments to address economic, political, and social inequalities that prevent individuals from reaching their full potential.

In the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities, women and girls are particularly at risk when it comes to climate change. Women and girls are often the primary producers of food and providers of water, heating, and cooking fuel for households. When resources become more unpredictable and scarce due to extreme weather, for example, women and girls have to spend more time and effort attending to basic needs, such as growing food and collecting water and fuel.

Canada has been an international champion in bringing a gender lens to climate change. Canada was a leader in securing the first-ever gender action plan under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted by the countries at COP23 last year. The plan aims to bring more women to the negotiation table, promoting more responsive climate policies at both the grassroots and global levels. Canada is leading by example in this regard through its chief negotiator and her team, with Canada's climate negotiators also providing training to women negotiators from Caribbean countries to strengthen their voices at international climate talks.

In conclusion, Canadians can be proud of our history of helping others around the world, including by providing assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable. We understand that a safer, more prosperous world means a safer and more prosperous Canada.

● (2300)

The Deputy Chair: I regret to advise the member that time has expired, and therefore, it being 11 p.m., pursuant to Standing order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported.

The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-245, an act to declare the Trans Mountain Pipeline Project and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:01 p.m.)

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