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Friday, April 16, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, April 16, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, Special Order or usual practices of the House: (a) the report stage amendment to Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), appearing on the Notice Paper in the name of the Minister of Justice, be deemed adopted on division; (b) Bill C-6 be deemed concurred in at report stage on division; and (c) the third reading of Bill C-6 be allowed to be taken up at the same sitting.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

An hon. member: Nay.

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CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy), as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage on Bill C-6. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-6, in Clause 5, be amended by replacing line 31 on page 4 with the following:

320.101 In sections 320.102 to 320.105, conversion.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing

my time with the member for Waterloo, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

I want to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking today from the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary as he needs unanimous consent to split his time.

Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to share his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, as I said, I begin by acknowledging I am speaking from the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. It is now home to many diverse first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I commit every day to honour the treaties by which we share this land, which is ultimately a gift to us from our Creator.

I rise today in the House for the third reading of this important bill which brings forward amendments to the Criminal Code and moves us closer to seeing an end to the damaging practice of conversion therapy, a practice that continues to harm LGBTQ communities in Canada and around the world. This insidious and harmful practice must finally be put to a stop and this bill will bring about that important change.

That is the formal way I would normally start a speech in this House, by acknowledging the land we are on, name the bill and give my opinion on it, but I want to start again to simply say I am a gay man and this is a bill with amendments to the Criminal Code that is deeply personal and incredibly important to me.

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While I do not expect everyone to relate to this bill the way I do and acknowledge the fact that out of 338 members in this place there are only four out, self-identified, open LGBTQ members, much smaller than the proportion in Canada's population, I do expect every member in this House to truly wrestle with what it means for them to vote against this bill. If they say they are voting against it as a matter of conscience, then I believe they need to stare deeply into that conscience and ask themselves, "Why would I want to perpetuate an injustice against another human being, a friend, a colleague, a family member, a neighbour, a constituent, anyone who will be hurt by that action; hurt perhaps to the point of death?" Why would they not want to stand with the vulnerable, with the oppressed, with the stigmatized, with the people who need their help the most?

I have heard and read the speeches against these amendments. They are tired and worn-out arguments that come from an age that I had thought we escaped long ago. The political rhetoric is there, trying to not sound like they are living in the stone Age, saying they are not against conversion therapy, just against this bill. They claim that the definition is too broad, that there are drafting errors in the bill, or they say that the escape clauses for religious bodies, escape clauses to help them avoid living up to God's command are not clear enough or wide enough, but I would say to them, as the prophet Micah did:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

It is time for us to talk truth in this place. If someone is against this bill, frankly, they are against me and against people like me, saying ultimately that we are less than they are, that somehow God made a mistake when God created us and that we should change who we are or at least consider changing who we are. I am here to say today that I am not going to change. I do not want to change and no one should be told that they have to change or should change the way God made them to be.

Conversion therapy, at its core, implies that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or two-spirited is somehow wrong. I am here to say that that is not true. I am here to say it is time for this House to declare it by putting to bed the myth that conversion therapy can ever be right in any circumstance in any place at any time. We already know well that LGBTQ communities in Canada have faced and continue to face social and economic disadvantages, and disparities in health, safety, employment, income and housing. These disparities are all linked to historic and systemic stigmatization and discrimination toward my community.

According to a report prepared by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, and based on a series of expert testimony and submissions, a wide range of health disparities are noted, including barriers to accessing health services. Notably, issues persist whereby LGBTQ2 communities are still not able to discuss their sexual orientation with their physician or, if they do, they often need to educate themselves, their health professionals, about their health needs. That same report highlights disparities in employment, income and housing. Strikingly, of the 40,000—

• (1005)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I apologize for interrupting the hon. parliamentary secretary. We are at report stage, not third reading, and he had only five minutes.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, Special Order or usual practices of the House:

- a) the report stage amendment to Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, (conversion therapy), appearing on the Notice Paper in the name of the Minister of Justice, be deemed adopted on division;
- b) Bill C-6 be deemed concurred in at report stage on division; and
- c) the third reading stage of Bill C-6 be allowed to be taken up at the same sitting.

• (1010)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to split my time with the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I expect this will be even better the second time.

I want to begin by acknowledging that I am speaking from the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa and the Haudenosaunee and Wyandot peoples, which is also now home to many diverse first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. I commit every day to honour the treaties by which we share this land, which is ultimately a gift to us from our Creator.

I rise today in the House for the third reading of this important bill, which brings forward amendments to the Criminal Code and moves us closer to seeing an end to the damaging practice of conversion therapy: a practice that continues to harm LGBTQ2 communities in Canada and around the world. These insidious and harmful practices must finally be put to a stop, and this bill would bring about an important change to the laws of Canada.

That is the formal way to start a speech in this place: We acknowledge the land we are on, name the bill we are speaking to, remind the House what its ramifications are and state clearly whether we support it and why.

However, I want to start again and simply say I am a gay man. This is a bill that makes amendments to the Criminal Code. It is a bill that is deeply personal and incredibly important to me. I acknowledge that out of 338 members in this place, there are only four out, self-identified and open LGBTQ2 members, a much smaller proportion than in the population of Canada. While I do not expect everyone to relate to this bill the way I do, I do expect every member in the House to truly wrestle with what it means for them to vote against this bill.

If members say they are voting against it as a matter of conscience, then they need to stare deeply into their conscience and ask themselves why they would want to perpetrate an injustice against another human being, friend, colleague, family member, neighbour, constituent or anyone who would be hurt by that action, perhaps to the point of death. Why would they not want to stand with the vulnerable, the oppressed and the stigmatized? These are the people who need their help the most.

I have heard or read the speeches against these amendments. For me, they are tired and worn-out arguments that come from an age I thought we had escaped decades ago. The political rhetoric is there, the members trying not to sound like they are still living in the stone age. They say they are not against conversion therapy, they are just against this bill. They claim the definition is too broad, or there are drafting errors in the bill, or they say the escape clauses for religious bodies, which help them avoid living up to God's command, are not clear or wide enough.

I say to them, as the prophet Micah did, "He has told you, oh mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." It is time for us to talk truth in this place. If someone is against this bill, they are against me and against people like me. They are saying ultimately that we are less than they are, that somehow God made a mistake when God created us and that we should change who we are or at least consider changing who we are.

I am here to say today I am not going to change, and no one should be told that they have to change or should change or even could change who God made them to be. Conversion therapy, at its core, implies that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or two-spirited is wrong. This is not true, and it is time for the House to declare that by putting to bed the myth that conversion therapy can ever be right, in any circumstance or in any place at any time.

We already know very well that LGBTQ2 communities in Canada have faced, and continue to face, a set of social and economic disadvantages. These include disparities in health, safety, employment, income and housing. These disparities are linked to historic and systemic stigmatization and discrimination against LGBTQ2 communities.

According to a report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and based on a series of expert testimonies and submissions, a wide range of health disparities are noted. These in-

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clude barriers to accessing health services, and issues persisting whereby LGBTQ2 individuals are still not able to discuss their sexual orientation with their physicians, or if they do, they have to be the ones to educate their own health professionals about their health needs.

• (1015)

The same report highlights disparities in employment, income and housing. Strikingly, of the 40,000 homeless youth in Canada, between 25% and 40% identify as being part of the LGBTQ2S community.

Just this week, retired Ontario Court of Appeal justice Gloria Epstein's long-awaited independent review found serious flaws in the way Toronto police handled the case of serial killer Bruce McArthur, whose killing spree from 2010-17 left at least eight gay men dead. Justice Epstein said that McArthur's victims were "marginalized and vulnerable in a variety of ways", and their disappearances were often given less attention or priority than they deserved by the police. They were gay, and many of them were racialized or from communities that police simply did not care much about.

Underneath these findings is the stark truth that the lack of attention is not simply incompetence on the part of the Toronto police force, it is a deeply embedded homophobia. It is systemic homophobia. That kind of homophobia, which leads to people dying and being killed, is only furthered when society allows things like so-called conversion therapy to be practised. Conversion therapy, which undermines the value, the worth and the dignity of LGBTQ2S people aids and abets those who would discriminate against, hurt, damage or kill us.

It is true that, throughout all this, LGBTQ2 communities continue to demonstrate great resilience, resourcefulness, innovation and strength. However, dangerous attitudes and beliefs underpin and fuel all of this. Discrimination is real, stigma is real and harassment is real. Even though hurtful attitudes and beliefs about our community continue to exist, they need to be challenged and they need to be stopped. Thanks to the good work of the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, we in the House have a chance to do just that by supporting this bill.

It is not LGBTQ2 people and communities who need to be changed or converted. Harmful prejudice, homophobia, transphobia and all forms of discrimination need to be changed and converted into justice, compassion, understanding and respect. Ultimately, they need to be converted into love. That is what we will be able to do collectively as we support this bill and bring it into law to build a better Canada for everyone.

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A vast breadth of sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions exists. That is nothing to fear. We must, as a society, reach a point where we all understand that each person's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are intrinsic parts of who we are. We need to embrace these in ourselves and in other people, even when we do not fully comprehend what they mean.

That is why this is such an important bill. Conversion therapy is based on misinformed assumptions and harmful beliefs. By moving forward with stopping the harmful practice of conversion therapy, we are not only moving to stamp out this practice and protect the lives of LGBTQ2 communities and people, we are also sending an important message. Our gender identities, our gender expressions and our sexual orientations are essential parts of who we are and they are not up for debate. They should be understood, appreciated and celebrated. Then we can have a truly inclusive, cohesive society.

It is obvious I was not born yesterday, which everyone can tell by my tired look. That simply means that I have seen tremendous advances in attitudes toward people like me. Just as I was beginning to understand my sexual orientation, the late prime minister Pierre Trudeau ensured that I would not be a criminal if I chose to act on my sexuality and love another man. I saw the emergence of human rights legislation and court decisions based on the charter that gave me a chance to marry my partner with whom I have shared almost 30 years. I have seen my government apologize to those hurt by systemic homophobia in the public service, the military and our national police force.

Now I am going to be in this virtual chamber when we take the next step to ban conversion therapy. We are not done yet. Old attitudes take a long time to die and a long time to bury, but this is our chance—

• (1020)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to go to questions and comments. The hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am so glad that my colleague invoked the words of the prophet Micah, so I am going to invoke the words of the Apostle Matthew, who stated:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

I have had so many people reach out to me in regard to this bill. Charlotte, a young woman in Calgary, was involved in lesbian activity. She struggled with self-worth and depression. She reached a point in her life when she did not want to continue with her lesbian activity, and her parents supported her choice and helped her find a counsellor who helped her process the feelings. She said:

Because of the counselling, I had a deep sense of love and acceptance. It was not harmful, coercive or abusive in any way.... If you enact the proposed bill, you're banning the exact support that I desperately needed at that time in my life. If this bill is to be truly inclusive, include people like me.

Why will the government not respond to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the hon. parliamentary secretary a chance to answer.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, the first thing I would say is that people like me are not unclean. It is deeply offensive to play Bible baseball like that. I know my Bible very well. That is why I would call him the Apostle Matthew. I understand every word in that scripture, having studied it and having a doctorate in theology. It is offensive to even use that word in the context of this debate.

What we are about is ensuring the safety and security of everyone, including Charlotte and anybody who has doubts or concerns about their sexuality, but not to engage in conversion therapy.

People deserve counselling and support. I spent 25 years of my life as a pastoral counsellor. I am proud of that work. I am proud of the fact that in my Christian heritage we will stand up and defend people, as do people in heritages of every sort and every religious background. This is a time to move beyond—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

[*Translation*]

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member so much for his speech. It was better the second time because it was not interrupted.

I am also grateful to be a part of the House as we look at this important legislation. I recognize this bill will not fix the historic wounds of conversion therapy, nor will it fix the homophobia and transphobia we still see in so many of our communities. I wonder if the member could talk about what the Liberal government will do to build capacity within the SOGIE community so that these challenges can be addressed by the community.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I want to thank colleagues from the New Democratic Party, including the hon. member, for their support. It has been long-standing, rich and important. It is very good to have friends.

The SOGIE community continues to need support, in particular people in other vulnerable and intersectionally biased communities; that is, people who are poor, who are indigenous and who are from racialized communities. I hope the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth will have a chance to talk about that, because I am very pleased with what her department is doing. It is reaching out. It is a cross-departmental secretariat that is ensuring that people have the resources they need. That includes continuing to work for every agency in every country to have the resources, whether through interpretation, cultural dialogue or anything. We are not there yet and we—

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• (1025)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): One last question, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his intervention today, but more importantly for his response to that ignorant first question we heard.

The reality is that, as the LGBTQ movement has been progressing, minds have been changed and people have come to realize the mistakes that were made in the past. I think of my parents, who have come so far from their original positions on gay marriage to where they are now.

Can the member talk from his experience about how we have made progress over the last number of decades, and where we ultimately need to be to establish a full sense of equality for all people in this country?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Madam Speaker, I have seen tremendous change. I have seen people go from complete misunderstanding to great love. I continue to be inspired by them. Some of them sit in the House. Hopefully tomorrow there will be even more sitting in the House who have made that conversion, which needs to be made.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by acknowledging that I am joining the House from Waterloo, Ontario, the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral people.

I also want to thank my dear friend and colleague, the member of Parliament for Don Valley West, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for sharing his time with me. Mostly, I thank him as a fellow Canadian citizen. I thank him as a fellow member of the human race. I thank him for being his true authentic person he was put on this Earth to be.

It is a privilege to rise in support of Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code to abolish the destructive practice of conversion therapy in Canada. I rise today with someone else's words, words I have not been able to forget since I first heard them. They are the words of Peter Gajdics, a survivor of six years of conversion therapy, who appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in December. Mr. Gajdics said:

I still consider it a miracle I didn't die. I left these six years shell-shocked. It was not so much that I wanted to kill myself as I thought I was already dead.

Imagine being parents feeling like they cannot accept part of who their child truly is or who or how they love. That is deep conditioning at work, conditioning that imprisons people in the misguided belief that the only acceptable path is being cisgender or heterosexual, conditioning based on myths, stereotypes and underlying mis-truths that are rooted in and perpetuate homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

It is high time for us to take decisive action to end conversion therapy and to do everything we can to stop violence and discrimination in its tracks. LGBTQ2 rights are human rights.

My mandate letter as the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth asks me to promote LGBTQ2 equality, promote LGBTQ2 rights and address discrimination against LGBTQ2 communities.

A recent global survey tells us that four out of five people who undergo these damaging therapies are younger than 24 years old, and of those, roughly half are under 18 years old. This is far too many young people growing up being told they are invalid, shameful or unnatural, far too many young people being told that how they perceive themselves, who they want to be in this world or who or how they love is wrong.

Bill C-6 get us one step closer to that goal.

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

These young people are our future. We must protect them. We have to put an end to conversion therapy, especially for children and youth.

[*English*]

I would like to thank the witnesses who appeared before committee, those who contributed submissions and the standing committee members who came together to strengthen the legislation for Canadians. Further defining conversion therapy to include gender expression while making clear the heinous efforts to force people to be something they are not is the target of this legislation.

In addition to the five original prohibited offences, the committee's amendments clarify that conversion therapy performed without consent is to be criminalized and that promoting conversion therapy services or practices is also to be targeted.

Unlike some misguided narratives we have heard about the bill, it would not criminalize another person's values, opinions or beliefs. It does not criminalize a private conversation where these values or beliefs are being expressed. We recognize it is crucial to ensure affirming and supportive guidance and advice remains available to those coming to terms with who they are.

There is no question that these proposed amendments bring us one step closer to building the safer and consciously more inclusive Canada we all imagine. However, we know that achieving this vision will take more than legislation. It will take a transformation of our ideas about and attitudes toward LGBTQ2 communities, a transformation of our broader perspectives on diversity and inclusion. It will take nothing short of a revolution of the hearts and minds of all Canadians.

The Government of Canada is strongly committed to protecting the rights of LGBTQ2 Canadians and ensuring full and equitable participation in society.

[*Translation*]

We are working with all levels of government and with partners from all sectors to bring about positive change across Canada.

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[English]

As leaders, as legislators, as Canadians, as compassionate human beings, it is our job to ensure that Canada is a country for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, can live in equity and freedom.

[Translation]

Not long ago, six Conservative members voted against the bill at second reading in the House. Anyone who continues to oppose the proposals in Bill C-6 is in direct opposition to the community.

[English]

The bill and all our actions to recognize and protect the rights of LGBTQ2 Canadians are important and necessary steps in building a safer, more equitable and consciously more inclusive Canada we all want. Conversion therapy practices have no place in Canada.

When I think of the courage and resilience of the many survivors who gave their testimony in December, I know that we in the House have a duty to ensure that we do not let them down. We are indebted to their collective strength and steadfastness in the face of oppression of those who speak out.

When children arrive into this world, they are not innately born with prejudice or hatred. Children are taught to hate and to discriminate, taught to be ashamed of who they are and taught that there is only one correct way to live and be. We have to provide a different future for our next generations, an even better and consciously more inclusive future.

Our task is clear: The time to act is now. I urge all members to support this legislation, protect Canadians and uphold human rights for all. For members who oppose Bill C-6, do so in their right but not by speaking with fear or misinformation.

Tomorrow, we mark the anniversary of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Let us all work to create and defend and build on these rights and freedoms. Let us protect these hard-fought rights and freedoms, because I know we can and must do better.

• (1035)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not support conversion therapy, but I do understand some of these concerns. I will be supporting the bill, but there are some concerns when it comes to those simple dialogues that we want to have with our children.

As a parent of five children, sometimes having those dialogues can be very difficult. I know there has been a great discussion about what is or is not criminalized. I think many people are just looking for assurance.

Could the minister share her thoughts on this so those people who are concerned feel there is more balance here?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, first, it is nice to see the member even if it is virtually. She is very thoughtful in her debate and discussion, and that is part of the challenge we sometimes have as members of Parliament: our personal values versus representing our communities. I want to assure the member and all Canadians listening that discussions and open-ended conversations

that explore identity are not conversion therapy and they are not targeted in the bill.

Children should be free to ask questions about who they are and to come to know themselves. That is why health care workers, parents, teachers, religious leaders must be able to continue supporting and affirming youth in these conversations and discussions.

The challenge where it becomes conversion therapy is when it is without consent, when it is being imposed, when people are being forced to change who they are or exploring who they are. That is where there is a little misinformation about what the legislation would do. We have worked really hard and have listened to a lot of the community to ensure we have it right. We hear from many people who say we need to go further. I want to assure exploratory—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Moving on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to build upon what the member said about this being one step.

During COVID, a lot of the supports in our communities have been greatly impacted. Could she talk about future steps going forward regarding what monies and supports will be provided by the government to our communities to ensure we go that step beyond and to ensure we fully incorporate and encompass the support she talked about in her speech?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member and her party for their unconditional support of protecting and defending LGBTQ2 rights as human rights.

When the pandemic hit, one of the first things our government did when it came to funding agreements was to recognize that the environment and the situation were changing. We wanted to ensure that organizations that were supporting members within the LGBTQ2 community were able to continue their work, because those supports are more necessary today than ever.

In 2019, our government put forward a \$20 million community capacity fund for LGBTQ2 communities. It is the first fund of its kind, a fund that will help communities build the foundation they need to support members of their communities. We have also ensured that, as we make appointments, we are more conscious about the diversity of our country to ensure these voices make it to the decision-making table. We have—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have one last question.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine.

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Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my aunt and her partner have built a beautiful family and a life together. There is nothing wrong with them, and I would not change them for the world. Could the minister share how this bill will help young people in the LGBTQ2 community find the same happiness that my aunts have found?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Speaker, that member has the courage to share a bit about her family and allow us to enter into her private life. Many people have looked into their families and how this legislation would impact them. Young people are not only our leaders of tomorrow, they are the leaders of today. They need to be their true, authentic selves and we have to support them.

The legislation is one step closer to every individual being able to contribute in a meaningful way and to be proud of the shell that he or she occupies. When we—

• (1040)

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

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent to split my time with my colleague, the member for South Surrey—White Rock.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Hearing no objection, the hon. member has consent.

The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-6, an act to amend the Criminal Code to ban conversion therapy.

Let me say at the outset that conversion therapy is absurd. It is wrong, and it is harmful. Conversion therapy should be banned. Individuals who perpetrate such harmful acts and seek to coercively change someone's sexual orientation or sexual identity should be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law under the penalty of the Criminal Code. I unequivocally support the purported objective of this legislation, which is why I voted for Bill C-6 at second reading.

I did so notwithstanding the fact that I did have some concerns with the manner in which the bill was drafted. In particular, I had concerns that the definition of conversion therapy was vague and overly broad, and that it could capture not only those circumstances that involve coercive, abusive or otherwise harmful efforts to change someone's sexual orientation or identity, but could also more broadly encapsulate such things as good-faith conversations.

Nonetheless, because I unequivocally support the purported objective of the bill, I was hopeful, as a member of the justice committee, that we could come together at committee to study the bill in detail, hear from a wide range of witnesses and bring forward appropriate amendments where necessary to get the definition right.

It goes without saying that if we are to carve out any law in the Criminal Code to ban conversion therapy, it is absolutely imperative that we get the definition right. At committee, many of the concerns I had with the way in which the bill had been drafted were expressed by a wide range of witnesses, including members of the

LGBTQ community, lawyers, medical professionals and members of the clergy.

More specifically, with respect to the definition and some of the issues that arise therefrom, I would first of all note that in the bill, conversion therapy is defined as any “practice, treatment or service”. These terms are not defined anywhere in the Criminal Code, and it should be noted that nowhere in the bill are these terms qualified in order to provide the context in which the practice, treatment or service would apply. Although these terms are found in parts of the Criminal Code, they are not stand-alone terms as they are in Bill C-6.

It is true that the term “treatment” connotes a therapeutic context. However, “practice” or “service” could, without qualification, involve just about any activity. For example, a “practice” could involve a good-faith conversation, and “service” could involve a voluntary counselling session or a religious sermon.

I was concerned and witnesses were expressing concern about the lack of clarity with respect to those terms, but in addition to that, the definition, as provided in Bill C-6, provides that it would ban any practice, treatment or service designed to reduce sexual attraction or sexual behaviour.

• (1045)

The definition is clearly expansive. It goes beyond a clear and targeted definition. Without any qualification, it could arguably include counselling sessions or other supports provided on a voluntary basis by medical professionals and other professionals. It could, arguably, capture good-faith conversations between persons struggling with their sexual identity and medical professionals, parents and other family members, religious leaders and others.

It is important to note that this definition of conversion therapy is not used by any professional body. It is not used by the Canadian Psychiatric Association, the Canadian Psychological Association or their American counterparts. In the face of that ambiguity, which was supported by witness testimony, Conservatives sought to bring forward amendments to get the definition right.

Now, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and other members of the government have repeatedly said that the bill before us would not target voluntary, good-faith conversations. I do not doubt their sincerity when they say that is what they believe. Consistent with that, the website of the Department of Justice states the same.

However, what matters not is the minister's interpretation of the bill. What matters not is what is on the website of the Department of Justice. What matters is, in fact, what is in the bill, which is why Conservatives brought forward an amendment to simply incorporate into the bill the very language that was provided on the website of the Department of Justice. Such language would have provided certainty. It would have provided clarity that good-faith and voluntary conversations would not be the subject of the imposition of criminal charges laid against persons.

Government Orders

Let me be clear that it is a fundamental requirement of the rule of law that a person should be able to know and predict whether a particular act constitutes a crime. Here we have a definition that is vague and overly broad, and therefore is at risk of contravening fundamental justice. It could be deemed contrary to section 7 of the charter as a result.

In closing, the government's intention is a good one, and the intent of the bill is a good one, but it is important that we get the definition right. I am concerned that we have not achieved that in the bill before us.

• (1050)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if I understand correctly, the member supports the ban on conversion therapy; however, he is hung up on the definition of three individual words, which could be very easily found in any Webster's dictionary, to provide context as to what they mean. Is that what the member is trying to tell this House?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, with respect to the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, it appears he did not listen carefully to my speech.

I noted, yes, that I had concerns with the terms “practice”, “treatment” and “service”, but I also noted concerns about the definition including the reduction of sexual attraction or sexual behaviour. There were many LGBTQ witnesses who appeared before committee who said that they were concerned this would make it illegal or create a chilling effect on counselling services and supports that they have relied on and that have helped them in their development and identity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I understand his concerns about the clarity of the bill's wording, but I wonder if he might take comfort in the fact that, when judges are called to interpret it, in order to exclude good faith conversations, they will also refer to parliamentary work and the debates for context.

Does my colleague take comfort in that?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely essential that, when we draft legislation, we ensure that it is targeted toward demonstrated harms. We should not wait for a judge to interpret it or hope that a judge will interpret the law the way we hope a judge would do in the face of vague and overly broad language, and on a matter that can involve five years behind bars upon conviction.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I hear the hon. member profess that he agrees that conversion therapy should be banned and banned criminally, yet he is concerning himself with the definitions about what counselling might mean. Leading lawyers and other people involved, including the Canadian Association of Social Workers and others, have said that good-faith counselling sessions and good-faith therapy would not be covered by this ban.

Is the hon. member just looking for an excuse to fail to pass this bill at third reading?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, with respect to the member for St. John's East, I voted for this bill at second reading. I heard the testimony of witnesses at the justice committee, in which there were significant concerns expressed. We worked to include language to provide that clarity.

I do not know why the government did not support such language because, had such language been incorporated, I believe we could have this bill pass this place with unanimous support or something very close to it. It is unfortunate that opportunity was missed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton and I would like to hear his thoughts on the fact that I share his concerns.

We agree on the principles of the bill. I think we need to be more inclusive. However, we do not want this to be rushed through and botched this time, as we have come to expect from the Liberals.

Could my colleague comment on the possibility of working with members of the Senate to come up with a definition and clarify this legislation from the outset rather than putting the onus on judges, so we can avoid any potential excesses?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier is absolutely right that it is important that we get the definition right. Surely, we want this legislation to pass constitutional muster, and a piece of legislation that has a definition that is vague and overly broad is at risk of a charter challenge, at risk of being found to contravene fundamental justice and at risk of being found to contravene section 7 of the charter.

I had hoped that this would not be the case and that we could have gotten it right, so that we could have a law on the books that would stand.

• (1055)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today not to debate a ban on coercive conversion therapy, but instead to debate the means by which we ban this harmful, damaging practice. I want to make one thing very clear from the outset: I am against forcibly attempting to change an individual's sexual orientation. I condemn that practice in the strongest possible terms. There is simply no place for this in Canada.

However, there is a place in Canada for compassion. At the justice committee, of which I am a member, we heard testimony from a variety of stakeholders on this bill, including survivors of coercive conversion therapy, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, indigenous leaders, academics, doctors, lawyers and faith leaders. I thank all the witnesses for their contributions, especially those who had the strength and courage to share their very personal experiences. I know it could not have been easy.

It is evident to me from having heard these witnesses, read countless briefs and spoken to dozens of constituents that there is a widespread support for banning coercive conversion therapy practices, and there should be. However, as with all legislation, the language must be clear. We need to ensure that judges can interpret and apply the law as it is written, and that Canadians know what the law prohibits and what it does not: in other words, whom it protects and whom it does not. On this point, I have heard repeatedly that the bill's definition of conversion therapy is unclear and overbroad, as my colleague just said, and may have unintended consequences.

For earlier Liberal speakers to say that those with any concerns are against the communities we are trying to help, and speak from fear, is a harmful, wrong-minded statement. The Minister of Justice has said that the bill would not affect good-faith conversations, which I understand to mean caring, non-coercive discussions with doctors, parents, counsellors, faith leaders or others to whom Canadians, young and old, may turn for support. However, the bill, as drafted, does not say that. Why not? As we all know, what matters is not what the minister says the bill will do, but what the bill actually says. That is the law. That is what judges will apply, from Victoria to St. John's.

Several witnesses appearing before the committee called for amendments to the bill to clarify its definition, to make it clear that it does not criminalize these good-faith conversations. Coercive conversion therapy should be banned, but we should leave politicization out and remember that we are dealing with real people with real vulnerabilities trying to make their way and needing help at a vulnerable time. We need to clarify, then proceed. The government should welcome the broadest possible support among Canadians for this legislation: nothing more, nothing less.

In fact, when the committee first heard from the Minister of Justice on this bill, the minister admitted, "I will focus on the bill's definition of conversion therapy, because there appears to be some persisting confusion about its scope." I agree with the minister. There is persisting confusion, and the confusion is about its scope, confusion that we, as parliamentarians, have a duty to rectify.

André Schutten, legal counsel and director of law and policy at the Association for Reformed Political Action Canada, or ARPA, told the committee the definition is ambiguous, unclear and overbroad, and that it "captures helpful counselling and psychological support for children, teens, and adults".

Colette Aikema explained to the committee that the counselling she received to help her cope with past traumas, including abuse and rape, would be criminalized by this definition of conversion therapy. Ms. Aikema told the committee that her voluntary therapy from a University of Lethbridge counsellor and a faith-based sex addiction group helped save both her marriage and her life. This was powerful testimony that should not be ignored.

We also heard from Timothy Keslick, a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, who fears that without further clarification, the therapy he relies on to help him navigate his same-sex relationships would be barred by the bill's ban on treatment that "repress[es] or reduce[s] non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviours".

Statements by Members

Others also expressed the need to clarify the definition of conversion therapy in the bill—

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I apologize. I have to interrupt the member, who will have five minutes to complete her speech next time the bill comes to the floor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

FIREFIGHTER HONOURED

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the wee hours of October 3, 1974, a volunteer Moncton firefighter, Don MacFarlane, spotted a fire inside a home as he drove past. Off duty, without protective clothing, he entered the home multiple times to rescue a child and four adults. In one case, he dragged a man to safety through the smoke and fire while the victim was overcome.

I am sharing Mr. MacFarlane's remarkable story years later because he considered this all in a night's work and never told anyone except his wife. His bravery went unrecognized until research by the Moncton Fire Fighters Historical Society brought it to light. I was truly honoured last week to recognize Mr. MacFarlane's bravery in a special ceremony.

The people of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe owe the Moncton Fire Fighters Historical Society a debt of gratitude for adding this incident to the historical record. We owe Don MacFarlane so much more. His selfless actions represent the best of what it means to be Canadian.

My thanks go to Mr. MacFarlane.

* * *

BUSINESSES IN LAMBTON—KENT—MIDDLESEX

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, main street is in trouble. Main street businesses in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex are hanging on by a thread and, sadly, many have gone under. Hair stylists, barbers, spas, fitness gyms are shuttered, again.

Statements by Members

Like my colleagues on this side of the House, I have met many business owners who have gone above and beyond to do what was asked. They found ways to get products to shelves and to serve their customers safely. They helped their workforce adjust to the lockdowns. They kept as many on payroll as possible. Their resilience is truly inspiring, but their net revenues are not.

They gave me a message to bring to the House: “We cannot survive another lockdown. No more debts, no more handouts.” They just want the lockdowns to end. They want the government to—

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

* * *

FRONTLINE HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I enter my ninth year of remission following treatment for testicular cancer, I rise today to recognize the hard work of nurses and all frontline health care workers who continue to save lives during this health crisis.

[*English*]

Yesterday, as I walked through the halls of Montreal's Jewish General Hospital for my annual blood work and X-rays, the experience was understandably different, but one thing remained the same: the dedication and resolve of our nurses.

I strain to find the words to describe my gratitude to the nurses who cared for me and, indeed, care for us all, so I will try to sum up these heroes with one anecdote. As I was leaving the hospital yesterday, one of the nurses who treated me looked at her colleague and said, “Okay, see you tomorrow. I'm off to the clinic. It's vaccines time”, because in addition to working her shift, she was also giving her time delivering life-saving vaccines to us and those we love.

[*Translation*]

They are true heroes. On behalf of everyone in this House, I sincerely thank them for everything they do for us and for all Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has hit everybody hard, and small businesses are no exception. These are the businesses that drive employment and provide the real basis of our economy.

Last week, I hosted a virtual town hall meeting for Elmwood—Transcona small business owners. I heard from Gary, the owner of a company that provides trips for people with mobility challenges. He received the Canada emergency business account loan, but slow business means paying it off next year. It is completely unrealistic. Roger is a self-employed massage therapist whose business has been devastated by the pandemic. While CERB helped early on,

rules for the new benefits disqualify him because he continues to earn some income.

While big banks benefited from huge gifts of liquidity and large firms were allowed to keep wage subsidy money while paying bonuses and dividends, small businesses continue to wait for word on whether they will get an extension on the CEBA or see income support that does not penalize them for making what money they can.

Once again, New Democrats are speaking up for the little guys when we say that small business owners deserve to know what support they can bank on in the years to come.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we recognize that the most efficient way to reduce our emissions is to use price mechanisms. I know what colleagues are thinking: There goes the member for Kingston and the Island once again, railing on about the need to price pollution. Guess what, those are not my words. They are, in fact, words that come straight from the new Conservative climate plan. That is right: After five long years of criticizing and lashing out against the government's bold vision on recognizing that pollution should not be free, the Conservative Party has finally figured out this is the right way to go. However, we should not be fooled. As usual, the devil is in the details. Rather than encouraging folks to pollute less, the Conservative plan actually incentivizes them to use more fossil fuels. Yes, that is right. With their plan, the more one burns, the more one earns.

Leadership is not about waiting for public opinion to be on one's side. It is about doing something bold because one believes—

● (1105)

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

* * *

FIRST RESPONDERS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to inform the House of some of the life-saving first responders we are blessed to have in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Paramedics Colin Anderson, Scott Speer, Hailey Ireland, Ted Maika, Dan Freeman, Stefan Marquis, Michelle Brown, Chris Scott, Tanya Sinclair and Sandra Ladd all received awards for resuscitating patients. Their coolness under pressure certainly will not be forgotten.

Brockville constables Dustin Gamble, Ross McCullough and Geoff Fearon, as well as sergeants Eric Ruigrok and Shawn Borgford, showed incredible heroism saving the lives of two of our citizens. Our community is grateful to these officers.

We also have a couple of long-time leaders who are retiring after 36 years and 46 years, respectively. Gananoque Police Chief Garry Hull and Leeds and the Thousand Islands Fire Chief Rick Lawson will be stepping aside to enjoy retirement.

This is but a sample of the amazing work that first responders and telecommunicators do for us. They are our friends, our neighbours, and because of their commitment—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

* * *

RAMADAN

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I join Muslims in my riding, across Canada and the world in observing the month of Ramadan.

As we fast from sunrise until sunset, and yes, even from water, Muslim Canadians will again this year have Iftars at our homes, isolated from others, missing out on gatherings with loved ones and praying at mosques.

Ramadan is a time to do our part to help those most in need, and I am thinking of community organizations like the Naseeha mental health helpline, which supports mental health for young people.

As Muslim Canadians do their part in supporting community, I am proud to be part of a government that stands shoulder to shoulder with Muslim Canadians to call out and take action against hatred in all its forms, including calling out Islamophobia by its name and proclaiming January 29 as a national day of remembrance of the Quebec City mosque attack and action against Islamophobia.

Our Canadian mosaic is a resilient one. *Ramadan Mubarak.*

* * *

2020 SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one year ago, on the morning of Sunday, April 19, we the citizens of Cumberland—Colchester, awoke to discover a devastating tragedy had ripped through our normally tranquil corner of the world.

Words cannot express my sorrow for the families and friends who lost loved ones and the RCMP who lost a beloved colleague here in the line of duty. I thank all first responders who risked their own lives trying to save others.

Statements by Members

We are Nova Scotians. When we continue to support one another with kindness and generosity, we prove that love wins the day and that violence does not and will never define us.

* * *

STEVE LUDZIK DAY

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month, and this past week our community came together to honour one of our local residents by proclaiming April 11 as Steve Ludzik Parkinson's awareness day in the city of Niagara Falls.

Steve arrived in Niagara in 1978 to pursue a hockey career, playing Junior A for the Niagara Falls Flyers. He successfully realized his childhood dream by playing professionally in the National Hockey League, and later went on to become a professional hockey coach and broadcaster.

Steve is known for his incredible and selfless contributions made through the creation of his Steve Ludzik Foundation and the establishment of the Steve Ludzik Centre for Parkinson's Rehab at Hotel Dieu Shaver hospital in St. Catharines.

Diagnosed with Parkinson's himself, Steve's work and efforts have made a significant difference in the lives of so many people across Niagara. The motto of Steve's life and fight against Parkinson's is to remain "Ludzy Strong".

Steve Ludzik is not only a friend to many; he is an inspiration to us all.

* * *

• (1110)

ENDOMETRIOSIS

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to bring the attention of this House to a painful disorder called endometriosis.

Endometriosis is a gynecological condition that causes severe pain, inflammation, fatigue and infertility. It impacts one in 10 women, as well as transgender and non-binary persons. Despite its prevalence, many women experience long delays to diagnosis.

Our government has provided funding through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to better understand the causes of endometriosis and to enhance science around prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

[Translation]

According to statistics, diseases that mainly affect women receive less research funding and are often under-diagnosed, which means that women are sometimes left to suffer for years without validation or treatment.

We need to do more for all those who are suffering and give them hope for a pain-free future.

*Statements by Members**[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week, the House of Commons got to finally debate Bill C-262, a bill that would provide a tax incentive for companies across Canada's economy to contribute to greenhouse gas reductions. Yes, in an era when the government's approach to an environmental problem is to nibble at the edges and tax Canadians, Conservatives have put forth a plan to incentivize the removal of these gases from the atmosphere. Canada has been, until lately, a leader in the approach to solving the world's growing emissions. Our initiative would put us back on track. Sadly, my colleagues in other parties spoke against solving global warming issues with Canadian technological solutions.

We have seen the results of the current government's approach to managing greenhouse gas emissions. In 2019, we saw another increase from Canada. The Liberal government needs to look beyond the non-solutions put forth by this Minister of Environment and Climate Change and consider this bill as part of a real climate plan, one that actually reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

* * *

*[Translation]***CLIMATE CHANGE**

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to reaffirm that the Conservative Party of Canada recognizes climate change, and I am proud of the leadership demonstrated by our leader, who yesterday presented a bold, realistic plan that has been validated by subject-matter experts.

This plan will help us meet the Paris targets in creative, effective ways. Among other things, we are going to establish a border tariff. We are going to increase carbon capture and the number of zero-emission vehicles. We are going to create a personal low carbon savings account.

Our plan is based on a very simple principle. We do not want to use the environment to fill government coffers. We want Canadians to be the ones who benefit from the positive impacts of this environmental plan.

It is ridiculous that the Liberal government thinks that Canadians will increase their fuel consumption to accumulate purchase credits for green products. The Conservative Party is the one that is going to take action for a greener environment.

* * *

*[English]***HOUSING**

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the most haunting aspects of my work in Hamilton Centre is receiving a call from a resident facing imminent eviction. I think about the countless renters in our city who are being forced out onto the streets each month by greedy landlords using “renovictions” and other dubious means to simply bring in new tenants and jack up the rent.

I think of Trish, a widow, who had to sell her home to pay off her debts, only to have her already-meagre ODSP cut.

I think of Justin, a hard-working father of four, with a well-paying job, who makes too much income to qualify for government support and yet not enough to qualify for a mortgage. He has now been forced to pack up his family and leave the city he loves and grew up in, hoping to find more affordable housing elsewhere.

The housing crisis that is happening in Hamilton exists across Canada and it needs to end. If the current Liberal government truly believes that housing is a human right, then actions must be taken to stop catering to foreign investors, speculators and land hoarders and finally end the gross profiteering off one of our society's most basic necessities of life: housing.

* * *

*[Translation]***ANOUK ST-ONGE**

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, today I am proud to take a moment to say a few words about a woman who is the pride of the North Shore.

Originally from Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam, Anouk St-Onge recently became a certified ship's captain, making her the first female Innu fishing boat captain.

It was with her family and children in mind—and in her heart—that she decided to pursue her studies on the other side of the river, in the Gaspé. She chose a traditionally male occupation and she is a model of perseverance. She has also become a pioneer for women who might want to follow in her footsteps by working in the fishing industry. Anouk St-Onge was not afraid to forge ahead and was determined to live her lifelong dream. Inspiring people like her prove that having ambition pays off.

Congratulations, Captain St-Onge, on your certification. I wish you much success.

* * *

● (1115)

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday history was made. The Leader of the Opposition shared his vision for a climate plan, aptly named “Secure the Environment”. It is bold and addresses challenging topics such as carbon leakage. Our plan has been independently assessed by Navius Research. Our plan would effectively achieve the same emissions reductions as the Liberal plan.

I was encouraged to see well-respected climate organizations such as Clean Prosperity call this plan “a significant step in the right direction”. It was also encouraging to see the Canadian Federation of Independent Business immediately recognize the benefits of our plan that would fix the unfair cross-subsidization burden imposed on businesses by the Liberal plan.

We all get that the current Liberal government does not like ideas that are not from its own cabinet, but let us not forget that every single climate plan and every target that a Liberal government has set, going back as far as 1993, has massively failed. For the sake of our climate, I implore the Minister of Environment to drop the juvenile partisan political response he put out yesterday, let us—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Saint-Laurent.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC TEACHERS

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week Quebec teachers were on strike, fighting for better working conditions so they can provide their students with a higher-quality education.

Their working conditions deteriorate every year. Things have gotten a lot worse because of the pandemic. Teachers have one extra hour of work without any additional pay.

As a former teacher, I know what it takes to prepare lessons, spend a good part of the day teaching, correcting work, supervising students, organizing additional activities and meeting other staff members and parents to improve the educational experience of our students.

There is currently a shortage of supply teachers and, as a volunteer, I have even had the opportunity to see the extent to which teachers have been burdened with additional important responsibilities because of COVID-19. This makes their work much more difficult.

We hear, we see, and we thank Quebec teachers for everything they are doing for our children.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, unfortunately for Canadians, there is once again mass confusion over access to vaccines and our ability to vaccinate all Canadians. Just a couple of minutes ago, Moderna announced that, instead of sending a late delivery of 1.2 million doses, it would be sending just half of that amount. In June, we could be two million doses short of our expected delivery numbers. Once again, this is the Liberal government's fault. How did the minister respond to this? She said, and I quote, “we are disappointed”.

Oral Questions

Canadians deserve better than empty words like that. Canadians deserve the facts.

Will the Prime Minister—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we, of course, share this sense of urgency to get all Canadians vaccinated.

So far, 12.7 million vaccine doses have been administered in Canada. We have shown time and time again that we can expedite the arrival of vaccines in Canada. Although we are disappointed in Moderna's supply constraints, we will continue to show that we will expedite vaccine deliveries to Canada.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, once again, those statements are not based on facts. We are not getting more vaccines; we are getting fewer vaccines.

The government promised to deliver vaccines as planned, maybe with a few minor delays. These are not minor delays, though, because we are talking about a shortfall of millions of doses. Fewer vaccines means fewer vaccinations. Fewer vaccinations means the economic recovery will take longer.

Will the Prime Minister do his duty, stand up in the House, and finally tell Canadians the truth about vaccine delivery?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will tell Canadians the truth. The opposition wants to turn vaccine procurement into a partisan political issue. The fact is that the government is exceeding all its targets and all expectations with respect to vaccine delivery by millions of doses, as we saw with the AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines.

I can assure Canadians that we will continue to have good news for them about this and that 50 million doses will be administered in Canada by the end—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, the facts do not support what the parliamentary secretary is saying.

The Prime Minister needs to tell Canadians the truth. Unfortunately, he did just the opposite when he expressed doubts about the CNN story, which was broadcast around the world and reported that Canada is having some real problems.

Could the Prime Minister stand up in this House and tell Canadians the truth for once about the problems Canada is having with its vaccine supply? That is his job.

Oral Questions

• (1120)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on vaccines, the Prime Minister is telling the truth, both in the House and to all Canadians. He is about to do so again in a few minutes.

The fact is that the opposition is playing political games, while we are busy working to get vaccines into Canada more quickly. We have demonstrated that over and over again, and we will continue to demonstrate it.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada has four dollars of household, corporate and government debt for every dollar of economic output.

That is the highest ratio in recorded Canadian history, twice our historic average, higher than the ratio in the U.S. during the sub-prime crisis or in Greece during that country's sovereign debt crisis.

We now show all five leading indicators of a forthcoming debt crisis. Will the budget, which has been delayed for two years, address this forthcoming debt crisis?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is curious to me that the Conservative Party, at every opportunity, seems to register complaints about the cost of our pandemic response without reflecting, as well, on the cost of inaction.

We know that the pandemic created immense costs for Canadian households and businesses. That is why we put forward programs, like the Canada emergency response benefit, to keep food on the table for nine million Canadians. It is why we advanced the wage subsidy, to keep five million workers on the payroll.

Canadians can rest assured that when we table the budget, we will continue to focus on measures that will protect their health and well-being, and support—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government's deficit and the rising debts of households and small businesses is the cost of inaction. It is the result of the terrible job the government did in letting thousands of people enter from China after it was warned by the military of a brewing pandemic. It is the cost of the government's vaccine failure. It is the cost of the late turnaround on rapid testing.

The cost of all of that will be a debt crisis. Will the government address the forthcoming debt crisis in the budget, or will we cross that bridge when it collapses?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance,

Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives do not seem to be willing to contemplate the true cost of inaction. I would point the hon. member to a recent report of the IMF. It indicates that, had the government not taken action, the scale of the federal deficit would have been roughly similar, but the Canadian economy would have suffered enormous job losses. This would have created economic scarring that would have prevented Canada from recovering when the time came to do so.

We will continue to invest in supports for households and businesses to help them weather this storm and to ensure that we set the stage for the economy to come roaring back. In particular, I would point the member to the recent jobs numbers, which show over—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Manicouagan.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, once again, the federal government's management of the quarantine for temporary foreign workers is a fiasco.

This year, the new testing has added to the burden on businesses. The federal government has contracted the testing out to a unilingual anglophone company in Ontario that cannot serve Quebec.

As a result, workers are being forced to isolate for 25 days while awaiting their results, and business owners are wasting whole days dealing with the red tape.

When will the government take action so that the workers we need can get to work when we need them?

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government recognizes the importance of temporary foreign workers for our producers and food processors. We are working tirelessly to ensure that temporary foreign workers can arrive safely in Canada by supporting employers with the additional costs incurred through accommodating the isolation period.

All the federal departments involved in the temporary foreign worker program have worked together to simplify processes and facilitate, as much as possible, the safe entry of these workers. We recognize the integral role farmers and food-processing employers play in ensuring Canadians have access to food, and we are here to support them.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, temporary foreign workers are being forced to isolate for a month because of the federal government's mismanagement.

For a fish processing plant, it makes no sense to go without workers for a month when the fishing season is only a few weeks long. For an asparagus farmer who is just days away from harvest, it makes no sense to have to pick the whole crop on their own while their workers wait for their test results.

These are huge losses for our businesses. When will the government take action?

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, temporary foreign workers have played an important role in ensuring our food security, especially during this pandemic. They deserve to be safe.

That is why we are working with provinces to ensure employers are prepared to safely welcome and quarantine workers, strengthening inspections to ensure employers meet quarantine and program obligations, funding migrant worker organizations to provide direct assistance to workers, improving the TFW tip line to provide services in multiple languages, and improving coordination with our partners to respond quickly to emerging issues. This comprehensive plan builds on and strengthens existing measures to ensure workers and employers—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the immigration backlog in this country is reaching ridiculous levels.

In Quebec alone, the average wait time is 27 months. A 27-month wait time shows a blatant lack of respect for the applicants.

The Liberals are yet again refusing to step up and are instead passing the buck to the provinces. It is the same old story.

Will the minister finally pull up his socks and speed up immigration processing to give hope to these people and at the same time support our businesses, which need workers during this labour shortage?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the pandemic has affected almost every aspect of our lives, and we have brought in innovative measures to process active cases as quickly as possible and minimize delays caused by COVID-19. We have prioritized applications from Canadians and permanent residents returning to Canada, as well as people providing essential services and support.

There is still work to be done, but we started taking measures to support Canadians on day one, and we will continue to do so in the future.

Oral Questions

[English]

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, small businesses have been on the front line of the pandemic, and many are not able to weather further restrictions without more help from the government. These entrepreneurs want assurances that next week's budget will provide them with the support they desperately need. New Democrats are listening to small business owners, and they have been clear that the Liberal government needs to further expand the CEBA loan to help more struggling businesses, extend the program to get them through this next wave and give businesses until 2025 to repay what they owe.

Will the government support our call to immediately increase CEBA by another \$20,000, and make sure small businesses can get back on their feet?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his continued advocacy for small businesses since the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the very beginning of this public health emergency, our approach has been to support households and businesses to help them weather the storm, so they can contribute to the economic recovery on the back end of COVID-19. That included measures such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency business account.

I will not spoil announcements that will be included in Monday's budget, but the hon. member can rest assured our approach to continuing our support for small businesses will be part of the recovery strategy for Canada.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, as Canadians are now facing the third wave of the global pandemic, the tax filing deadline is quickly approaching. Filing taxes is a stressful time for everyone, but in a global pandemic, it can be downright harrowing. Conservatives believe that the tax filing deadline should be extended to provide relief for those who are struggling.

Will the minister consider extending the individual tax filing deadline until June 30, as Conservatives are calling for?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government understands that this tax season is stressful for Canadians. Our government will continue to be there for them every step of the way.

Oral Questions

In February, we announced that recipients of emergency and recovery benefits would be eligible for interest relief if they file their 2020 income tax returns. The CRA also has strong taxpayer relief provisions in place through which taxpayers can be relieved of penalties and interest if these are incurred for reasons beyond their control. These measures will ensure that Canadians who need help this tax season will get it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will take that as a “no”.

This tax season our government has locked nearly one million taxpayers out of their CRA My Account because of its lacklustre cybersecurity. Many people are struggling to regain access to their accounts, which they need to file their taxes.

Will the government please consider giving a couple of extra months for Canadians to file their taxes? It took the government nearly two years to table a budget.

• (1130)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government understands that this tax season is a stressful one for Canadians. Our government will continue to be there for them every step of the way.

I encourage all Canadians to file their returns on time, so the delivery of the benefits and credits to which they are entitled are not disrupted. Canadians can easily file online, by paper or, for specific individuals, by phone.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, former Liberal Party national director Ian McKay was found guilty of breaking ethics laws when he hid investments in his cannabis company, which was in breach of federal law. What did he earn for his troubles? We would think sanctions or other penalties. No, he was named Canada's ambassador to Japan by the Liberal government.

We have another unscrupulous Liberal representing Canada on the world stage. Are ethical breaches prerequisites for Liberal insiders to be given major appointments?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to point out how important the relationship we have with Japan is, as an ally, as a friend and as a very significant trading partner. The appointment of Mr. McKay is a significant appointment in that it acknowledges the fact that we want to build our economic, cultural and social relationships with Japan. We trust Mr. McKay to represent Canada well, and Japan will continue to grow in importance with Canada as we grow together.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is clear that to be a Canadian ambassador under the Liberal government, one better be a Liberal insider. Ethical breaches and connections to human rights abusers go a long way. This must be why Dominic Barton, with his deep connections to Communist China, was named Canada's am-

bassador to China, an ambassador to China who participated in meetings down the road from concentration camps.

When the Liberals are considering ambassadors, which is higher on the resumé: ethical breaches or complacency in corruption?

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, with respect to our relationship to our allies and our friends, as well as those countries we have challenges with, Canada is well represented by professional public servants, as well as ambassadors, who represent Canada with dignity, grace, intelligence, compassion and dogged determination. Ambassador Barton exercises that sort of public service, and I am proud to have him as our ambassador to Canada.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, foreign, state-backed misinformation and violent forced confessions should not be part of the Canadian broadcasting system, which is why I will be moving amendments to Bill C-10 to protect Canadians and others from these gross violations of human rights.

Does the government support these proposed amendments?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an exciting day, as we are moving forward with clause-by-clause consideration on Bill C-10, modernizing the Broadcasting Act, today in committee.

Standing committees are independent and have an important role to play in improving bills through the legislative process. I am looking forward to seeing all parties work together to make sure that it is the best bill that it can be.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was a very clear and specific question. It was not about committee agendas. It was about the policy of this government with respect to these forced confessions.

Safeguard Defenders has filed a complaint with the CRTC about the airing of forced confessions on Canadian airways involving nearly 60 victims between 2013 and 2019. The CRTC has failed to lodge an investigation.

Will the parliamentary secretary stop avoiding the issue and simply state the government's position on this? When it comes to removing foreign state-backed misinformation and violence from the Canadian broadcasting system, does the government agree that action is required?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the question from the member across the way was in respect to amendments that are being considered in committee. I want to reiterate that standing committees are independent and they do have an important role to play.

All members of the committee, including opposition members and members of the government party, will be working together at committee to consider all of the amendments being put forward.

* * *

[Translation]

PYRRHOTITE

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, pyrrhotite is destroying homes in the Mauricie region, and the federal government needs to do its part.

In its recent budget, Quebec invested an additional \$26 million to help affected homeowners, for a total contribution of \$80 million. The federal government has contributed only \$30 million, and that was five years ago. The Government of Quebec has said, and I quote: “Québec expects the federal government to contribute financially to broadening and enhancing assistance for homes damaged by pyrrhotite”.

To become an equal partner, Ottawa needs to contribute an additional \$50 million—

• (1135)

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

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I will apologize in advance, because I am not familiar with the very specific issue he has raised around pyrrhotite. I would be happy to take more detail from him on the back end of question period, should he wish.

However, I will note, in particular, that we have made significant investments, including the ability to repair and retrofit affordable housing units, to ensure that every Canadian, no matter their level of income, has a dignified place to call home.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, from that answer, one would think that this is the first time we have brought the pyrrhotite problem to the federal government's attention.

A house is a lifetime investment. Pyrrhotite victims are experiencing personal and financial distress. The entire region has rallied together. The government cannot claim that it did not know about the problem. One of the government ministers, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain sits at the consultation table. The time for excuses is over. The Mauricie region needs leadership and co-operation.

Oral Questions

To become an equal partner, Ottawa needs to contribute an additional \$50 million. The budget will be announced on Monday. Will the federal government be there for these victims?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the federal government has always been there for the victims of pyrrhotite. We have met with them and talked with them. We are aware of the difficulties and problems they are facing and of everything they have had to deal with. Funding was made available to deal with this very serious problem. We will continue to be there for pyrrhotite victims.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians' 2020 annual report says that the Chinese Communist Party is increasingly targeting Canada's science and technology sector through programs like its Thousand Talents Program, which gets Chinese scientists to bring research back to China. However, despite evidence that Canada's 5G technology is being, as the reports says, “actively targeted”, the Liberals still refuse to ban Huawei from our network.

Let us try this again. Will the Liberals take a stand against Chinese wolf warrior diplomacy and ban Huawei?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Innovation and Industry), Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me assure the member that we take national security very seriously. We take national security and the research environment, and we do the work required to ensure that Canadians have full confidence. We ensure that everything has protocols, that Canadians are safe and secure, and they do not have to worry about the types of concerns the member has identified.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, Chinese citizens are coerced by the regime and Huawei is an arm of the communist party.

The NSICOP's report also states, “China and Russia remain the primary culprits” for foreign interference and “are the most significant long-term threats to Canada's sovereignty and prosperity”, yet the Prime Minister defends the communist party's interests even threatening to withdraw from the Halifax security forum if Taiwan was recognized for its resistance to China's relentless pressure.

How can the Prime Minister defend Canada from the CCP's interference if he is an active apologist for it?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Innovation and Industry), Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me reiterate one more time that we are constantly on the lookout and do everything within our power to safeguard our research, our national security and our economic interests. These are valid concerns to have, but as the member is fully aware, the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Industry have taken numerous steps over the course of the past several months to ensure that Canadians have nothing to be concerned about.

*Oral Questions***AIRLINE INDUSTRY**

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Monday, the Liberal government announced a financial package worth up to \$5.8 billion for one of Canada's airlines, Air Canada. Not only does this package neglect the thousands of laid-off workers at Canada's other airlines, but there were no new supports for airports, air traffic controllers or travel advisers with commissions at other airlines.

Assisting one airline is simply not the comprehensive relief program for which we have all been asking. Could the government commit to keeping its promise and support all our aviation workers?

• (1140)

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to talk about Monday's announcement.

This week is a good week for workers in the aviation sector. This week is a good week for passengers who have been waiting for refunds. This week is a good week for communities that have been disconnected because of COVID. This week is a good week for travel agents. Our agreement with Air Canada is great news for the aviation sector.

Let me assure the member that we are in discussions with other airlines. I look forward to supporting the excellent work of our aviation workers.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week is a good week for one company.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal government has been promising assistance for Canada's aviation industry for over a year, but nothing happened until this week, with a plan for Air Canada. Unfortunately, we need a plan for the entire industry. This piecemeal approach will serve only to slow the recovery and negatively impact aviation workers.

Why did the government take so long to act?

[*English*]

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Sunwing received a package in February. We are in discussions with Air Transat. We are in discussions with WestJet. We are in discussions with other airlines.

In last fall's economic statement, we announced \$1.1 billion in supports for airports, and regional and remote airlines.

It is not the Conservatives who will be there for the aviation workers; it is our government, which has been there from day one, and we will continue to have their backs.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Madam Speaker, Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation sent a letter to the Minister of Northern Affairs asking him to ensure a swift conclusion to the NIRB's environmental and social assessment of the mine's pro-

posed expansion. The minister has refused to meet with the Nuluu-jaat Land Guardians after multiple requests.

Reconciliation requires meaningful interaction with Inuit. Instead, the Liberals are ignoring requests to provide transparency and fulfill their obligations. Has the minister or his staff met with the Baffinland Iron Mines Corporation in the last six months?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague knows that the process regarding the Baffinland Mary River Mine project proposal is ongoing. In the coming weeks the independent Nunavut Impact Review Board will resume hearings on the project.

As was set out in the Nunavut agreement, the NIRB process was established with Inuit and territory partners to ensure the interests of all Nunavummiut were heard and protected. We are confident that all parties will continue their dialogue through that NIRB process, and it is not up to us to prejudice the outcome.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

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AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canadians have been waiting for over a year for Air Canada to return their hard-earned money for cancelled trips. While the Liberals stood by, thousands of jobs have been lost across the air sector. It should never have taken over a year to get help to airline workers or to make families whole by providing refunds.

After months of pushing the government to do the right thing, it finally had come to an agreement. However, without a real enforcement mechanism, the government is left relying on Air Canada.

While the minister take an active role in resolving disputes and ensuring Canadians are properly refunded?

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to once again talk about how this week is a good week for workers in the aviation sector and it is a good week for passengers who are waiting for refunds. It is also a good week for travel agents and it is a good week for communities that lost regional routes that connected them to other parts of the country and the rest of the world

I want to thank our officials at the Department of Finance and at the Department of Transport for working diligently. We have done our homework. We have protected the interests of Canadians. We protected the interests of passengers—

Oral Questions

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the REM station at Montréal-Trudeau International Airport has been under construction for some time. Could the Minister of Transport update the House on this project and explain how this is an essential investment that will benefit the entire Montreal area?

• (1145)

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

Our government is pleased to announce an agreement with our partners to build the REM station at the Montréal-Trudeau International Airport. This project will benefit Montreal and follows our commitment from the fall economic statement to support airports. This project is good news for people from Montreal and Quebec. I want to thank my colleagues from the Quebec caucus for championing it.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, a few months ago, I asked the Minister of Public Safety what he would do to defend our country's digital infrastructure from cyber-attacks and terrorism. He answered by saying that they threw money at it.

Just recently, over 533 million Facebook users' data was leaked online. The CRA was attacked last summer, and Microsoft just faced a cyber-attack. This is hurting our economy and the safety of Canadians.

When will the government make a real plan and take cybersecurity seriously?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this government will stop at nothing to protect its citizens and, indeed, our government and its institutions from cyber-attacks. The minister is completely committed to his work on that file, and that file will continue. That work includes doing work with our technology companies, doing work across the government and funding adequately our cybersecurity efforts.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has said repeatedly that there remains no more important relationship than that with the indigenous people.

In his 2019, mandate letter to the procurement minister, he instructed her to secure 5% of all federal contracts with indigenous-owned companies. She failed. As a result, that mandate letter was

scrapped and a new one was granted. It is as if it was inconvenient and therefore whitewashed.

My question is very simple. When will the government stop making false promises, misleading Canadians and actually follow through?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in fact, our government is incredibly committed to reaching that 5% target of procurement from indigenous companies. I had the pleasure, along with the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, of participating in a round table and working on the modernization of procurement in delivering successful procurements for indigenous companies and indigenous peoples right across the country. That work continues, and we will be reporting on even more good news on that in the future.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline transports Saskatchewan and Alberta oil to eastern Canada. It supplies half of Ontario and Quebec's gasoline, diesel, home heating fuel and jet fuel. However, next month, the governor of Michigan is going to shut down that pipeline, jeopardizing tens of thousands of jobs across Canada.

Why has the Prime Minister not yet engaged directly with President Biden on enforcing the transit pipeline treaty between our two countries?

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Line 5 is non-negotiable. People will not be left out in the cold.

I want to also thank the members of the Canada-U.S. special committee for their hard work on setting Line 5. We have received their report and will be reviewing it, but it is clear there is no daylight between parties and Canadians on this issue. Line 5 is essential to Canada's energy security, and we will continue to defend it.

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FINANCE

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's debt load is among the highest per capita of developed nations. With the spending announcements and budget coming on Monday, there does not seem to be any stopping this massive buildup.

The Prime Minister continues to boast that he has Canadians' backs. Is there any chance he will come clean next week and explain to our grandkids that it will be on their backs to pay it all back?

Oral Questions

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that demonstrates the Conservatives' lack of willingness to recognize the cost of not taking action to support Canadian households and businesses through this pandemic. I point the hon. member to the testimony of a representative from the OECD at the finance committee just yesterday, where he indicated that Canada's healthy fiscal position put us in a great position to respond to the costs of this pandemic, but also to set the course for the recovery.

On our side of the House, we will not be afraid to invest to ensure households can keep food on the table and that workers can remain on the payroll. We will do whatever it takes for as long as it takes to see Canadians through this emergency.

* * *

• (1150)

[*Translation*]**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, neonicotinoid pesticides are threatening the survival of bees.

Bees are essential to the food chain. Without them, there is no pollination, no plants and no biodiversity.

Three years ago, Ottawa committed to following Europe's lead and prohibiting these pesticides, but it is now backtracking without offering a solution.

The Bloc Québécois has, for years, been urging the government to invest heavily in searching for alternatives and to support farmers during the transition, but Ottawa has not done a thing for farmers or for the environment. We are back to square one.

When will the government take action?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are making significant investments in research to help our farmers adapt and engage in sustainable agriculture.

I do want to point out that there is a framework for neonicotinoids. The most recent study looked into the safety of plants and aquatic life. Let us not confuse the issue. This is a very complex subject that we are taking seriously in order to keep Canadians safe and healthy.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, transitioning away from neonicotinoids is also essential for public health.

The Institut national de la recherche scientifique found that these pesticides act as endocrine disruptors in humans and may have consequences, especially for women's health.

It is clear that these pesticides are harmful to the environment and to health, but we cannot leave farmers in the lurch by banning them without offering an alternative. We have to invest in research and support farmers through the transition.

When will the government pull its head out of the sand?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are making major investments in research to help our agricultural producers. We are very serious about striking a balance to make that transition happen while keeping Canadians safe and healthy, which is obviously our top priority.

Regulations are in place, and we are investing in science.

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[*English*]**CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, April is personal tax season and with the deadline fast approaching, Canadians are feeling overwhelmed. Lockdowns, business closures, layoffs and job loss are only a few issues that have made tax filing more complicated and time consuming than ever before. Accountants, tax consultants and individuals in my riding and across the country are pleading for more time.

Will the minister urgently address this unnecessary added stress and extend the annual tax filing deadline?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I stated for the hon. member's colleague earlier on in the session, our government understands this tax season is a stressful one for Canadians and our government will continue to be there for them every step of the way.

In February, we announced that recipients of emergency and recovery benefits would be eligible for interest relief if they filed their 2020 income tax returns. The CRA also has strong taxpayer relief provisions in place, where taxpayers can be relieved of penalties and interest if these are incurred for reasons beyond their control. These measures will ensure that Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

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[*Translation*]**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, last year when the Prime Minister was announcing his COVID-19 assistance measures he said that no one would be left behind.

*Oral Questions***TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

Rosalie, a young mother from Montmagny, recently finished her maternity leave and at the dawn of the third wave she is being denied the Canada recovery caregiving benefit by a Canada Revenue Agency officer because her daughter was not previously registered for child care between the two waves.

It is not for lack of trying. Rosalie is on a wait list at 50 different places and those that remain are not taking infants because of COVID-19. What does the government suggest Rosalie do?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we recognize the disproportionate impact this pandemic has had on women.

When we transitioned from CERB to EI and the recovery benefits last September, we provided an EI hours credit retroactive to March 2020. This was in recognition that individuals may not have been able to accumulate enough hours to be eligible for EI.

Women benefited from the hours credit as they could retroactively claim EI maternity benefits. We have worked hard to ensure equity for EI claimants, and members in this House can be assured that new mothers are receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, thousands of Canadians have been abandoned by the system.

For example, after receiving EI sickness benefits, one of my constituents was denied the Canada recovery sickness benefit because her employment insurance file is still open and it is blocking the system. Managers are aware of the flaw and are awaiting instruction.

When will the Minister of National Revenue and the Minister of Employment work together on resolving the problem so that honest Canadians can receive the money they are entitled to?

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that this continues to be a difficult time for many, which is why we transitioned to a simplified EI program, and created three new recovery benefits to support Canadians who are unable to work or have reduced hours.

Service Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency work together to share data on Canadians who apply, to ensure that only one benefit is paid to someone applying at any given time. In some instances, this integrity measure can cause a delay.

That said, we understand that any delay in receiving benefits can be hard for people, so Service Canada and the CRA are continuing to work together to reduce delays and ensure Canadians are paid the benefits they need in a timely manner.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for years the Highway of Tears has been an unsafe route for indigenous women and girls. Families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and survivors have highlighted the connection between these heinous acts and the gaps in cellular service along Canadian highways, especially in rural and remote areas.

Can the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development update the House on the steps our government has taken to enhance safety, particularly for indigenous women and girls, along Highway 16?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his hard work and particularly for his leadership as chair of the Liberal Pacific caucus.

Along with our partners in B.C. and with Rogers, our government is connecting the entirety of Highway 16 to reliable cell service. Work begins this construction season and will be completed by October of next year. In consultation with families and survivors, we do this work and respond to recommendations from the inquiry and the Highway of Tears symposium.

We complete this work in memory of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and in earnest resolve to end such tragedies, gender-based—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Wall Street Journal, “Canada’s Vaccine Rollout Lags Behind as Cases Rise”; CNN, “Canadian vaccine rollout is not going well at all”; The Atlantic, “Canada’s Vaccine Mess”; and The Guardian says that Ontario starts one-month lockdown as cases surge.

Apparently, Canada’s Prime Minister thinks these American and U.K. publications are peddling fake news. Will the Prime Minister be honest with Canadians and admit vaccine availability is his failed responsibility?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have already furnished 12.7 million doses to the provinces and territories to vaccinate Canadians.

Oral Questions

We have managed to advance tens of millions of vaccine doses from one quarter to another and, just moments ago, announced that an additional eight million doses of Pfizer vaccine will be supplied to Canadians over the coming weeks and months.

The Canadian vaccine procurement strategy is working. It has worked since the beginning. We will continue to be among the top countries in the G20 for vaccinating our citizens.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada is behind with vaccines; that is a fact. It is now an embarrassing story reported on CNN.

The lower supply of vaccines is getting rationed with off-label usage. Instead of three weeks, doses can be delayed by four months. We are the only country with a four-month interval. The Liberals make excuses and say they are following facts and science, but Canada's chief science adviser has called the dosing delay a "population-level experiment".

Does the Prime Minister agree with his advisers in saying that his failures are the reason for this unusual dosing regimen?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we just had a great example of the member's reading the question instead of listening to the previous answer.

As I just reported, we will be increasing the number of Pfizer vaccines available to Canadians by eight million over the next weeks and months. That will mean that approximately 50 million doses of vaccines will be distributed to Canadians.

The real question is when will the opposition stop chasing the bouncing ball and playing politics with vaccine procurement, and instead recognize that we are among the leading countries in the world in the G20 for—

• (1200)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to the most recent numbers by Statistics Canada, less than one-third of Canada's municipal waste water is fully treated. This mixture of human waste and water is poured into our waterways, millions of cubic metres every day. It is shocking that the biggest polluters are Canada's coastal cities. The environmentalists who decry over its ethical oil sands are silent. Where is the Minister of Environment's plan to deal with this reckless pollution of our Canadian waterways?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, during our mandate, we approved over \$1.5 billion in federal funding for 1,452 waste-water projects across the country. In comparison, from 2011 and 2015, the previous Harper government approved only 216 waste-water projects and invested less than half the amount of federal funding.

Compare that with the Conservative platform that had the Conservatives cutting billions of dollars from much-needed infrastructure projects across the country and reducing investments that our municipalities critically need. With funding by multiple federal departments focused on national priorities that serve communities first, we are building Canada.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservative leader told Canadians that he would bring forward a serious and comprehensive climate plan. Instead, all we got was a 15-page pamphlet that did not mention science and does not help us meet our climate goals. To top it off, the Conservatives continue to delay serious legislative action on climate with the net-zero act. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change please update this House on the Conservative climate pamphlet and the Conservatives' filibuster of Bill C-12?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to be clear that this is a pamphlet that will do less and cost Canadians more. After fighting climate action for years, Conservatives have promised to stop sending rebates back to families, and instead create an incomprehensive reward system where the more they burn, the more they earn.

Compare that to our net-zero bill, Bill C-12, which is up for debate today. It would require us to set meaningful legislative targets and was a key commitment we made to Canadians in the last election. I sincerely hope all members will allow the debate to conclude today, so that we can—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, a report from Environmental Defence concludes the Liberals gave at least \$18 billion to the fossil fuel industry last year, despite their stated goal to move the country to a post-carbon economy. The Minister of Natural Resources has pointed out in this House that the majority of Canadians voted for serious action on climate change. When will the Liberals listen to those Canadians, and take urgent and bold action on climate change instead of throwing billions of dollars at the fossil fuel sector?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the authors of the report the hon. member mentions are not being entirely forthright. In their assessment of subsidies, they included things that the majority of Canadians would not agree are subsidies: for example, investments in orphan wells and methane cleanup, which were supported by the NDP; the wage subsidy for oil and gas companies that was received by all sectors in the economy; and investments in technology to drive down emissions from Canada's oil and gas sector. Canada needs to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, but, mixing several issues, this report does not contribute to an intelligent discussion on this important subject.

* * *

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I think I speak for the vast majority of Canadians when I say that we do not want an election during the third wave of this pandemic, particularly one clearly motivated by partisan opportunism. That said, an election unfortunately still remains a possibility, so I will ask a very specific question.

Can the minister please advise whether the government has any intention of seeing Bill C-19 become law, whether the Chief Electoral Officer has indicated he is COVID prepared and how quickly after royal assent he would be able to give notice that the temporary changes are in force?

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think it is important for us to recognize that we are, in fact, in a minority Parliament. No one knows what that means in terms of what can happen. The Chief Electoral Officer says we need to be ready if an election happens and Elections Canada, which is recognized around the world as an authority on independent elections, I am sure will ensure that Canada will be ready.

With respect to Bill C-19, we will continue to move forward in the best way we can.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled "Main Estimates 2021-22: Votes 1 and 5 under Department of Veterans Affairs, Vote 1 under Veterans Review and Appeal Board".

Routine Proceedings

OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-287, An Act to amend the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act.

He said: Madam Speaker, hostile actors, most notably the Chinese state, are trying to use the good name of international development to advance neo-colonial objectives and undermine international peace and security. Tragically, we see a repeat of the kind of 19th-century colonial tactics that were used by powers in Europe being used in the 21st century by the Chinese state: Debt-trap diplomacy exploits economic vulnerabilities in the developing world to try to exert control and undermine peace and security.

Canada should take a stand against this 21st-century neo-colonialism. We cannot always stop it, but we can refuse to be complicit in it. Unfortunately, the government is funding, through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, aspects of this Chinese state neo-colonial policy. My private member's bill would amend the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act, the legal framework governing foreign aid, to ensure that Canadian aid dollars cannot ever be used to advance the interests of hostile powers or to undermine international peace and security.

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

* * *

• (1210)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion:

That,

(a) pursuant to section 5(1) of An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons be appointed to review the provisions of the Criminal Code relating to medical assistance in dying and their application, including but not limited to issues relating to mature minors, advanced requests, mental illness, the state of palliative care in Canada and the protection of Canadians with disabilities;

(b) pursuant to section 5(2) of the Act, five members of the Senate and ten members of the House of Commons be members of the committee, including five members of the House of Commons from the governing party, three members of the House of Commons from the Official Opposition and two members of the House of Commons from opposition who are not members of the Official Opposition, with two Chairs of which the House Co-Chair shall be from the governing party and the Senate Co-Chair shall be determined by the Senate;

(c) in addition to the Co-Chairs, the committee shall elect three vice-chairs from the House, of whom the first vice-chair shall be from the Conservative Party of Canada, the second vice-chair shall be from the Bloc Québécois, and the third vice-chair shall be from the New Democratic Party;

(d) pursuant to section 5(3) of the Act, the quorum of the committee be eight members whenever a vote, resolution or other decision is taken, so long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House, one member of the opposition in the House and one member of the Senate are present, and that the Joint Chairs be authorized to hold meetings, to receive evidence and authorize the printing thereof, whenever six members are present, as long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House, one member of the opposition in the House and one member of the Senate are represented;

Routine Proceedings

(e) the House of Commons members be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee no later than five sitting days after the adoption of this motion;

(f) changes to the membership of the committee, on the part of the House of Commons, be effective immediately after notification by the relevant whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;

(g) membership substitutions, on the part of the House of Commons, be permitted, if required, in a manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2) and that they may be filed with the Clerk of the committee by email;

(h) until Wednesday, June 23, 2021, members may participate either in person or by video conference and witnesses shall participate remotely;

(i) until Wednesday, June 23, 2021, members who participate remotely shall be counted for the purpose of quorum;

(j) until Wednesday, June 23, 2021, except for those decided unanimously or on division, all questions shall be decided by a recorded vote;

(k) until Wednesday, June 23, 2021, when more than one motion is proposed for the election of the joint chair or vice-chairs, any motion received after the initial one shall be taken as a notice of motion and such motions shall be put to the committee seriatim until one is adopted;

(l) the committee have the power to sit during sittings and adjournments of the House;

(m) the committee have the power to report from time to time, to send for persons, papers and records, and to print such papers and evidence as may be ordered by the committee;

(n) the committee have the power to retain the services of expert, professional, technical and clerical staff, including legal counsel;

(o) the committee have the power to appoint, from among its members, such sub-committees as may be deemed appropriate and to delegate to such sub-committees, all or any of its powers, except the power to report to the Senate and House of Commons;

(p) the committee have the power to authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings and that public proceedings be made available to the public via the Parliament of Canada's websites;

● (1215)

(q) until Wednesday, June 23, 2021, in camera proceedings may be conducted in a manner that takes into account the potential risks to confidentiality inherent in meetings with remote participants;

(r) pursuant to section 5(5) of the Act, the committee submit a final report of its review, including a statement of any recommended changes, to Parliament no later than one year after the day in which it commenced their review;

(s) pursuant to section 5(6) of the act, following the tabling of the final report in both Houses, the Committee shall expire; and that a message be sent to the Senate requesting that House to unite with this House for the above purpose and to select, if the Senate deems advisable, Members to act on the proposed Special Joint Committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

It is agreed.

[*Translation*]

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed will please say nay.

Hearing no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

TAIWAN

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this petition notes that in April 2020, Taiwan announced the donation of 500,000 medical masks to Canada to be distributed to front-line workers and first nations peoples.

The petitioners, citizens and residents of Canada call upon the House of Commons to publicly thank the Taiwanese government for its gift of medical masks; publicly congratulate the Taiwanese people on having successfully contained the COVID-19 crisis; publicly endorse Taiwan's meaningful participation in the WHO and World Health Assembly among other intergovernmental organizations, including co-signing a letter to the WHO's Director-General, directed by Japan and the United States and signed by other like-minded nations, to invite the Taiwanese delegation to the World Health Assembly; encourage strong bilateral relations between Canada and Taiwan, including cabinet-level communication and travel; and invite Taiwan's Health Minister Chen Shih-chung to address a parliamentary committee to discuss Taiwan's successes at combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and share learnings with Canadian authorities.

The petitioners also congratulate Taiwan on its successful battling of the COVID-19 virus.

HERBICIDES

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to present petition e-2738, which received over 2,000 signatures.

The petitioners are asking the Minister of Health to hear that many Canadians oppose herbicides being used by the forestry industry that prevent the natural return of forest biodiversity, and ask that the minister take leadership and ban the commercial use of herbicides in the forestry industry in Canada with the exception of addressing invasive species.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to present petition e-3205, which has 2,003 signatories.

The petitioners note the federal government is planning to restrict public access to the Hamilton and Burlington piers through the use of physical barriers. These piers are an important part of our community. The area has been open to public use for decades and the area is a unifying space for the Hamilton and Burlington communities.

The petitioners, citizens and residents of Canada, in association with Save Our Pier Hamilton Beach Community, call upon the Government of Canada to maintain responsible public access to the Hamilton and Burlington piers without the use of barriers in a similar manner to the accessibility found in comparable municipal public spaces.

• (1220)

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am tabling five petitions today.

The first is with respect to the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

The petitioners are very concerned about the human rights and humanitarian situation as it has unfolded there in recent months. They are calling for a stronger response from the government. They want to see support for investigations into credible reports of war crimes and gross violations of human rights law as well as direct and ongoing engagement with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is with respect to Bill C-6, a bill debated this morning.

The petitioners support banning conversion therapy. They have concerns about the definition, as written. They are calling on the government to ban coercive, degrading practices that are designed to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, to ensure that no laws discriminate against Canadians by limiting the services they can receive based on sexual orientation or gender identity, to allow free and open conversations about sexuality and sexual behaviour and avoid criminalizing professional and religious counselling voluntarily requested and consented to by Canadians.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition highlights the horrific treatment and the ongoing genocide facing Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in China.

The petitioners want to see action from the government, not just the House of Commons, in terms of recognizing that a genocide is taking place and following it up with appropriate actions.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth petition is in support of Bill S-204, a bill currently before the Senate, that would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that has been harvested from an unwilling patient. I am sure members can appreciate the importance of this bill.

The petitioners want to see this Parliament take the steps necessary to get that bill passed into law as soon as possible.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fifth and final petition highlights the human rights abuses confronting Falun Gong practitioners in China.

The petitioners note work done by David Kilgour, David Matas and others to reveal industrial-scale organ harvesting and trafficking. They call on the government to take every opportunity to engage the Government of China to seek an end to the persecution of

Routine Proceedings

Falun Gong practitioners and to do everything they can to establish measures to stop organ harvesting and trafficking. No doubt, one of those measures would be the adoption of Bill S-204.

I commend all five of these petitions to members of the House and wish everyone a good weekend.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to table petition e-3108, which has over 3,000 signatures and was initiated by constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The petitioners note that natural, time-tested immune system essentials and holistic health practices do not receive enough attention for their role in preventative health care. They request that the Government of Canada educate and empower Canadians on holistic health approaches to optimize and maintain their natural immunity and well-being. They ask to cover practices for health sustainability and wellness care under the Canada Health Act, including chiropractic care, massage therapy, acupuncture and naturopathic medicines. They ask the government to support, promote and enhance Canadians' access to holistic health services and natural health products.

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise virtually in the House today to present a petition from a number of constituents. It is a petition that originated some time ago. It is slightly dated, but so many petitioners have asked for it to be submit it.

I do submit a petition calling for the government to take note of the fact, which is not dated and remains the case, that there is no established method for cleaning up a spill that involves bitumen diluted with diluent, that the Trans Mountain pipeline represents a threat to coastal communities and a threat to climate.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to reject the idea of buying and building the Trans Mountain pipeline at a cost of what was estimated at that time, but has risen to be over \$10 billion.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition today concerning Bill C-6.

The petitioners recognize the need for a ban on harmful, degrading and coercive practices that seek to force people to change their sexual orientation. They also recognize, however, that the definition of conversion therapy used in Bill C-6 is not used by any medical body in the world and it is so imprecise that it will lead to the prohibition of forms of counselling that reduce unwanted sexual behaviour.

Government Orders

I am sure my colleagues can understand the damaging implications of this, and I remind them that committee witnesses testified that types of counselling this bill would ban actually saved their lives.

• (1225)

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today.

First, I want to thank Sukhwinder Singh, the national director for United Sikhs Canada, for bringing this one to my attention. It is an e-petition and I am very pleased to sponsor it in the House.

The petitioners call on the House of Commons in Parliament assembled to pass a Criminal Code prohibition of sex-selective abortion. They indicate that sex-selective abortion is legal in Canada because we have no laws, that it is antithetical to our commitment to equality between men and women, that 84% of Canadians believe it should be illegal to have an abortion if the family does not want the child to be a certain sex and that Canada's health care professionals recognize that sex selection is a problem in Canada.

I am please to present this today on behalf of 10,197 Canadians.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I also want to present a petition brought to my attention in regard to Bill C-6. I will not read through all of the concerns, but I will highlight specifically two of today.

The petitioners say that Bill C-6 expressly allows counselling, medical and surgical efforts to change a child's gender, but prohibits support for a child seeking to detransition to his or her cis-gender. The bill could restrict the choices of LGBTQ2 Canadians concerning sexuality and gender by prohibiting access to any professional or spiritual support freely chosen to limit sexual behaviour or detransition. There is also a concern about the definition of conversion therapy. We all agree that conversion therapy is wrong, but the bill fails to outline it properly so people are not caught in the crossfire, specifically in this case of those who choose to transgender and then detransition. There is also the concern around a child seeking to detransition.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADIAN NET-ZERO EMISSIONS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from March 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this bill.

One thing is very clear. Climate change is truly the greatest challenge of this century, if not this millennium. The Bloc Québécois examined this bill carefully, and we support it in principle simply because we cannot be against doing the right thing. However, we think that the bill needs improvement. We need to give it some teeth.

Like most environmental protection agencies, the Bloc Québécois was pleased that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change introduced this long-awaited bill.

However, we are somewhat disappointed with how weak it is in its current form. The overall goal of climate legislation should be to make current and future governments responsible for their climate action in order to prevent a perpetual failure to reduce emissions. Targets were set a long time ago, but unfortunately, we sometimes see them being changed along the way. Changes have been made several times over the past 30 years, leading us to believe that we had lowered our emissions when they had actually increased compared to when we first started setting targets.

Unlike Bill C-215, an act respecting Canada's fulfillment of its greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligations, which was introduced in the House by the Bloc Québécois, Bill C-12 as drafted will not help achieve that objective.

Major changes would be needed for Bill C-12 to have any real impact on ensuring that Canada fulfills its obligations under the Paris Agreement. Also, unlike the Bloc Québécois bill, this bill does nothing to enshrine the Paris Agreement into Canadian law, even though it ought to be. The fact that the Paris targets are not even included in Bill C-12 only confirms that Canada is not serious about its commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050.

Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois believes that the bill should include a binding target of a 30% reduction below Canada's 2005 levels by 2030. The bill should also set an interim target for 2025.

Government Orders

Also, one of the major problems with Bill C-12 is that it does not set out any credible accountability mechanisms for reductions. The only obligation that Bill C-12 imposes on the minister is to prepare a report. Ultimately, the minister will get to assess his own progress and share his findings with the public. Under Bill C-12, the role of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development is almost non-existent, when the commissioner actually needs a bigger operating budget.

The government should enlist neutral, objective, independent institutions and authorities to ensure that these measures really have teeth and to hold the minister to account. Under the bill as it stands now, the minister is accountable only to himself. That is why we also think that there should be an action plan and that the measures taken by the government should be examined by this authority—

• (1230)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but we have to move on to questions and comments.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I am very disappointed in this bill. Other countries, such as England and New Zealand, have much stronger legislation. They passed bills with hard-hitting measures that will truly tackle the perils of climate change.

Bill C-12 is the weakest bill in the world.

What does my Bloc Québécois colleague think about the fact that the Minister of the Environment did not compare existing laws elsewhere in the world to come up with measures that work?

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I believe that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot did indeed have time left. I am very sorry.

The member has another six minutes for his speech if he wants. Then we will come back to the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her question.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot once more.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, certainly, I will gladly pick up where I left off. I was a little surprised by the interruption, as I did not think we were there yet.

Bill C-12 needs to include an action plan, measures and a review by an independent body that will assess whether the targets are being met and whether Canada is fulfilling its obligations under the Paris Agreement. The bill is missing that aspect. The Paris Agreement is more than just a declaration of intent. As we have said before, the government needs to walk the talk. It needs to listen to the major environmental groups, which have all pointed out the significant flaws with Bill C-12.

That is what the Green Party member pointed out in her question when she said that this bill is one of the weakest in the world, which is true, unfortunately.

The best approach would be to take inspiration from Bill C-215, the bill on climate change accountability that was introduced by the Bloc Québécois. Our bill set out binding reduction targets and introduced real accountability mechanisms, and that is what really matters.

The goal of Bill C-12 is not to ensure that Canada fulfills its international commitments, but rather to enshrine into law the existence of a target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. However, the Paris Agreement is quite clear. In order to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, the middle of this century, we must first cap greenhouse gas emissions around the world as soon as possible.

The purpose of any climate legislation is not to support the government's efforts—which is exactly how this bill is being presented—but rather to force the government to fulfill its commitments and keep it from failing again.

At the beginning of the House debate on Bill C-215, I remember being told that we needed to preserve policy space. However, since a bill can be repealed, policy space does not disappear. Of course, it is much more difficult to repeal legislation than it is to just leave policy space, as the current bill does. Still, I think it is only right for a government that wants to adjust its actual greenhouse gas emission targets downward to be required to follow a much more rigorous process, rather than being able to make such changes lightly.

With our Bill C-215, we wanted the interim emissions reduction target for 2030 to be a reduction of at least 30% below the level of Canadian greenhouse gas emissions in 2005, which is consistent with the Paris Agreement. In comparison, the Liberal Party's Bill C-12 states that the minister will set the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2030 within six months of the day on which the act comes into force. The bill does not actually contain any binding reduction targets. It merely states that it will be up to the minister to announce the new targets.

In the throne speech, the government states that it will bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal, and the Prime Minister keeps saying that it will be exceeded. If the government is so sure that it will exceed its reduction target for 2030, why did it not include it in the bill? If the government is so confident, I think it should have nothing to fear from including the targets in the bill. Even if it has concerns about not being able to meet the targets, they should still be written into law.

Government Orders

There is also a problem with the reports. According to the bill, the minister must set targets for the milestone years, but these years are not specified. The targets are established one by one over time, five years before the milestone year. The first target, which should be the one for 2035, will be set in 2030. One question we could ask ourselves is the following: If the progress report is already evaluating whether the interim targets are being met, why would the assessment not be done on an annual basis, after the national inventory report is submitted in accordance with the United Nations framework convention?

In my introduction earlier, I spoke about the role of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. The bill does not expressly state that the measures must be assessed based on Canada's ability to adhere to the Paris Agreement. However, for the law to truly ensure that the government's actions enable Canada to meet its targets and honour its international commitments, the commissioner's role must be to assess whether the planned measures will allow Canada to meet its targets and how meeting them would enable Canada to honour its obligations under the Paris Agreement.

• (1235)

In addition, Parliament needs to be able to ensure that the government is honouring Canada's international commitments. The legislation must include a mandatory target for 2030. If the Liberal government's good faith were a valid and satisfactory guarantee of Canada's climate success, why would we need climate framework legislation? This is a valid question.

The government cannot say that Bill C-12 contains restrictive measures while at the same time saying that the only real restriction is the outcome of the election. The Bloc Québécois is fully prepared to work with the government, the opposition parties, environmental groups and the public to amend Bill C-12 to ensure that Canada's international climate commitments will actually be honoured.

However, it is a problem that the minister is the one who establishes the body's mandate and that the minister can change this mandate at any time. As the bill stands now, the advisory body is restricted to providing advice with respect to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The fact that experts are not being asked to provide advice on the short-term targets, the interim targets and the 2030 target is yet another example of how the government does not understand that this is a climate emergency. It is not prioritizing the rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

• (1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): We now move to questions and comments. I would ask the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to repeat her question.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my question is simple and clear.

What is being proposed in Bill C-12 will result in Canada having the weakest law in the world with respect to the government's responsibility to tackle the great threat of the climate emergency.

Other countries have laws. For example, England passed a very strict law in 2008, which resulted in greenhouse gas reductions. Every year, England meets its targets while Canada fails to do so.

In my colleague's opinion, why did the minister not study the stricter legislation of other countries?

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, at their recent convention, the Liberals voted against the proposal of their party's Quebec wing to promote green energy and to put an end to fossil fuel subsidies. Despite all the good intentions and fine speeches, the Liberal Party rejected this proposal.

We cannot transition to clean energy while increasing fossil fuel subsidies, as is currently happening. Unfortunately, Canadian governments, no matter which ones, often only pay lip service. As the member said so well, we have not really studied what is being done well elsewhere.

Let us now hope that the detailed study in committee will amend and improve the bill.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is in regard to the importance of the national government working with provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders to further the cause. As we talk about the legislation for net-zero emissions, I think it is very robust and ambitious, and it will meet the needs and expectations that Canadians have of the government.

Would the member not agree that, if Ottawa is working in co-operation with other jurisdictions in different areas, we will be better able to achieve the types of goals Canadians want us to achieve?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, we completely agree that Ottawa must work with Quebec, the provinces and the different levels of government. That is not the issue, and promoting this collaboration is part of our DNA.

We really want environmental matters to be an exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec. In my view, collaborating with the provinces means, for example, not imposing an oil project when the provinces do not want it.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the remarks of my hon. colleague. I agree with so much that he presented around ways to strengthen this accountability legislation.

Government Orders

I wonder if he could provide the House with a change that he feels would go the furthest and would be the highest priority amendment to this legislation to improve accountability and strengthen the bill. Is there one idea that he feels stands out?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Speaker, I will simply say that most of the useful ideas can be found in the bill that the Bloc Québécois introduced, such as the need for real accountability, a recognized monitoring and oversight body, and 2030 targets.

In other words, we cannot simply rely on good intentions and let the minister assess his own performance. We need an independent oversight body and we need much more binding targets.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are times when we are called on to do big, hard, important things. I believe tackling the climate crisis is one of those things, and I know many in this place agree.

It is such an important thing that I feel both compelled to speak and afraid that my words will not measure up to the hopes of my daughters' generation, rather, that they will be added to the decades-long soundtrack of political platitudes, which, taken all together, have added up to so little. I first became concerned about climate change as a teenager; now I have teenagers of my own, and yet so little progress has been made.

Today we are debating Bill C-12, Canada's much-awaited climate accountability legislation. I would like to focus my remarks on a gaping hole it contains, which is the lack of any climate targets until 2030, at the very end of the decade that we know will be the most critical in turning things around. In some ways, the once slow-moving train wreck of climate change would seem the perfect candidate for incrementalism. If we had acted in a measured and determined fashion decades ago, making modest but significant reductions each and every year, we would be in a very different place right now, but of course we did not.

In 2004, Rick Mercer merrily called on Canadians to commit to the one-tonne challenge. Canada's emissions back then were 742 million tonnes. Fifteen years later, in the inventory just released for 2019, they were 730 million tonnes, only 1.6% lower. Along the way, we made all sorts of commitments, in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2010, and we fulfilled none of them.

It is startling that the Minister of Environment was quoted as saying recently that it was "really good news" that Canada's emissions went up by one megatonne. I am all for positive vibes and sunny ways, but on what planet is it "really good news" when things the government said it would make go down go up instead?

The government has adopted Stephen Harper's 2030 target of reducing emissions by 30% compared to 2005 levels, and has promised to raise this ambition in line with the Paris accord. This is well and good, because we know we need to do more than 30% if we are going to do our part in avoiding the worst ravages of climate change.

However, a lot of Canadians would appreciate a government that gives them the unvarnished truth, that we have been losing badly. We have blown through every single climate target we have set as a country and, like a kid who puts off studying until the night before the exam, the timeline has collapsed on us. We are very nearly out of time altogether. We can no longer claim with a straight face that modest incrementalism is going to get us to where we need to be within the time still left on the clock.

As the IPCC has stated, this decade matters most. In each and every year leading up to 2030, we need to make progress that is not just measurable, but indeed quite dramatic.

Given this dire situation, this climate emergency, I cannot understand why the government is so resistant to the idea of telling the public about where it plans for Canada to be, where we need to be, in 2025. Why would it resist such basic transparency?

The minister stated in the media that he is confident Canada is on track to achieve year-over-year emissions reductions from here onward. Yet every year since the government came to power, emissions have gone up, and every year the minister has claimed we are on track. It begs the question what the phrase "on track" even means.

The analogy that comes to mind is that of training for a marathon. There are certain milestones one needs to reach along the way. If the race is in two weeks and people are not yet running 10 kilometres comfortably, they are certainly not going to be ready for 42 kilometres. Canada's government has paid the entry fee and jogged to the start line of many climate races, but we do not train and we do not finish. We just commit to running new races and jog up to the start line, again and again, high-fiving our friends and smiling for the cameras. Worse yet, these past six years we have taken to bragging that we are going to run with the best of them, but our actions, our results, have yet to add up to any of our ambitions.

This is a race we cannot lose. We need a different approach, and that is exactly what the NDP, the Bloc and the Green Party are calling for, an approach that is transparent, honest, collaborative: what my late friend Bruce Hill once called a "show, don't tell" approach.

Government Orders

● (1250)

Of course, a near-term milestone puts our policy choices into stark focus. There is much less room for contradictions, trade-offs or half measures, and no time for clichés about the environment and the economy going hand in hand. It means the decision-makers around the table today are likely to be the same people held accountable in just four years' time.

In addition to targets, we also need to strengthen Bill C-12's enforcement mechanisms to ensure real accountability. The bill tasks the Environment Commissioner with assessing progress, but we know that office does not even have adequate resources for its current mandate. The arm's-length advisory committee needs to be given an active role in setting targets and reviewing progress. We are ready to work constructively with the government to improve this bill and give real teeth to independent, empowered bodies that can enforce the government's targets. It is the kind of approach that worked for the U.K.

The U.K. climate change act is seen as the gold standard of climate accountability. Central to the U.K. approach are five-year carbon budgets. These are legally binding with regular reporting to Parliament. The first five-year carbon budget covering the period of 2008 to 2012 was not enacted until 2009, yet the country met that milestone with room to spare. It exceeded its second carbon budget too, and today is well on its way to meeting its third. The U.K.'s arm's-length advisory body, the committee on climate change, helps set targets and publicly reports on whether those targets are being met. Since 1990, the U.K.'s emissions have fallen 44%. The Brits are not just finishing the race: They are on the podium. It feels funny describing all this because, of course, the government is perfectly familiar with the U.K. example, yet it has tabled a bill that falls far short.

It is not that there are not aspects of Bill C-12 that we support. For the first time, the government is codifying the basic principle of accountability on the climate. Targets will be enshrined into law, and the government acknowledges that we must limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°C. Although the language could be much stronger, it is positive to see reference to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. However, this bill's basic purpose is to ensure we hit our 2030 and 2050 targets. In that regard, the lack of a near-term milestone and stronger enforcement mechanisms are glaring flaws.

Canadians elected not just a minority parliament, but a minority in which over 60% of MPs elected belong to parties that prioritize climate action. The promise of a minority is that we will work together in the spirit of collaboration to strengthen legislation and serve our country in the best way possible. With the NDP, Bloc and Greens all calling for the same basic amendments to Bill C-12, this is the Liberals' opportunity to show they can lead alongside others.

Who knows? With the Leader of the Opposition's recent revelation that carbon pricing is a thing, even in a weird way that rewards people who burn more fossil fuels, we may yet see the Conservatives graduate from climate curious to climate sincere. First he will have to convince his party that climate change is real, but hope springs eternal. Imagine a House united against this common threat, as it has been only a few times in our history. If there is a challenge

worthy of such unity, the climate crisis is that challenge. Let us show Canadians we are equal to it.

In closing, I was reminded recently that my predecessor, the inimitable Jim Fulton, stood in the House 30 years ago and called delay on climate action "a crime no future generation would forgive." He was right, and we have delayed far too long. Let us improve this bill, hold our government to account and maybe we can get things pointed in the right direction at long last.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned two people I also love who left us too soon: Bruce Hill and Jim Fulton. In reference to him thinking about his own children and being interested in climate as a teenager, I held my daughter, not yet one year old, while I watched the signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Rio in 1992. Since that time, humanity has emitted more greenhouse gases than in the entire period between the beginning of the industrial revolution and when we committed to start reducing greenhouse gases to avoid the emergency we are now in.

My concern is that Bill C-12, as drafted, is actually dangerous because it deludes us into thinking that a 2050 target of net-zero will keep us from blowing past what we committed to do in Paris, which was to hold the global average temperature to as far below 2°C as possible and preferably to 1.5°C. There is a carbon budget.

Will the hon. member—

● (1255)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley will have an opportunity to comment.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I do not disagree with anything that my hon. colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands has said. The challenge in front of us is to take what we have been presented and to work as hard as we can to make it better, to have the courage to work together, to hold each other to account and to try to come out with something that is better than what we have had for the past 30 or 40 years. That is a challenge that I certainly hope we are equal to.

Government Orders

Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I understand the member supports this bill, but I just want to raise an issue that I discovered in researching this bill. In the past, many people have criticized the Harper Conservatives for being too cozy with special interests, giving them too much play in being involved in legislation. However, I found an article in the Financial Post this week that basically stated, “Jonathan Wilkinson could almost be accused of plagiarism”, with respect to copying a document that was put out by a variety of—

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the hon. member knows that we do not use members' proper names in the chamber.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I thank the member for pointing it out, and it is absolutely a reminder that we do not use the names of members or ministers in the House.

Mr. Derek Sloan: That is correct, Madam Speaker. I am sorry. I was quoting, but I will move on.

I just want to point out that the government has provided funding to some of these organizations: \$1.7 million in federal grants to the Pembina Institute, \$200,000 to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will give the opportunity for the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley to answer, and we are running out of time.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, to answer very briefly, standing up for the environment is not a special interest.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

We are debating Bill C-12 today. Although the bill has merit, many of us feel that it lacks teeth.

There has been talk about the bill introduced by the Leader of the Opposition, which may be unenforceable. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP have introduced their own bills on climate accountability.

What does my colleague think is an essential characteristic of a good law on environmental responsibility?

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, the essential characteristic of a good law on environmental responsibility, and in particular accountability, which is the focus of this discussion, is that it produces results and empowers independent bodies, just as we have officers of Parliament who hold us to account, to cut through the doublespeak and the spin of successive governments and give Canadians the unvarnished truth about where we are at and where we need to be.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like the member to comment specifically on the fact that this bill would create an advisory mechanism and that there was an expectation when this bill started to be debated that there would be some consultation and some broad representation in terms of that advisory mechanism. More recently, we found out that the government has already identified the individuals

who will sit on that advisory body, even before the legislation is passed, even before it has gone to committee.

I wonder if the member thinks that this is a mistake for the government and the Liberals should be consulting with members of the opposition and trying to have a broad consensus reflected and different experience and knowledge reflected in that advisory mechanism to represent all parts of Canadian society.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I do not believe that the purpose of the advisory committee should be to represent all of the broad diversity of Canadian society. It should be an advisory committee of experts who recognize the imperative of action on climate change and who are positioned to provide expert advice to the government. The risk is—

● (1300)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government has said from the beginning of the pandemic that we will have Canadians' backs, and that is what we are doing, yet as we continue to fight COVID-19 and have a plan for the Canadian economy, the planet remains in crisis, and we must act.

I am going to try to keep my remarks short. I know some members may not believe that, but it will be in the form of a plea to hon. members. I am asking members to allow Bill C-12, the Canadian net-zero emissions accountability act, to move on to the next stage of the legislative process.

Last December, we announced Canada's strengthened climate plan for a healthy environment and a healthy economy. With this plan, we will achieve our environmental and economic goals and exceed Canada's current 2030 climate target. The net-zero bill is a fundamental part of this plan. “Net-zero” is not a flashy catchphrase. If we do not reach net-zero emissions by 2050, we will not achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. This is an existential threat to the planet on which there is a global consensus.

There is also consensus here at home, where the vast majority of Canadians voted for climate action in the last election. Just last week, five environmental organizations issued a press release calling on all parties to advance this bill. Canadians want us to move forward because Bill C-12 will bring accountability and transparency to Canada's climate commitments. It will offer people and businesses certainty as we transition to a cleaner future.

Government Orders

Since the introduction in the House of Commons, members have debated the bill three times. Despite delays caused by procedural manoeuvres, during these debates each party indicated its support for the principles of the bill and agreed that it should be referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I will give some examples.

The Conservative environment and climate change critic, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, stated, “It may raise some eyebrows that my party will be supporting this bill at second reading, but if we are going to have any success, we need to find those things that we can agree upon and take action. There are things we can and must agree on.... In summary, I see very little in this bill to oppose.”

The Bloc Québécois environment critic stated, “Given the importance of the issue it addresses, although we agree with the principle, we feel Bill C-12 needs some work. Members can count on the Bloc Québécois to propose improvements.... Once amended, this bill will be crucial for the future.”

The NDP critic for the environment and climate change, the member for Victoria, stated, “I will be pushing the government to make this bill stronger. We cannot afford to wait any longer. We are running out of time. Young people and Canadians are watching us, and they will not forgive us if we fail them, if we lack the courage to do what is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change. They are telling us to wake up.”

The Conservative finance critic, the member for Abbotsford, stated, “Conservatives in the House support this legislation.” The member for Saskatoon West stated, “I like the proposed legislation, Bill C-12. The reason I like it is that it is a made-in-Canada solution to greenhouse gas emissions.” The Bloc Québécois climate change critic, the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, stated, “the climate crisis must not be a partisan issue. That said, I am very much looking forward to studying this bill in committee. I do have reservations, but climate legislation is crucial.”

The Bloc member for Saint-Jean stated, “In recent months, governments, cities and universities in Quebec and Canada have declared a climate emergency. This is not the time to procrastinate. As the saying goes, never leave for tomorrow what you can do today.” The NDP member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay stated, “We will support this bill at second reading, but the Liberals must work with us to strengthen the accountability provisions”.

When the minister participated in the debate, he emphasized that our climate goals are shared objectives that require collaboration. We believe strongly in the integrity and spirit of the parliamentary process and remain committed to considering in good faith constructive amendments to improve the legislation.

We know that, in addition to those put forward by the members of the Liberal caucus, the environment and climate change critics of both the Bloc and the NDP have put forward proposals to strengthen the bill, and we are diligently reviewing those proposals. If we all agree, let us move forward and conclude debate today. Members should vote on the bill so it can be amended at committee. Amendments can be brought forward from members of Parliament and civil society that can be considered and debate can continue. I know

I am new to the environment committee, but there are some exceptional members on all sides who we look forward to working with.

• (1305)

However, if the debate fails to conclude, I would ask that members consider supporting the government in using parliamentary tools that are available to ensure there is a second reading vote very soon. Political leaders who support climate action should not stand idly by while it is delayed. This is not the time to procrastinate. We have responsibility to all Canadians and to future generations to act now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, all parliamentarians here agree that we need to tackle climate change and do what is necessary for the environment.

How can my colleague assure Canadians that the Liberal government's plans will get results? From what we are seeing here today, this bill will delay initial results for the length of two majority mandates plus one year, for a total of nine years. I would like to hear my colleague's views on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I disagree with the hon. member's statement. It has taken nine years, but we have flattened the curve on pollution. The reports that have been released show that we are moving in the right direction. The member's party said it supports the bill, and we look forward to further amendments. We want to work with the opposition to strengthen this bill, and we look forward to it. We hope the debate concludes today, so the real work on amending the bill can begin in earnest, rather than stalling it here in the chamber.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, we welcome this bill. It is a step in the right direction, but it simply does not go far enough to ensure that we are doing everything we can to address the climate crisis.

When the Prime Minister was asked why there was no target for 2025, he did not even answer the question. He talked about how, ultimately, the accountability for the government's actions or inaction comes from Canadians themselves.

Canadians are saying the Liberals have missed every single climate target they have set, and they want the government to come up with a credible plan. They want a 2025 milestone to start with, so we can make sure we are monitoring where we are and measuring it. Will the member accept our proposal to have a milestone target for 2025?

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Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, we look forward to amendments being brought, but I take exception with the member's claims about our climate plan. I know the hon. member will not believe me, so I will reference his former leader Thomas Mulcair, who called our climate plan absolutely marvellous, saying it put Canada on track to respect our Paris accord obligations. He went on to say that our Prime Minister had published a very bold, all-encompassing and frankly brilliant climate plan. We agree.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary. We serve on the environment committee together. We are very excited to be able to get to this study and talk about amendments. In the meantime, as we look at the accountability aspect, I was so glad to see the word "accountability" right in the title of the legislation.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us how accountability interacts with the work the Auditor General's office and the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development would be doing to make sure the bill, and the audit of the bill, would show that we are making progress on our targets?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Guelph for his passion on climate change, which has been evident since we both got elected in 2015. It has been a pleasure to serve with him on the environment committee these past few weeks.

Accountability is already in the legislation. The hon. member is correct in pointing out the role of the Auditor General, and we are fully willing to strengthen that. We are willing to work with opposition parties. We are willing to see amendments.

This is vitally important. All members keep talking about how vitally important it is, but all that is serving to do is delay this legislation. Canadians want to see us debate this. There will be further time for debate at committee stage, report stage and third reading, but let us get it to committee so we can get the real work done and evaluate amendments as they come forward.

• (1310)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we see this often, when Liberal members get up in the House during debate, taking House time, to say we should speed it up to pass the bill, seemingly unaware that, when they stand up to speak to a bill in the House, they are consuming time and reducing the chances of the bill passing in the timeline they propose.

If the member wants the bill to pass in a certain timeframe, will he look in the mirror and consider his own culpability by choosing to give a speech today?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, that is why I gave a very brief speech, to get this through as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with great pride and emotion that I rise today to talk about the environment. I do so with thoughts of my children and my granddaughter, who will be celebrating her first birthday in three weeks.

There are different ways of achieving our common goal of combatting climate change. Climate change is real, and we need to face that reality by taking positive, long-term measures that will make a real difference. Here is why we have concerns about Bill C-12.

Yesterday, our party and the hon. Leader of the Opposition and member for Durham tabled a concrete, realistic and responsible environmental action plan that will produce tangible results. It is a bold, innovative plan that appeals directly to Canadians to address and combat climate change.

The key component of the environmental plan that we tabled yesterday is the creation of a personal savings account. We recognize that carbon pricing is a reality and that we need to put a price on carbon. However, in contrast to the current approach, which involves a government-managed carbon tax, we, the Conservatives, want to give that responsibility to Canadians.

When someone makes a purchase with a carbon footprint, the carbon footprint charge will be printed in black and white on the bill. That amount will then be immediately transferred to a savings account. The Canadian consumer could then use that money to make purchases of their choice with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We are starting from the premise that when one action is taken, another action will directly follow to offset the first action.

We believe that Canadians are in the best position to know what they need and how they can take action to combat carbon pollution. Instead of leaving this in the hands of the government, we are putting it in the hands of citizens.

We know that this is an innovative approach, and that is good because we need to innovate, think outside the box and get off the beaten path to deal with this problem properly. Adapting to this approach will be a real challenge, but that is exactly what we need to do. However, we want to do it with the help and participation of the provinces. We are not saying that here, in Ottawa, we know what is best and we will enforce that. We will work with the provinces to enable citizens to make the choices that they think are best, since Canadians themselves are the ones who know what is best for them and what is best for reducing their environmental footprint.

For example, someone could buy an electric bicycle, do renovations on their house by replacing their windows with energy-efficient ones, or buy a bus pass to avoid driving their car and therefore reduce their carbon footprint. These are positive, constructive, realistic and responsible initiatives that empower the individual.

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That is not all. We go much further. We have a zero emission vehicle plan, which is especially great for Quebecers. As everyone knows, Quebec has a lot of expertise in that area. Over in Saint-Jérôme, Lion Electric is making electric buses that are sold across North America, which is great. We will support the sector by investing \$1 billion in building our electric vehicle manufacturing and developing affordable battery technology.

I have no personal connection to Saint-Jérôme, but it is well known that Saint-Jérôme is a hotspot for electric vehicle know-how. Saint-Jérôme CEGEP students can even earn an attestation of collegial studies in electric vehicle technology. This is a place where people are focused on the future and invest in training. We will put \$1 billion into supporting this.

• (1315)

The same goes for our targets. We are inspired by British Columbia, which wants 30% of vehicles sold there to be electric by 2030. British Columbia is on its way, and we are following in its footsteps. Major auto industry players such as Ford and GM are following suit and have similar objectives. As our leader said recently, the world has changed, Canada has changed, and we have to head in that direction. This is how we will do it.

We also want to reduce industrial gas emissions. That will not happen overnight because we know that major polluters pollute more because of their philosophy and the fact that they have to produce so much. Our approach is to work with major polluters to reduce their gas emissions.

We also want to establish North American standards. I say this because we could set extremely strict standards in Canada, but if we do not do so in partnership with the Americans, in particular, we would of course be left with our hands tied behind our backs, as it would make our businesses less competitive globally. We therefore have to work with the Americans and come up with North American standards for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in various industries. That would be the realistic, responsible and correct approach to take, one that would not hurt Canada's economy, but on the contrary, would create some important opportunities.

We also want to develop a carbon capture credit. This technology exists in Canada, particularly in central Canada, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba for example. It is already highly developed, and it is constantly being improved. If Canadians were to put their faith in us in the next election, our government would make that a priority, with a \$5-billion program to build that carbon capture capacity and innovation even further.

I know a little bit about this because a business in my riding, CO₂ Solutions, had also developed this as a way to take action and reduce pollution through carbon capture. When carbon is emitted, it is immediately sequestered underground so it cannot damage the environment. These are positive, constructive and truly realistic approaches. Someone can have 100,000 crazy ideas, but they will not necessarily be feasible. We, on the other hand, have concrete and realistic solutions, and we are reaching out to the provinces and to businesses. Most importantly, we are putting measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the hands of Canadians.

However, we must recognize that with respect to Bill C-12, which we are debating today, something changed between the time the government introduced the bill and now. The government decided to create an advisory group and invite only people of its choosing to develop certain policies and ideas. If it is going to open the debate, it must open it to everyone. The government cannot choose only the people who will go along with it and then make us live with the potentially serious consequences of the decisions made. That is why we have very serious reservations. In fact, we think it is unacceptable. What the government did when the debate began was to introduce a new measure that literally no one saw coming.

• (1320)

[*English*]

Therefore, I would like to move the following amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “that” and substituting the following:

“the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050, since the Bill fails to:

A. implement a plan that recognizes climate change is real and addresses the significant problem it represents, while also ensuring that economic development and job growth can flourish all across Canada; and

B. address the fact that, after committing to working with Parliament on the makeup of the advisory group, the government appointed climate activists whose influence, if acted upon, would lead to the destruction of the oil and gas sector, disproportionately threaten certain regions of the country and their essential industries, and weaken national unity.”

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The amendment is in order.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on a point of order.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, maybe procedures have changed, but with questions and comments when an hon. member raises their hand, am I not entitled to ask a question?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Absolutely. I was just confirming how to proceed. I am sorry.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, to my hon. colleague, it is entirely the point that when one understands a carbon budget and when one understands the threat of maintaining or expanding oil and gas activity over even the next decade or more, the chances of losing human civilization to runaway global warming are very severe, and we should be planning for the protection of workers and an orderly transition away from fossil fuels. In fact, that is what is required and being planned around the world.

I would ask my hon. Conservative colleague how the Conservative Party can claim to have a climate plan but think expanding oil and gas well into the future is some sort of right based on regional representation.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I want to pay my respects to the member of the Green Party. I can assure her that I welcome each and every question and will ensure that she will have the time to ask questions.

To the member's point, we have to realize the truth that we live, and I will give the example of Quebec. In the province of Quebec, based on the last study, nine billion litres of gasoline were sold last year. Around 60% came from America.

We would prefer to have Canadian oil instead of American oil. However, if we cancel projects such as Keystone XL and Line 5, which is the will, unfortunately, of the new administration in America, then where will America get its oil from? It will get it from countries that are bigger polluters than we are. So, to save the planet, I will support the Canadian oil and gas industry.

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think that the government over the last six years has clearly demonstrated its ability to appreciate the value of our environment and the importance of our natural resources, recognizing that we need to take into consideration the environment, the economy, indigenous issues and other issues that surround it. Our policy has been very successful.

Maybe my colleague could elaborate on why it is that the Conservatives have not been able to land on anything successfully that deals with a very important aspect, the environment, and doing what is right for the environment. This is something that Canadians want them to do. Why have they not been successful—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I want to pay my respects to my hon. colleague. I know I should not say it, but I miss him in the House.

I will get to the point. When my hon. colleague talks about first nations, the industry and the people, unfortunately, with the Liberal policy, we have heard the Prime Minister saying that we need to phase it out. We have heard the Prime Minister say that it is not going down as fast as expected.

This Prime Minister is not pro-Canadian industry. I would even say that this Prime Minister is not a friend of the first nations that are working hand in hand with the oil and gas industry in Canada. We had great projects for being self-sufficient in Canada with the support of first nations, but, unfortunately, as this government failed to recognize that, a lot of good projects have been cancelled.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am a bit surprised the member had the audacity to put forward an amendment that criticized the bill in front of us because it fails to that recognize climate change is real. After all, it was his party that voted that they did not believe climate change was real. Is it a bit surprising in that aspect.

I believe in his remarks, he suggested that the Conservative Party supports a zero-emission vehicle mandate, similar to the one in British Columbia. Is that true? Is that something that we can work with him on?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, yes, it is written in our motion that climate change is real, so we have to address it. I think he will support our motion because it is written in black and white in this resolution. If he votes against it, unfortunately we will not recognize that and shame on him, but we will see what his vote will be. Based on that, I want to be very clear: Yes, it is written in black and white in our policy. Yes, we will—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my wonderful colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent with whom I have the pleasure of sharing a riding border.

I only have two minutes, but I have a lot to say. I would like to begin by reiterating to the House that the Conservative Party of Canada acknowledges climate change. Yesterday, our leader presented a plan for the environment. I was very proud of his leadership.

The summary of Bill C-12, an act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050, includes five components. My colleague brought to the attention of all members of the House the third component, which indicates that the bill:

(c) establishes an advisory body to provide the Minister of the Environment with advice with respect to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 and matters that are referred to it by the Minister;

The thing that bothers us about this bill is that the Liberals once again have a hidden agenda. They are already making appointments and have determined who will sit on the advisory committee.

Private Members' Business

Would it be possible to respect every industry and stakeholder in Canada and work together on building the necessary tools to address climate change and lower greenhouse gases? Stop pitting the north against the south, the east against the west, industry X against industry Y. Let us work together. Do we not want to develop a plan to get results? Unfortunately, what this bill is proposing will not produce results for nine years, but we need to act now.

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC) moved that Bill C-219, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sexual exploitation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is indeed an honour to represent the good people of Perth—Wellington in this place.

It is an honour to rise in the House this afternoon to begin second reading debate of my private member's bill, known in this Parliament as Bill C-219, an act to amend the Criminal Code (sexual exploitation).

As I stated when I introduced the bill at first reading, it is a direct result of the advocacy, comments and concerns of the people of Perth—Wellington.

In early 2018, an incident occurred in which a person employed to work with persons with disabilities, who was also a children's entertainer, was convicted of a serious sexual crime against a person living with disabilities. My constituents were outraged by the lenient sentence of a monetary fine and probation, and called for a resolution to the flaw in the Criminal Code.

In a perfect world, I would have liked to have done so much more through the bill to better support Canadians living with disabilities. Far too often I hear from constituents who live with disabilities that they have fallen through the cracks: those who experience challenges in accessing government programs; those who face challenges with housing; and those who encounter barriers in employment. However, as hon. members know, with the limitations of Private Members' Business, it would not be possible to achieve all these goals through legislation without a royal recommendation.

In his 1913 autobiography, Theodore Roosevelt includes this quotation, "Do what you can, with what you've got, where you are". I am here today in the House doing what I can with the legislative resources available to me to try in this way to better protect Canadians living with disabilities.

I originally introduced the legislation in the previous Parliament, in January 2019, as Bill C-424. However, as members know, the Standing Orders on Private Members' Business were a barrier to

moving the bill forward at the time and it died on the Order Paper when the 42nd Parliament was dissolved.

During the 2019 election, the proposals contained in my bill were included as part of the Conservative Party's election platform, and I personally made the commitment to my constituents that if I were to be re-elected, I would bring back this legislation to the House. Today, I am fulfilling that commitment to the constituents of Perth—Wellington.

Shortly after I tabled the bill for the second time in February 2020, another case involving sexual exploitation reached the news. This case involved a young person. The former chief of police of Bridgewater, Nova Scotia was sentenced to a 15-month imprisonment following an October 2019 conviction for sexually exploiting a 17-year-old girl. In this instance, the offender was also convicted of sexual assault, however, this caused a legal issue as it was questioned as to whether the court could convict a guilty person of two criminal offences for the same incident. In this case, the conviction of sexual exploitation was entered and the conviction of sexual assault was stayed.

As a sexual exploitation charge is often accompanied by a sexual assault charge, Bill C-219 would provide the additional benefit of ensuring only fair sentences are available when such controversies occur. Furthermore, Bill C-219 proposes to provide courts with the ability to impose harsher sentences in instances when only a charge of sexual exploitation is made. One example of the convictions of sexual exploitation but not sexual assault occurred last year, also in Nova Scotia, in which a religious leader was convicted of sexually exploiting a 17-year-old young person.

The second proposal contained within Bill C-219 was also inspired by the incident that occurred in my riding. If passed, the bill will require courts to consider the fact that a victim is a person living physical or mental disability as an aggravating circumstance when sentencing a person convicted under section 286.1(1) or 286.1(2) of the Criminal Code. This would fill an unfortunate void currently existing in the Criminal Code.

Persons living with disabilities are more vulnerable to this kind of exploitation due to a number of factors, including the capacity to give consent. What is more, in many cases, the offender is known to the victim and is often someone the victim must rely upon for care or other personal or financial support. This addition to the Criminal Code would ensure courts always take into account this vulnerability.

It is a sad truth, but as legislators we must be willing to admit that sexual exploitation is a problem in our country and we must strengthen our laws to better protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

Research and statistics have time and time again shown us that young people and persons living with disabilities are more often than not the victims of sexual and other types of crime.

Private Members' Business

According to Statistics Canada's report "Victims of Police-reported violent crime in Canada, 2016", "When controlling for population, the rate of victimization was highest among youth aged 16 to 17 and young adults aged 18 to 24." The report further explains, "Overall, 8% of police-reported victims were victims of sexual offences. However, these offences were much more prevalent among child and youth victims that came to the attention of police." The report goes on to state that 34%, more than one-third of female victims of sexual offences, were aged only 12 to 17 years old.

● (1335)

According to Statistics Canada's Report Violent Victimization of Women with Disabilities, "according to both self-reported and police-reported data, the large majority of victims are women... This trend is also evident when looking at the population with a disability" who are victims of self-reported sexual assault "as nearly nine in ten (88%) victims... were women." The report also states that Canadians with a disability, 30% of incidents, were more likely to be victimized in their own home compared to victims who did not have disability. This serves to highlight the sad reality that even in their home, people with a disability are at an increased vulnerability.

According to the Department of Justice Research and Statistics Division, "Sexual assault is a gendered crime; women are victimized at a higher rate... than men... As with other violent victimization... young people aged 15-24 years have the highest rate of sexual assault (71 incidents per 1,000 population)."

Sexual exploitation is a disturbing crime because it involves an imbalance and an abuse of power. Often it involves some sort of authority figure in a position of trust. That is why for years the Criminal Code includes the following description in its section on sexual exploitation "Every person... who is in a position of trust or authority towards a young person" or "who is a person with whom the young person is in a relationship of dependency." Furthermore, in the sexual exploitation of someone with a person with a disability, it reads similarly, "Every person who is in a position of trust or authority towards a person with a mental or physical disability or who is a person with whom a person with a mental or physical disability is in a relationship of dependency."

This makes the specific crime of sexual exploitation all the more concerning. It requires a person in a position of power to take advantage of that power for their own appalling purposes. There is no excuse and there is no justification for these kinds of acts. These crimes occur when a person actively chooses to use their position to harm an innocent victim.

Last month I had the honour to meet virtually with representatives of Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre, an organization that provides services to victims of these types of crimes from Toronto to Barrie to Peterborough. They talk about how difficult it is for victims of vulnerable populations in the justice system.

We need to ensure they are respected and supported. We need to ensure when victims come forward, they feel they are taken seriously. We need to ensure victims of these types of crimes have faith in the system and believe the devastating acts committed against them will not go unpunished.

I recognize that introducing legislation that proposes to increase sentences may not be consistent with the direction of the current government, which has often taken the position that some mandatory minimums are not appropriate. I would like to address that issue.

Charter challenges on mandatory minimum sentences are determinations if the sentence is "grossly disproportionate". This is not the case with this bill. Given the abuse of power and the long-term impacts on victims, it should be clear to all of us that a one-year minimum sentence for sexual exploitation of a person under 18 years of age or a person with a disability is proportionate to the serious crime.

Sex crimes are different from other crimes. This has been recognized by successive governments for decades, including by the current Liberal government. The current mandatory minimum sentence of 90 days for sexual exploitation of a young person has been in place since the current Liberal government came to office and they have chosen to keep that in place. In fact, when the government introduced Bill C-22, their own backgrounders explicitly stated they were not proposing to remove mandatory minimum sentences for sexual offences and listed them among other serious violent offences in which strict sentences remain in place.

● (1340)

Furthermore, when the justice minister spoke in the House, he clearly stated that sexual offences committed against children were committed by serious criminals and should be treated seriously. The same should be true of sexual offences committed against persons living with disabilities.

It would be beneficial for Parliament, the elected branch of government, to explicitly include in the Criminal Code a higher sentence for these crimes for the purpose of protecting vulnerable Canadians. Criminal laws serve to protect vulnerable people and serve a valid purpose. They are a legitimate part of fostering a safe society and they serve the public good.

The last number of months, under the challenges of COVID-19, many Canadians have been distressed to hear increasing reports of sexual crimes.

On July 13, 2020, a CBC news headline stated, "Child sex exploitation is on the rise in Canada during the pandemic." The article states, "Cybertip.ca said... saw an 81 per cent spike over April, May and June in reports from youth who had been sexually exploited, and reports of people trying to sexually abuse children."

A Global News report last month stated that a man from outside of Edmonton was arrested and charged with multiple counts of exploitation, among other charges.

Private Members' Business

A March 20, CBC news headlined stated, "Reports of sexual violations against children double in P.E.I."

I encourage all members of all parties to come together to support this bill. In fact, there is precedence for all-party co-operation regarding changes to these sections of the Criminal Code.

Prior to 2005, the maximum sentence for sexual exploitation of a young person as an indictable offence was only five years, and no minimum sentence was provided. This changed in the 38th Parliament, when the then Liberal minority government passed Bill C-2, an act to amend the Criminal Code, protection of children and other vulnerable persons, and the Canada Evidence Act, which was sponsored by then justice minister Irwin Cotler. That bill increased the maximum sentence for sexual exploitation of a young person to 10 years, and introduced a minimum sentence of 14 days.

The bill also added to the Criminal Code a list of factors regarding the nature and circumstances of the relations to be established to determine how the relationship is exploitative. As Minister Cotler told the justice committee at the time, the purposes of the bill were "to provide greater protection to youth against sexual exploitation from persons who would prey on their vulnerability."

This bill was not only supported by all parties, but its passage was accelerated by all-party agreement and the use of a unanimous consent motion.

Then, on May 1, 2008, the Criminal Code was amended again, through another bill also named Bill C-2, this time to change the definition of a young person and to provide additional protections. This bill, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, was sponsored by the then justice minister Rob Nicholson and passed quickly through the House of Commons with all-party support and co-operation.

I would note the support of that bill included the current Minister of Transport, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, the government House leader, the chief government whip, and the Liberals members for Ottawa South, Halifax West, Humber River—Black Creek, Lac-Saint-Louis and Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame.

Young people and persons living with disabilities need to be protected. It is incumbent on us to pass this bill, because it is a targeted bill to correct two specific flaws in the Criminal Code. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to ensure the Criminal Code provides appropriate sentences for disturbing crimes so vulnerable Canadians are not at risk. There is no excuse for these crimes.

I urge all my fellow members to support this important bill.

• (1345)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for introducing this bill. I have two questions to put to him.

The member raised the issue of sexual offences. What he is proposing is not just keeping a mandatory minimum but expanding it from 90 days to one year on summary conviction. Courts have already held in the country, in Yukon and Nova Scotia, that this has been found unconstitutional.

My second point is that I am asking him, given his long analysis and deep thought on the issue of mandatory minimums, what his position would be with respect to our position on this side of the aisle, that mandatory minimums contribute to the overrepresentation of people in the criminal justice system. It does not serve victims and, particularly, it does not serve Black and indigenous Canadians.

Given that reality, would the member be moved to be supportive of Bill C-22, which is currently before the House?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I will try to address most of what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice spoke about. I would start with what he ended with, and that is mandatory minimums and overrepresentation of certain groups within the criminal justice system. That is a conversation that needs to be had, but on the crime of sexual exploitation, that is a crime in which there is a power imbalance and in which the offender is a person who is in a position of power over the victim. They are not a vulnerable population. It is the victim in these cases who is in the position of a vulnerable population.

The second is the point of mandatory minimums more generally. Courts and Parliament have recognized that certain crimes need to be condemned, and we need to take strong actions on them. This is the case with violent crimes and sexually based crimes. In this case, I would argue this is one that would withstand a charter challenge due to the serious nature of the actions undertaken by offenders against vulnerable populations, including young people and persons living with disabilities. They are the vulnerable populations that we need to be defending with this legislation.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have a very specific question for him. The amendments he wants to make to the Criminal Code target offences that, depending on the severity of the charge, the Crown can choose to prosecute as a criminal offence or an offence punishable on summary conviction.

However, the bill suggests that the one-year mandatory minimum sentence remain the same in both cases even though a criminal offence and an offence punishable on summary conviction differ in both nature and severity. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I apologize, but I will answer the question in English because it is harder for me to answer in French.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The member does raise an important question about summary versus indictable offence. If I understood the question well, it was whether summary conviction and indictable offences would have the same mandatory minimum sentence and whether that would be appropriate, given that they be slightly different crimes. I would argue that given the seriousness of these crimes, whether it is on summary conviction or an indictable offence, the minimum sentence of one year would be appropriate for either summary conviction or otherwise, given the seriousness of the power imbalance of an offence involving a vulnerable population.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the problem I have with mandatory minimums is that they tend to be one-size-fits-all, no matter the circumstances or the information on each case, and I am worried about them taking away from judicial discretion. I was wondering about his thoughts on the sentencing principles that already exist in the Criminal Code under section 718.2, which do require a judge to take into account whether there was a position of authority or trust and whether a person was under the age of 18 years. These allow judges to significantly increase penalties based on the circumstances of the case.

I believe what he is trying to tackle in this bill is already allowed for in the Criminal Code, and I am wondering why he does not agree with that.

• (1350)

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford does raise an important point about sentencing guidelines, which are already there, and I do agree with that to a degree, but we have seen cases, including one that happened in my riding, where that was not the outcome. There was no sentence. It was a monetary fine and probation for the individual I have seen in this riding. I would say that when there is a serious crime we need to, as Parliament, stand up and say that this is not appropriate.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is safe to say that parliamentarians reflect their constituents' beliefs. I think that we would find consensus that hideous crimes are being perpetrated in society far too often. Sexual offences, in particular against children and persons with disabilities, are indeed hideous crimes. They cause so much damage to our society.

An occurrence can take place over hours. Often, more than the hours of the actual incident, the effects could be prolonged for days and in incidents of captivity they could be much longer than that. People seem to forget that the consequences of being a victim of such a crime go far beyond the time of the incident: they stay with the person for the rest of their lives.

It is important that we as legislators understand and appreciate the impact these types of crimes have on victims, their family members and friends. Having that appreciation and understanding puts us in a better position to take action.

I used to serve on a justice committee. I want to bring two perspectives from that. It was a youth justice committee, and I was its chair for a number of years. We had this discussion about minimum sentencing, or minimum dispositions, as there was an increase of people who were stealing cars. People on the committee said that no matter who the person was who stole a car, we needed to ensure that youth had a minimum sentence or an assessment where he or she, most often he, would have to fulfill x, y and z requirement plus whatever else they would have to assign. Other members of the committee had a different approach, saying that we needed to allow the honorary probation officers dealing with youth some discretion.

As a justice committee, we never dealt with sexual offences, but the principle of judicial discretion was something on which we had a very healthy discussion. When the committee first formed, some individuals with the hardest attitudes toward ensuring there were the toughest consequences came to believe that minimum sentences were not what we should be putting into place.

I say this because I believe that, if we were to canvass our constituents, everyone would agree that sexual offences, in particular against children and persons with disabilities, upset people significantly. We have a difficult time understanding why an offender would do such a thing and the initial reaction is to put them in jail and throw away the key. We, as legislators, understand and appreciate that is not necessarily the answer.

• (1355)

Yes, there needs to be a consequence, an element of punishment, but we also need to look at the bigger picture. That is not to say, as the introducer of the motion has put on the record, that former Liberal ministers have come forward and said yes to minimum sentences for certain types of crimes, this being one of them, nor does it mean we have to outright oppose all minimum sentencing; what it does mean is that we need to give special consideration to the types of things that are happening in our communities.

Whatever members think of minimum sentencing, as my New Democratic friend pointed out, they should think of judicial independence and the laws we have in place today. The Criminal Code covers most of everything, if not everything. I have not gone through the details of the private member's bill that has been provided, but it seems to cover, in one fashion or another, what we are having to face today. We might find the odd example that would challenge it to a certain degree, but I think we have to be very careful not to recognize the importance of judicial discretion. That is part of the fear I have. When we talk about systemic racism and look at incarceration and the role it has played, at least in part, it would be irresponsible for us as legislators, any time we talk about minimum sentencing, to not take into consideration the impact it may have on other issues where there could be a correlation. I find some crimes more upsetting than others.

Private Members' Business

From a personal point of view, the issue of exploitation is something I do not think we could ever do enough about with respect to discussions, debates and looking at ways we can combat it. I do not believe it has been getting better over the last number of years or back over the last decades. In part, that is because of the amount of exploitation taking place on the Internet today. I applaud the ministers of the government who I know have been doing a tremendous amount of consulting on this issue. We have a Prime Minister with a teaching background, who understands the importance of young people and making sure they get the best chances at life. When we start talking about sexual exploitation and those who are vulnerable in our society, we need to be there so we can provide that extra level of protection. There are things we can do. I believe the Government of Canada has been very proactive on that file.

I am hopeful we will see a downturn. Some of what we hear as a direct result of the pandemic on the issue of sexual exploitation is making a lot of people nervous, because we know the cost of one offence is horrendous, not to mention the impact it has on the victim. The costs go far beyond the dollar value. The bill talks about how we want—

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to proceed to the next speaker.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-219, which would amend the Criminal Code to increase sentences for offences of sexual exploitation and to add as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the victim is a person with a disability for the purposes of sentencing.

I agree with all members, or at least I think all of them, that this bill has a noble objective to protect the most vulnerable. I am perhaps a little less comfortable with the method of achieving this goal through increasing sentences and imposing higher mandatory minimum sentences.

Before I begin talking about the bill itself, I want to talk in general about mandatory minimums and revisit a question I have asked the House before about whether these sentences truly act as deterrents. The example I cited was the Bloody Code, used in England from the 17th to the 19th centuries. This code imposed the death penalty for such crimes as the theft of an item valued at more than 12 pence, such as a turnip. One might think that the code deterred people from stealing turnips, but that was not the case. Instead of sending people to the gallows for stealing such low-value items, juries instead opted to acquit the offenders, often by underestimating the value of the item stolen. The code did not deter crime, but rather encouraged it. After the imposition of capital punishment for the theft of turnips, more turnips than ever were stolen.

In these modern times, one could imagine that mandatory sentences might now be deterrents for judges, who might be tempted to look for ways to acquit the offender rather than impose a minimum sentence that would be disproportionate to the crime committed. Conversely, if the minimum sentence is very short, one would have

to wonder whether it would truly be a deterrent and whether it would simply give judges less discretion.

Before I speak about the different parts of the bill, I will say that at this stage I will not comment on whether it is appropriate to refer the bill to a committee. I believe that the bill raises many questions and I am going to focus on that today. I will then indicate whether I will be voting for or against the bill at second reading. I think that the discussions in this chamber will be very informative and a great opportunity to show the importance of the debates held in the House.

The first of the three aspects covered by Bill C-219 concerns people in a position of authority. Paragraph 153(1.1) of the Criminal Code will be amended to increase the minimum sentence on summary conviction from 90 days to one year. In such a summary conviction, the judge would be limited to handing out a sentence between one year and two years less a day. This would greatly limit the judge's discretion in determining the sentence. Judges' responsibilities go beyond handing down a guilty verdict or an acquittal. Sentencing is also an important part of their job. Their discretion in this case would be severely curtailed.

Another problem is the imposition of the same minimum sentences for crimes deemed indictable offences and for crimes deemed summary offences. Handing out the same minimum sentence for crimes considered to be of different severity raises questions.

Furthermore, this amendment to the Criminal Code may not be constitutional. In 2019, the Court of Appeal of Yukon ruled that the minimum sentence of one year for an indictable offence was unconstitutional. We therefore can expect that the courts will do the same thing with the one-year minimum sentence for an offence punishable on summary conviction. The Nova Scotia Court of Appeal and certain lower courts in other provinces also declared this portion of the law unconstitutional.

• (1405)

The bill's second amendment relates to a person in a position of trust or authority, specifically towards a person with a mental or physical disability. This clause poses the same problem because it too adds a minimum punishment of one year for an offence punishable on summary conviction. We will most likely have the same debate about why the minimum sentence should be the same for an offence punishable on summary conviction as for a criminal offence.

Another problem might be the constitutionality of this mandatory minimum sentence. If we compare this to an article intended to protect other people also considered vulnerable, in this case children under 16 years of age, it is worth remembering that the Quebec Court of Appeal overturned the mandatory minimum sentence in Caron Barrette in 2018. The court declared:

...that the one-year mandatory minimum sentence of imprisonment provided for in s. 151(a) of the Criminal Code is of no force or effect with respect to the appellant, that it is unconstitutional as infringing s. 12 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and is not saved by operation of s. 1 of the Charter.

We might have a constitutionality problem in this case too. Another problem is that subsection 153(1) of the Criminal Code is rarely used because it is not very clear. Unfortunately, it is not a paragon of clarity.

At paragraph 184 of the decision in *R. v L.C.*, the Hon. Erick Vanchestain says:

This provision was not subject to specific doctrine or jurisprudence in respect of its interpretation.

In other words, it is rarely used. He goes on to say:

It would appear from the parliamentary debates and proceedings surrounding the enactment of this provision that this offence was created at the request of organizations representing [persons with disabilities] who were seeking to obtain specific protection for vulnerable persons with disabilities, more specifically, the caregivers.... For this provision to be meaningful it necessarily needs to be complementary to the provisions with which it forms part.

The important paragraph is the following:

The court finds that the protection targeted by this provision is sexual abuse that takes advantage of the victim's disability, which is not the case here.

In that case, the victim was deaf.

In the end, the person was acquitted of the charge under section 153, because it needed to be proven that they had taken advantage of the victim's disability. What Crown prosecutors often do is use other sections that are clearer and easier to convict on. That makes section 153 ultimately useless, because it is not clear enough or makes it too hard to meet the burden of proof.

The last part of the bill calls for an amendment in the context of the commodification of sexual activity. It states that the court shall "consider as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the victim of the offence is a person with a mental or physical disability".

We can expect this to create some discrimination in the hiring of sex workers. That is the absurd part of it. For instance, clients would be more likely to be criminally charged if they used the services of a sex worker with a disability that does not make her otherwise vulnerable than if they went to her colleague who does not have a disability. This would be a rather strange side effect of a very literal reading of the clause.

Furthermore, section 718.04 of the Criminal Code already sets out aggravating factors for offences against vulnerable persons. It reads:

When a court imposes a sentence for an offence that involved the abuse of a person who is vulnerable because of personal circumstances — including because the person is Aboriginal and female — the court shall give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence of the conduct that forms the basis of the offence.

Therefore, there is already a directive for judges that a harsher sentence must be imposed when the victim is someone who is considered vulnerable.

There are a number of questions that could be asked about this bill. We could look at everything that was done following the Bedford case, which decriminalized the provision of sexual services.

Private Members' Business

Should we be cracking down on clients or focusing on pimps, for example?

There is a lot to debate. I look forward to following this issue and hearing the parliamentary debates on it.

• (1410)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-219, and I would like to thank the member for Perth—Wellington for bringing forward the bill. While I have great respect for the member, I cannot bring myself to support his bill. I say this knowing full well of his noble intentions to protect some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Bill C-219 is yet another Conservative amendment to the Criminal Code that seeks to bring in mandatory minimum sentences. In this case, the amendments are to the sections dealing with offences for sexual exploitation, against both young persons and persons with disabilities. The bill would add the fact that the victim is a person with a disability as an aggravating circumstance for the purpose of sentencing when someone is found guilty of purchasing sexual services from a person under 18 years of age.

In the 41st Parliament, the NDP opposed the whole section of the Criminal Code that was criminalizing sex work because, of course, we know full well that this is forcing it even deeper into the shadows. Unfortunately, the bill we have before us today is attempting to grandstand on the backs of victims. I use that word because the bill would do nothing to prevent these crimes, nor would it reduce their severity.

Too often in this place, we let overheated rhetoric and the stoking of people's fears replace good policy. This is especially the case when dealing with criminal law. As legislators, we cannot let the desire for revenge substitute against what all of the evidence shows us. I am speaking as a parent of three young children, so I understand the emotional gut punch of these crimes. They are vile and they are of a nature that makes us recoil in horror, but I have to detach myself from those emotional feelings. I am not a judge. I am not the person looking at the circumstances of the case, and that is where I have to draw the line, the separation between the legislative branch of government and the judicial branch of government.

New Democrats are opposed to mandatory minimums because they are an ineffective tool against crime. They do not deter perpetrators from committing crimes. We believe that discretion on sentencing should be left in the hands of judges. Alternative sentences or diversion programs almost always have better results in terms of rehabilitating perpetrators and, thus, preventing future crimes.

Private Members' Business

Mandatory minimums prevent judges from using these alternative sentences and diversion programs. Mandatory minimums remove the decision-making power from judges, and mandatory minimums deprive the court of the nuance it needs to bring in its decision-making. Unfortunately, the Conservative approach is to have the exact same minimum punishment for every conviction, regardless of the circumstances of the case.

They can also have the effect of clogging up our court system, because there may be accused innocent persons who are most likely to take a plea deal in order to avoid mandatory minimum sentencing if they feel that there is not strong enough evidence to acquit them even though they are quite sure of their innocence, while those who are guilty may not have any incentive to plead guilty, because they know there is going to be a mandatory minimum in place. We already have a judicial system that is bursting at the seams with so many court cases that have been backlogged, and this has been exacerbated by COVID-19. I certainly do not want to add to our already over-burdened court system.

[T]he evidence is clear: [mandatory minimums] are an ineffective and [in fact] dangerous justice tool. They do not deter crime. They do not increase public safety. They disproportionately affect Indigenous and other racialized Canadians. And they are incredibly expensive.

But we have known that for decades.

In 1984, the Canadian Sentencing Commission concluded that [mandatory minimums] create injustice without accomplishing any of the other functions ascribed to them.

In 2005, a Department of Justice...report found evidence that "minimum sentences are not an effective sentencing tool: that is, they constrain judicial discretion without offering any increased crime prevention benefits."

● (1415)

For the next part of my speech, I will move on to a very important and already existing section of the Criminal Code. It is very important for us to realize, in the context of today's debate, and in any reform of the Criminal Code, that there are already detailed sentencing principles that a judge must apply in their consideration of the appropriate punishment.

For example, under section 718.01, any time there is an offence against children, the court, when imposing a sentence, has to give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence of such conduct. Under the existing section 718.04, when it comes to an offence against a vulnerable person, the court has to give primary consideration to the objectives of denunciation and deterrence. Also, a fundamental principle that is outlined under section 718.1 is that a sentence must be proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the responsibility of the offender.

Of course, the section that has often been quoted in these types of debates pertains to the other sentencing principles as outlined under the existing section 718.2, which, for the purposes of debating Bill C-219, I should mention specifically reference whether the offender, in committing an offence, abused a person under the age of 18 years; whether the offender, in committing the offence, abused a position of trust or authority in relation to the victim; and, also, evidence that the offence had a significant impact on the victim, considering their age and other personal circumstances, including their health.

All of these specific references, which are already in the Criminal Code, give judges incredible leeway to apply the appropriate punishment for the appropriate crime.

I know that these crimes illicit a very strong, emotional response. However, it is important for us to remember that the Criminal Code, at the end of the day, is not a proactive piece of legislation. It is very often a reactive piece of legislation. It comes into effect after the fact, after the crime has been committed. Our ultimate goal is to try and engage in preventative measures and, of course, to make sure that we do have those supports in place for the victims.

I do thank the member for Perth—Wellington for bringing forward the bill for debate and, again, I know that it is coming from a good place and has very noble intentions. However, in conclusion, my NDP colleagues and I support doing what is most effective to prevent crime and that also offers the best outcomes for the victims of crime.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of my colleague from Perth—Wellington's private member's bill, Bill C-219, an act to amend the Criminal Code, sexual exploitation.

The purpose of this bill is to increase the maximum and minimum sentences for individuals found guilty of sexually exploiting vulnerable individuals, such as children and those with mental disabilities, under the Criminal Code. The reason that this bill is needed is so disheartening.

A Stratford man who worked for a social service agency and performed as a clown was convicted of obtaining sexual services for consideration involving a 25-year-old mentally disabled woman. The punishment for his crime was just two years of probation and a \$2,000 fine. This man preyed on this woman, took advantage of her and was let off the hook with a slap on the wrist. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident.

In 2016, a Nova Scotian police chief was found guilty of sexually exploiting a teenage girl. A police chief, a person who we are taught to trust and go to for safety, abused his position and exploited a vulnerable individual. His only punishment was 15 months in jail. This is so disturbing.

As the shadow minister for women and gender equality, I have the opportunity to sit on the status of women committee. Recently, we tabled our report on the impacts of COVID-19 on women. One of the things that we learned about the devastating impacts of COVID and the consequences of the lockdowns was that women's shelters saw a significant decrease in the number of calls they were receiving from women.

Normally, a reduction in calls would be a good thing, but what we know is that during times of crisis, violence toward women actually increases. This meant that women were trapped at their homes with their abusers with no help. They were basically living in their own type of prison.

Women were not the only ones who saw an increase in violence directed at them. Cybertip.ca reported that, with children doing school remotely and spending more time on their computers, tablets and phones, it saw an 81% increase in the number of reports from youth who had been sexually exploited and reports of people trying to sexually abuse children.

The National Child Exploitation Crime Centre also reported that at the onset of the pandemic it saw offenders on livestreaming sites, social media and on the dark web looking for children to chat with online or to meet in person so they could sexually assault them.

It is hard to believe that in a country such as Canada, people who like to prey on these vulnerable individuals exist. We owe it to our children and to those most vulnerable to ensure that those who would prey on them for their own sexual pleasure are met with some of the toughest punishments.

This is why I fully support my colleague's private member's bill to bring in mandatory minimums on these criminals and strongly urge all members of this House to support it.

• (1420)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to join second reading of Bill C-219, an act to amend the Criminal Code, sexual exploitation, which was introduced on February 25, 2020, by the member for Perth—Wellington.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the bill's important objectives to better protect young people and persons with disabilities from sexual exploitation and to ensure the appropriate sentencing for anyone who commits a serious sexual crime against them.

The available data shows we must remain vigilant in ensuring children and people living with disabilities are protected from sexual violence. We know young persons aged 15 to 24 have the highest rate of sexual assault. This comes from JustFacts Sexual Assault, May 2017.

According to the 2014 General Social Survey on victimization, Canadians with disabilities were almost twice as likely to be victims of violent crime than Canadians who did not have a disability. That survey also indicates the proportion of women with mental health-related disabilities who reported being a victim of sexual assault was over three times higher than that of their counterparts with no such condition.

This bill proposes a number of sentencing reforms that would apply to three sexual offences: sexual exploitation, section 153; sexual exploitation of a person with disability, section 153.1; and purchasing sexual services, section 286.1. These reforms involve increasing and imposing new mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment on sexual exploitation offences.

I have just noted increasing the maximum penalty for sexual exploitation of persons with disability and a new aggravating factor that would apply where sexual services are purchased from a person living with a disability. I propose to situate these reforms in the broader criminal framework governing sexual offending, which is recognized as one of the most comprehensive in the world.

Private Members' Business

The Criminal Code includes child-specific sexual offences as well as sexual offences of general application that criminalize a broad range of conduct. These offences protect children from all forms of sexual conduct with adults. For example, offences prohibiting sexual interference in section 151 and invitation to sexual touching in section 152 protect children under the ages of 16.

Once it is established that sexual conduct occurred and that the accused knew the victim was under the age of 16 or failed to take responsible steps to ascertain that age when the circumstances required it, the offence has been committed. It does not matter whether the young person consented.

The Criminal Code sexual exploitation offence, section 153, which this bill proposes to amend, protects 16-year-old and 17-year-old youth from sexual conduct with adults where there is a relationship of trust, authority or dependency between the adult and the young person or the relationship is otherwise exploitative of the young person.

Courts may infer a relationship is exploitative of a young person from the nature of the circumstances of the relationship, including the age difference between the accused and the young person, the evolution of the relationship and the degree of control or influence by the accused over the young person. That is subsection 153(1.2).

I have two minutes remaining and perhaps I will get to finish when this comes back again.

In offences committed where it is established the sexual conduct occurred in the context of one of the relationships and the accused knew that the victim was 16 or 17 or failed to take reasonable steps to ascertain that age when the circumstances required it, again it does not matter whether the young person consented.

These are all serious offences with maximum penalties of 14 years' imprisonment on indictment and the MMPs of one year on indictment and 90 days on summary conviction. Furthermore, the sexual assault offences, section 271 to 273, that protect all Canadians also protect children. Sexual assault captures the full range of sexual contact, from kissing to intercourse. Where the victim is under the age of 16, this offence carries the same penalties as child-specific sexual offences. The sexual assault provisions also protect all Canadians, including those living with disabilities.

Private Members' Business

● (1425)

When the victim is 16 years old or older, sexual assault involves sexual touching without consent of the person being touched. In recognition of the fact that sexual assault victims are often vulnerable and have a very difficult time coming forward, the sexual assault provisions contain special rules and procedures that are designed to protect victims. For example, subsection 273.1(1) of the Criminal Code “defines consent as the voluntary agreement of the complainant to engage in the sexual activity in question.” This means that consent must be expressed actively through words or conduct. Anything short of that does not constitute consent.

The Criminal Code also specifies that consent is not obtained as a matter of law in a number of different—

● (1430)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):
The hon. member will have four minutes to finish the next time the bill comes to the floor.

[*Translation*]

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

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

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