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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Windsor West.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 15, 1965, our national flag was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill. In 1996, February 15, was officially designated National Flag of Canada Day, thanks in large part to the advocacy of former MP for Parkdale—High Park and current Oakville North—Burlington resident Jesse Flis.

At the official ceremony inaugurating the new Canadian flag in 1965, the Honourable Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Senate, said, “The flag is the symbol of the nation’s unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion.”

Residents are invited to drop into my community office and pick up a flag poster to display throughout our 150th anniversary to honour and show pride in our flag, a beacon of strength, fairness, diversity, and freedom at home and around the world.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ROY LACAUD HEENAN

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to mark the passing of a great man who had one vision, two homelands, and three passions. More than anything, Roy Lacaud Heenan wanted to realize his vision of a law firm in which everyone strove daily to combine a desire for excellence, entrepreneurial spirit, and the joy of working together. A man of remarkable intelligence, boundless energy, and uncommon drive,

Roy Heenan set the stage for the Heenan Blaikie law firm’s outstanding ascent.

Born in Mexico but an ardent champion of his adoptive homeland, he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of his exceptional contribution to his three passions: labour law, the visual arts, and academic life.

[*English*]

I invite my colleagues to salute the passing of Roy Heenan, a man bigger than life, a great Canadian, and indeed a man for all seasons.

* * *

HEALTH CARE

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard from residents in my riding of Milton, and other Canadians, who feel that their health care needs are being neglected, and who feel forgotten by the current Liberal government. I implore the government to make the investments needed to right these wrongs in its upcoming budget. Now is the time to implement a national dementia strategy based on the recommendations of the Senate report and support it with steady, reliable funding. Now is the time for the Canadian autism partnership program, which would address key issues, such as information sharing and research, early detection, diagnosis, and treatment, while supporting families of Canadians living with autism. Now is the time to tackle the challenge of rare diseases by investing in early diagnosis, access to treatment, and research for those suffering from rare diseases.

Canadians are waiting. Let us get to work.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FEBRUARY 15

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 15, 1965, Canada got a new flag. Of all 365 days of the year, Canada had to choose that day, the same day as the anniversary of the hanging of five Patriotes. With this abhorrent attempt to steal the day from Quebeckers, Canada has desecrated the memory of our heroes. Chevalier De Lorimier, Charles Hindelang, Amable Daunais, François Nicolas, and Pierre-Rémi Narbonne were hanged because they loved their nation, because they fought for it, and because they believed in freedom and were enemies of oppression.

Statements by Members

On this 150th anniversary of Confederation, I would remind the House that Canada was built on the gallows that killed our heroes. Canada may have gotten a new flag on February 15, but we the *indépendantistes*, the separatists, we got our rallying cry: *Vive la liberté, vive l'indépendance*. Long live freedom, long live independence.

* * *

[English]

WOMEN'S MEMORIAL MARCH

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the first missing and murdered women and girls memorial march was organized in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Now, 27 years later, the march has spread across the nation into dozens of communities from coast to coast.

It is not a mistake that the date for the march is February 14. Valentine's Day is a day when we celebrate love. For the families of missing and murdered women, on this day and every day, their hearts ache for the loss of their loved ones.

Since the 1970s, over 3,000 women have gone missing or were murdered. To this day, hundreds of cases involving indigenous women and girls remain unresolved. To honour their memory, we need to stop all forms of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual violence against women. We need a national inquiry that is led by family and community members, an inquiry that validates their experiences and knowledge, supports their journey to healing, and honours their loss by providing answers and a commitment to real and meaningful action.

Real justice means no more stolen sisters.

* * *

BRING ON THE SUNSHINE FESTIVAL

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the work of the Bring on the Sunshine festival, a grassroots event that fosters a positive and creative space within our community for people of African descent to explore identity and heritage through the arts, while celebrating African culture and identity within a Canadian context.

Bring on the Sunshine showcases artisans and musicians, and acts as an opportunity for our community to come together in celebration during Black History Month. There is something for everyone to enjoy, from live music and drumming workshops to freshly prepared food.

We thank the organizers, community donors, officials, and volunteers who have once again come together to put on this amazing event. The festival is on Family Day, February 20, and I would like to invite all my colleagues and indeed all Canadians to come to Kitchener this Monday to celebrate.

● (1410)

MEMBER OF THE B.C. LEGISLATURE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1991, brilliant and athletic Michelle Stilwell became paralysed by a terrible accident and was condemned to a wheelchair.

She decided not to let it keep her down. In fact, she went on to compete in multiple Paralympic Games in which she was successful at securing six gold medals and one silver, in addition to multiple world records.

On top of that, she is a minister in the British Columbian government, a member of the legislature in that province, and a mother. She is one of over a million disabled Canadians who work. She is an inspiration. Unfortunately, she is retiring from her athletic career, but fortunately, she will continue to serve the people of British Columbia as a minister and a member of the Legislative Assembly.

We wish her well in her athletic retirement and we look forward to working with her for continued service for people all across this country by an inspiring Canadian. Congratulations to Michelle.

* * *

CLAREMONT LEGION

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, I attended the Claremont beef dinner at Legion Branch 483, where I had the honour of announcing over \$36,000 in support of an important local project. This funding, made possible through the enabling accessibility fund, will support the Legion as it constructs an exterior ramp, installs a lift, and builds an accessible washroom and a barrier-free corridor.

Accessibility issues have always been of the utmost importance to me, and I am proud that since the creation of the enabling accessibility fund, the government has helped thousands of Canadians gain access to community programs, services, and workplaces.

I would like to especially thank Karyn Miller and Sandy Hill from the Claremont Legion for all of their fantastic work on this project. This support, coupled with generous contributions from community organizations and residents, will ensure that veterans, children, and adults with disabilities will be able to access such an important facility in my riding.

* * *

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker I rise to congratulate Islander David Thompson, granted the distinguished alumni award at the Dalhousie Faculty of Agriculture. This most prestigious award recognizes outstanding service and commitment to the Faculty of Agriculture, industry, and the alumni association.

Mr. Thompson's career in agriculture began after graduation from NSAC in 1970. He entered the crop protection industry, providing technical support in the Maritimes, Quebec, and Maine. Well known and respected among potato and cereal grain growers across the country, he was a champion for environmental issues.

Statements by Members

Currently president of the World Potato Congress, Dave also served locally as president of PEI Grain Elevators Corporation, promoting the grain and soybean industry of Prince Edward Island.

Allegedly retired, Mr. Thompson works and volunteers with numerous organizations and is as busy as ever. We thank David Thompson for his exceptional service and commitment to PEI, the agriculture industry, and the environment.

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[Translation]

HOOKED ON SCHOOL DAYS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years now, Quebec has been organizing Hooked on School Days to encourage young people to stay in school. Hooked on School Days are celebrated annually during the third week of February.

The purpose of the week is to rally the public around our young people to talk to them about hard work, perseverance, and the advantages of having a good diploma. It also serves as a reminder that dropout prevention matters to us all and that every student needs encouragement.

As a former teacher and school principal, I can say with confidence that we are working with incredible young people who will accomplish great things for society. I invite hon. members, business people, teachers, educators, principals, stakeholders, community groups, coaches, parents, and anyone who works with young people to make education our priority, because our young people are our future and our pride.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

IRVINE FRASER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with heavy heart that I rise today in recognition of Irvine Fraser, better known as “Jubal”.

Irvine was a Winnipeg Transit bus driver who passed away because of an incident on his bus.

It is important for us to recognize that transit bus workers across our great nation extend their sympathy to the family and friends of Irvine. The fact is that every day in Canada we have buses going through our municipalities, opening their doors, and ensuring we have the best quality public transportation system in the world.

It is with a heavy heart that I extend my personal condolences, as well as condolences on behalf of my colleagues, to the family and friends of Irvine, and to the many others who have been so affected by this most recent tragedy.

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QUEEN'S YORK RANGERS 2799 ARMY CADET CORPS

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise as a former air cadet to recognize the

hard work of the Queen's York Rangers 2799 Army Cadet Corps of Aurora, Ontario.

I was honoured to be a reviewing officer at the corp's annual parade last year. This corps, for the third time in four years, was awarded the Clarry Trophy for Top Large Army Cadet Corps in Ontario. This is an outstanding achievement.

The cadet program focuses on developing citizenship and leadership, promoting physical fitness, and encouraging interest in the air, sea, and land elements of the Canadian Forces for youth 12 to 19 years of age.

This corp's motto of “results not excuses” has paid off as the members have raised enough money to travel to France for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

I congratulate the members of the Queen's York Rangers 2799 Army Cadet Corps. We thank them for being exemplary citizens and leaders in our community.

* * *

NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Canadians will mark the 52nd anniversary of the Canadian flag.

Canada has known several flags throughout our history. At Confederation 150 years ago, the Union Jack was flown as our flag. At Vimy Ridge, and in World War II, our troops fought under different versions of the Red Ensign. The maple leaf was already a symbol of Canada dating back to the 1700s, from its use as the emblem of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, to its place in Alexander Muir's patriotic song, the *Maple Leaf Forever*.

That maple leaf became the focus of the country's new flag in 1965. While the product of a divisive debate, for 52 years now, the maple leaf flag has been a unifying symbol, representing Canada and recognized the world over.

Canadians are modest about their patriotism, but hundreds of thousands of homes, including mine, proudly fly the Canadian flag today on National Flag of Canada Day, and every other day of the year.

* * *

MOLLY CHATTERJEE

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the life of a very dear friend and constituent of Brampton West, Molly Chatterjee.

Molly was born with Down's syndrome, but this did not stop her from making an impact on many lives. Molly was very involved in our community, feeding the homeless, helping at a senior citizens home, and providing warm meals at a women's shelter.

I had the pleasure of meeting Molly during our election campaign. All our volunteers will never forget Molly's ever-smiling face and her compassionate and warm hugs.

Oral Questions

I was overcome with great sadness when I learned that Molly had passed away on Christmas Day in her home. I offer my sincere condolences to Molly's parents, Prabhat and Madhuri; her brother, Prasenjit; her sister-in-law, Taniya; and her very dear niece, Preyasi, whom she adored.

Molly will be forever missed by her friends and family, and the lives she has touched forever by her warm and kind heart.

May my friend rest in peace.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL AND ITS UNIVERSITIES

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to applaud the fact that Montreal has just been named the best city in the world for university students.

Montreal is the first city to take over the top spot from Paris since the annual international ranking has been prepared and published. Montreal is unique in terms of quality of life, cultural diversity, and its world-class universities with instruction in both official languages.

• (1420)

[English]

In fact, Canada's big university cities performed very well overall in this international ranking. Vancouver and Toronto took the 10th and 11th spots respectively.

Our cities are global in every sense and welcoming because, fundamentally, we are a country of diversity, peace, and inclusion. Let us stay that way.

[Translation]

Congratulations, Montreal.

* * *

[English]

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC AND TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians welcomed the news today of the European parliament approving the comprehensive trade agreement between Canada and the EU. The House overwhelmingly approved CETA just yesterday.

I would like to thank the Liberal government for recognizing how important this deal is for Canadian jobs. A special mention goes to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Trade who will continue this valuable work.

This would not have been possible without the vision and ambition of our former prime minister, the Right Hon. Stephen Harper. CETA was conceived, negotiated, and concluded under his leadership and that of the members, and friends of mine, from Abbotsford and York—Simcoe.

The heavy lifting was done by our world-class trade negotiators. Led by Steve Verheul, his team worked tirelessly on this historic

agreement. For people like Steve, it becomes a part of their DNA and in turn a part of our history and success as a free trading nation.

I am proud to have been involved in such a historic agreement. Let us not stop with CETA. Let us also move forward with our allies in the Asia-Pacific and make Canada the gateway to North America for both Europe and Asia.

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VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the contributions of two exceptional Waterloo Region volunteers, Diane Bonfante and Gloria Rudney, founders of Flag Wavers of Waterloo Region.

In addition to their tireless work for multiple community organizations, they have a long history of involvement in organizing Flag Day and Canada Day events in our region.

Today is the 52nd anniversary of the first time our flag was raised on Parliament Hill. During this 150th anniversary of Confederation let us celebrate our flag.

I invite all Canadians to search online for Flag Wavers of Waterloo Region and listen to its video of students at Kitchener's Smithson Public School singing about our flag. Then post a picture or video of themselves with the flag and inspire others to do the same: #canadianflag.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

TAXATION

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a lot at stake with our relationship with the United States, and Canadians are worried. While the U.S. is lowering taxes, the Prime Minister is raising them in Canada. That is what happens when there is a spending problem. There is nothing left when an emergency happens.

Will the Prime Minister stop raising taxes on our businesses so they can compete with the Americans?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our record on taxes is quite clear. We have lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. It was the very first thing we did. We know that helping middle-class Canadians is critically important to the future of this country. That is why we moved forward with that tax reduction. That is why we moved forward with the Canada child benefit, which helps nine out of 10 families. We also know that keeping a competitive tax rate for business is important, and that is the continuing focus of our government.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is only one thing that is clear about taxes in our country, and that is that they are going up.

We know the President says that he wants to tweak NAFTA. We do not know quite what that means yet, but we do know he has plans to lower taxes and cut regulations.

Oral Questions

My question is simple. Could the Prime Minister name one single economic policy that he has changed since the election of President Trump to protect our economy from Trump's low-tax agenda?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Monday was a very important day for Canada and for Canadians. We recognize the importance of our economic relationship with the United States, the importance for jobs, the importance for economic growth on both sides of the border. We expressed to the Americans our willingness to work together in terms of making sure our trade relationship improved over time, so we could help middle-class Canadians and middle-class Americans with good, well-paying jobs for tomorrow, which would be better for both of our economies.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is spending a lot more money than he said he would. He promised to borrow only \$10 billion a year and to balance the budget by 2019. Now, at the rate he is spending, he will not balance the books for 30 years, and he is raising taxes on Canadians to pay for all of this.

Does the Prime Minister understand that all this borrowing has to be paid back by hard-working Canadians?

• (1425)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize that in order to create good-paying jobs for middle-class Canadians, we have to have an economy that is working. We know that making investments in our economy is critically important.

What we have seen over the last year, since December 2015, is 277,300 new jobs in our economy. In January, we saw our unemployment rate decline from 6.9% to 6.8%.

We are making investments in our economy to help middle-class Canadians today and tomorrow.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “older, smaller, and poorer” are not my words. They are the words of the mayor of Vegreville about the fate that awaits the town if the Liberals close the immigration centre.

He warns of a crash in home values and an exodus of students and young people. It will be a devastating blow to the people and the future of this small community. The mayor said, “This is exactly the opposite of what the government promised to do for rural Canada in the last election”.

Why is the Prime Minister attacking rural Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the case processing centre in Vegreville, we understand this change will have an impact on staff and their families, but we are working very hard to make sure we minimize those impacts. That is why all full-time employees in the current case processing centre will have their jobs available to them in Edmonton, which is one hour away. We continue to engage the community.

In the new location, not only will we be able to expand our immigration services, we will be able to create more jobs for Alberta.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the minister to come to Vegreville so he can get a sense of what we are talking about. This is not just an impact on these employees. This is an impact on the entire town of Vegreville. It will crash home values. There will be an exodus of students and young people. It will be a devastating blow to the people and the future of this small rural community.

Will he come and visit, face the people of Vegreville, face the mayor, and explain to him why he is attacking rural Canadians?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with the local union representative for Vegreville, as well as a staff member, two days ago. I have spoken with the mayor of Vegreville. I understand this change will have an impact on staff and their families. That is why we are committed to going ahead to make sure we help the community with those impacts, minimize those impacts.

I can assure the hon. member that all full-time employees will have their jobs available to them one hour away in Edmonton and the new location will have more immigration processing and more jobs.

* * *

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the heels of the Prime Minister's visit with Donald Trump, the Liberal government is continuing to deny that American immigration policies have direct impacts on Canada. The Prime Minister refuses to stand up against Trump's Muslim ban.

The immigration minister refuses to repeal the safe third country agreement, and the public safety minister refuses to raise cases of Canadians being turned away at the border with his American counterparts.

Why is the Liberal government turning a blind eye to these obviously discriminatory and hateful U.S. immigration policies?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is just plainly, flatly wrong.

I have indicated over and over again that we will collect the data about Canadians who feel that in some way they have been mistreated at the American border. That issue will be raised with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, promises, promises. It is not what they say they will do, it is what they did not do on Monday.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

On Monday, I visited Yassine Aber, who was turned back at the U.S. border. He is a brilliant young man and also an athlete. He was turned back, but not because he committed a crime or did anything wrong. No, he was turned back because his parents are from Morocco. It is a disgrace to have a Liberal government that refuses to condemn this blatant discrimination.

Why are the Liberals doing nothing to address—

The Speaker: Order.

The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, simply repeating a falsehood does not make it any truer.

When Canadians are treated unfairly, or feel they have been treated unfairly, at a border crossing, they have an appeal procedure that is available to them. In addition to that, those cases will be raised by me directly with the Department of Homeland Security. We are in the process of arranging a meeting for that purpose right now.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the document from the U.S. border services said that Yassine Aber did not have a valid Canadian passport. I saw that document. I also saw his passport that is valid until 2026.

The Ethics Commissioner has opened another investigation into the Prime Minister's exclusive vacation. It is the second time, and unprecedented that our Prime Minister is under investigation.

Will he now admit to breaking two different laws, and will he finally take responsibility for his actions, or is he going to blame it all on some guy named Joe?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said by the Prime Minister time and time again, the Prime Minister will respond to any questions that the commissioner may have.

This government is focused on working for Canadians, and responding to the very real challenges that Canadians are facing. We will continue to work hard and deliver on our commitments.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the questions that Canadians are asking are about their Prime Minister who has broken the law again.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister promised to usher in a new era of transparency and ethics, but the Prime Minister himself is now under investigation for not one but two separate incidents.

Let us try a different tack to see if we can get the Liberals to stop spouting their talking points.

What would the Liberals have said if Stephen Harper had broken the law not once but twice?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as it has been said many times, the Prime Minister will answer any questions that the commissioner has. Our government and our Prime Minister are here to work hard for Canadians and address the very real challenges that they are facing. We will continue to work for Canadians.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what do we have to show for the second state visit to Washington in less than a year? Nothing.

Our Prime Minister said that he was prepared to reopen NAFTA before he was even asked to do so. Fortunately, President Trump is talking in terms of mere tweaks. I hope that is how it will play out.

What is actually on the table? The government is going to negotiate. I hope that tears will not play a role in negotiations this time. What did the government put on the table? Did it put the softwood lumber agreement on the table? There has been talk of supply management. What is the truth? What did it put on the table?

[English]

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government had a productive and important meeting with the President on Monday. Let me remind this House that the President assured Canada and the world that we have a very outstanding trade relationship.

As for NAFTA, it is important for us all to take note of the fact that neither Wilbur Ross, the nominee for secretary of commerce, nor the U.S. trade representative have yet to be confirmed; nor has the U.S. formally initiated a NAFTA negotiation process. If and when that happens, Canada will be ready.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Americans are not too shy to talk about what was discussed. Here is what influential House Speaker Paul Ryan said after meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs:

[English]

We had a productive conversation about how we can enhance these ties, including by strengthening NATO and improving dairy market access.

Paul Ryan said that. If you are unable to answer, parliamentary secretary, Paul Ryan is doing it. What have you put on the table, please?

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean to direct his comments to the Chair.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Canada-U.S. Relations.

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague pointed out, it is true that our government had a very important and productive meeting with the President on Monday.

Let me remind the House that the President assured Canada that we have a very outstanding trade relationship. As for NAFTA, it is important to note that neither Wilbur Ross, the nominee for secretary of commerce, nor the U.S. trade representative have yet been confirmed. The U.S. has not yet initiated a NAFTA renegotiation process either. If and when that happens—

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

* * *

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' spending is out of control. The Liberals' plan will lead to only higher deficits and debt. To pay for all of this, the Liberals are planning to raise taxes and user fees for everyone.

They keep claiming to want to help the middle-class. If this is their definition of help, they should stop. Canadians just cannot afford it.

Will the finance minister stop wasting Canadians' money, and stop taxing those who can least afford it?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to fight for middle class families, to improve their lot in life today, to make investments that will help them tomorrow.

To be clear, we lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. To be clear, for the nine out of 10 families who are getting the Canada child benefit, they are getting an average \$2,300 more per year.

Every month, they are having a better situation for their families, and we are starting to see that across the country.

We will continue with these efforts on behalf of Canadian families this year and in the years to come.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have already raised taxes on Canadian families. They have imposed a carbon tax, and they have raised payroll taxes.

The finance minister says that everything is on the table as they negotiate budget 2017.

Today, we call upon the minister to at least commit that he will not attack a family's ability to save for their children's future, their education.

Will the finance minister tell us that he will not touch the registered education savings plan?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we can say to Canadians, and what we have said to Canadians, is that we are going to continue to work to improve their situation.

Oral Questions

When we reduced taxes on middle class Canadians, we did it knowing they would have more money in their pockets every month. When we gave them more money to raise their children, we knew that would help them with what they really need.

That will be our continuing focus on how we can help families. That will be executed through our next budget, and the budgets to come.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way for the Minister of Finance to reassure Canadians would be to come clean with Canadians.

Unfortunately, every time we ask specific questions about tax benefits for Canadians, the minister is always evasive. We have been asking him questions about seniors for at least two and half weeks now, specifically on pension splitting and tax credits for the elderly, and yet the minister can never seem to give us a straight answer.

Will the minister finally reassure Canadian seniors this time?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for caring about our seniors. I have some very clear statistics here that I am happy to share with him.

By dropping the age of eligibility for old age security back to 65, we are keeping 100,000 seniors from living in extreme poverty.

By increasing the guaranteed income supplement by about 10%, we are lifting 13,000 seniors out of poverty. By investing \$200 million in housing for seniors, we are improving the living conditions of many seniors' families and of the communities in which they live.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he forgets one thing: it is the grandchildren of those seniors who will have to pay for this government's mismanagement.

When spending is out of control, as it is under this government, there are two solutions for addressing the financial crisis: either we regain control of public spending, or, instead, we take more money out of people's pockets.

Guess what this government is doing. It wants to raise taxes. An internal memo at the Treasury Board says so.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board rise and say that he has no intention of raising taxes for Canadians with new fees?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have lowered taxes for Canada's middle class. That was very important. We will continue to make investments to grow our economy. That is very important for jobs today and in the future. More jobs means a better future for families, for young people who are currently in school, and for Canada.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months, we have been raising questions about provisions in CETA that would harm Canadians, with no reassurances from this minister. The current government has refused to address the increased cost of prescription drugs for Canadians, and ignored calls for the removal of investor-state rules. These controversial rules give foreign companies privileged access to sue our governments in exclusive courts.

Trade with Europe is too important to get wrong, and EU member states have made it clear they will not accept CETA with investor-state rules. Does the minister agree that they should be removed?

• (1440)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased with the vote in the European parliament today, and very pleased with the vote on CETA in this House yesterday.

The minister is in Strasbourg meeting with our European counterparts. The Prime Minister will be there tomorrow to deliver an address on the importance of the Canada–EU relationship.

CETA is the most progressive trade agreement ever signed by Canada and the EU. It will create tens of thousands of jobs. It will create greater prosperity for Canadians. It will help grow the middle class. Today is a very good day.

* * *

[Translation]

DAIRY INDUSTRY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to protecting supply management, there was no clear and reassuring message from the Prime Minister on his trip to Washington or when he left for Europe.

What is worse, there are several indications that there will be more hits to our supply management system.

With 17,700 tonnes of fine cheeses entering Canada and ridiculously inadequate compensation, are we to understand that the Liberal government will be sacrificing our supply management system, yes or no?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to invest \$350 million in assistance for dairy producers and artisanal cheese makers to modernize and improve their long-term competitiveness. These programs will help dairy producers and processors adapt to the increase in cheese imports from the European Union under the agreement.

As a result of comments made during consultations of the dairy sector, programs were developed to make strategic investments in the dairy industry and increase the efficiency of our competitive productivity under the supply management system.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in the history of our country a sitting prime minister is under multiple active ethics investigations. This Prime Minister has zero respect for ethics and ethical standards. This Prime Minister believes he is above regular, everyday, law-abiding Canadians, and that the rules simply do not apply to him.

When will the Prime Minister admit that he broke the law, and finally answer Canadians' questions about his unethical behaviour?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said time and time again, the Prime Minister will answer any questions that the commissioner may have. What has also been stated many times, and what we will continue to do is work hard for middle-class Canadians to respond to the very real challenges that they are facing.

We will continue on the plan and the mandate Canadians have given us. That is why we lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. That is why we introduced the Canada child benefit to help families with children who need it the most. We will continue to invest in Canadians and Canadian communities to help grow the economy.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an honest and transparent Prime Minister does what he says and says what he does. However, we have proof that this Prime Minister thinks he is above the law, acts without thinking, and speaks out of both sides of his mouth when it comes time to justify his behaviour to Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister stop hiding behind his talking points, stop pretending that he will answer all of the Ethics Commissioner's questions, and finally explain to Canadians here in the House why he thinks he is above the law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that we are going to work hard for the middle class and Canadians, and that is what we are doing.

Oral Questions

That is why we lowered taxes for the middle class and that is why we are working with Canadians, including the families with children who are most in need. We are going to continue working hard for Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the Prime Minister will be forced to answer the Ethics Commissioner's questions, because that is what happens when one is under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. However, the Prime Minister needs to answer Canadians. His own platform said, "As the head of government, the Prime Minister represents all Canadians and should be directly accountable to all Canadians."

I am going to give him a chance to answer a simple question. Did anyone in the Prime Minister's Office ever advise him that it was against the law to get in that helicopter, and that riding in a private helicopter was against the law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and this government are responding to the very real challenges that Canadians are facing. That is why our government is working hard for all Canadians. We will continue to work closely with provinces, territories, and municipalities so we can help make investments and create the growth Canadians need. We will continue to do the good work they expect us to do.

• (1445)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need to know if their Prime Minister did not know the law or if he knew the law and chose to ignore it. Again, I ask the Prime Minister, did anyone in his office, the PMO or PCO, advise the Prime Minister that taking a ride in this helicopter, a private helicopter, was against the law? Was he advised that it was wrong?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said time and time again, the Prime Minister will answer any questions the commissioner has. What the Prime Minister and this government will also continue to do is to work hard for Canadians, work hard for middle-class Canadians to respond to the very real challenges they are facing. We will continue to work closely and better with the provinces, territories, and municipalities. We will continue to make the investments to work harder for all Canadians so that we can strengthen our country and do the good work they need us to do.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the last election there was hope that we would see a renewed collaborative approach to health care funding, but 18 months later, all we have seen is a divide and conquer tactic from the Liberal government, and 90% of Canadians remain with no national health accord.

Shockingly, the Prime Minister's Office says it is okay with this and that it has a "high tolerance for failure" for a pan-Canadian agreement. When it comes to health care, Canadians do not have a

high degree of tolerance for failure. When will we see a new national health accord for all Canadians?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House and talk about the collaborative relationship that I have had with the other health ministers. We agreed a year ago on what the priorities should be and how they would like to see money invested. On that basis, we were able to go to them and say we will increase the Canada health transfer every single year. In addition to that, we will act on those shared priorities that the other health ministers identified. We were able to go to them with an offer to invest \$11.5 billion, including an unprecedented investment of \$5 billion for mental health care to expand access to mental—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is breaking yet another promise. It promised to negotiate a long-term health care agreement with the provinces.

Five provinces, including Quebec, are still without an agreement. The government promised to treat the provinces as partners, but apparently it would rather divide and conquer. The offer on the table is not good enough; it will not enable the provinces to maintain current service levels.

Will the government finally listen to the provinces and negotiate a long-term agreement that will enable them to provide people with the services they need?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had very good discussions with my counterparts across the country.

We talked about Canadians' priorities and their needs in terms of access to mental health care and home care. That is why we put forward an unprecedented investment: \$11 billion for home care and mental health. We will also increase health transfers every year, and that is good for Canadians.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate Canada's Agriculture Day this week, there is no better time to reflect on the importance of youth in agriculture. Whether it is helping youth obtain the skills, support, and education they need for a bright future in agriculture, or obtaining the ideas for the future of our family farms and rural communities, our government understands just how important their voice is.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food please inform the House on what he is doing to support youth in agriculture across this country?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the father of a young farmer, I can assure my colleagues that we realize that the future of Canadian agriculture depends on the next generation of farmers.

The minister met with passionate young farmers from across the country through round table discussions and Facebook live events. We will eagerly continue to listen to them as we develop our new agricultural policy framework.

We recently invested \$780,000 in 4-H Canada, and we doubled the limits for loans available to young farmers. We will continue to help our young people get the skills and support they need to move Canadian agriculture forward—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Thornhill.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deadly surge in the Russian-backed war in eastern Ukraine continues and shows signs of intensifying. Officials in Kiev say that in recent days, at least 170 vehicles with munitions and 60 more with fuel crossed from Russia.

As the Government of Ukraine waits anxiously for the Liberals to extend Operation Unifier, senior ministers are now asking that Canada supply anti-tank and other defensive weapons to counter the Russian-sponsored offensive.

Why are the Liberals sitting on their hands?

• (1450)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is aware of the situation. It is very concerning to us, and certainly we strongly condemn the actions of the Russian-backed separatist forces in Ukraine.

The minister is in close contact with the ambassador in Kiev and recently spoke with the Ukrainian foreign minister, Pavlo Klimkin. The minister also discussed the situation in Ukraine with Secretary of State Tillerson and Senator John McCain in Washington.

Both the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are currently evaluating how best to help our friend and ally, Ukraine, including through Operation Unifier.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that Canada will be supplying Kurdish forces in Iraq with long-range sniper rifles, with mortar, with anti-tank weapons, with night vision devices, along with non-lethal aid.

Why are the Liberals ignoring Ukraine's request for similar defensive weapons systems and expanded training as Russia escalates the conflict?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we continue to work in close

co-operation with Iraqi authorities to implement our strategy, which was developed with the Iraqi government's consent and in consultation with our coalition partners.

Canada will supply equipment such as small arms, personal protective equipment, and optical equipment to assist Iraqi security forces. This work is currently under way. The exact delivery dates will be determined in conjunction with the Iraqi government and will depend on the availability of the equipment selected.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ukraine needs actual weapons, not platitudes.

The Liberals are doubling down and cutting danger pay for our troops who are in the fight against ISIS, which is causing additional stress to their families at home. This is the same government which admitted that the mission was getting more dangerous after it pulled our CF-18s from the fight.

When our party was in government, we instructed the military to continue to provide full benefits to our troops who were in Afghanistan. Will the Liberals finally do the right thing and restore full danger pay to our troops and their families?

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to ensure our men and women in uniform are compensated for the outstanding work they do in operations.

All Canadian Armed Forces members deployed abroad are entitled to a risk allowance that reflects the conditions and risks that they are exposed to in the specific location of their mission. The risk levels of our operations, including Operation Impact, are constantly reviewed to ensure members of the Canadian Armed Forces are appropriately compensated.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are the most cowardly and crass people there are in this world. They are so fearless that they put lifetime gag orders on those who oppose their schemes. They are stripping a veteran of more than 30 years of his title of honorary colonel for criticizing a stupid decision—

The Speaker: Order. I encourage the hon. member to refrain from using such disruptive language.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles may finish asking his question.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be more polite.

The Liberals are not very nice. Is that more polite? They are so fearless that they put lifetime gag orders on those who oppose their schemes. They are stripping a veteran of more than 30 years of his title of honorary colonel for criticizing the Liberals' stupid decision to buy the outdated Super Hornets.

In light of all that, how are they going to treat those who—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, honorary colonels are an integral part of the Canadian Armed Forces family. Their role is essential, as they provide leadership, mentoring, and promote esprit de corps in units across the country. Within the local community, they use their experience and expertise to promote and support the unit, its soldiers, and their families.

As representatives of the Department of National Defence, like any other soldier, honorary colonels must refrain from defending political interests.

* * *

• (1455)

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government promised to expedite the construction of a rail bypass in Lac-Mégantic. Unfortunately, we no longer know whether a Liberal promise means anything.

Meanwhile, over three years after the tragedy, two out of three residents still show signs of post-traumatic stress. It is high time that the government put words into action.

My question is very simple. Will the minister stop with the empty rhetoric and take real steps to expedite the construction of a rail bypass?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been tasked with expediting the process. That is why we are holding discussions with the Province of Quebec, which of course is involved, the mayor of Lac-Mégantic, and AECOM, the company commissioned to do the rail bypass study.

We know it is important to expedite the process, and we are working as a team to figure out how to do that.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the communities of Madawaska and Témiscouata are reeling from the tragic death of Carl Jason Dunphy.

This former Canadian Armed Forces artilleryman valiantly served his country during three tours in Afghanistan. I want to offer my sincere condolences to his family and friends.

Just a few hours before he died, he posted the following message about Veterans Affairs Canada on his Facebook page: "It's eating away at my resources and my strength. It's not up to friends and spouses to deal with this because a government organization doesn't act".

What will the minister do to prevent this kind of thing from happening again? Will the department follow up internally?

[English]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with the family and friends and those impacted by this tragedy. It is

deeply saddening to hear of anyone taking his or her own life. When it comes to suicide prevention, we always need to do better.

Our government is committed to expanding access to support for veterans, RCMP, and their families. That is why we are working with over 4,000 registered mental health professionals, operating 11 operational stress injury clinics, and have been hiring front-line staff, 360 to date, to work with individuals. We have also opened nine offices and are expanding health and support care.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in recent weeks, nearly 100 asylum seekers have illegally crossed the U.S. border into Canada, including 40 in Quebec this past weekend alone.

While the government is in idle, border towns like Emerson, Manitoba, plead for government assistance as their resources are taxed by the influx and people keep pouring in. Communities like Emerson are requesting more RCMP resources right now. When can the community expect help to enforce the law and maintain security?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the hon. gentleman knows, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency are very professional and proficient at what they do. They have been working very hard to deal with this situation right from the very beginning. They are well trained. They are making internal decisions with respect to the allocation of resources to make sure that they have the right people in the right places to do the job to protect Canadians and to make sure of the health and safety of those who are travelling. If they require additional support or resources, I am sure they will let us know.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under our Conservative government, we always made judicial appointments a priority. The Liberals have been in office for over a year, and there are now judicial vacancies everywhere in this country. As a result, there are more than 800 criminal cases that are in jeopardy. These are cases that include attempted murder, manslaughter, and murder. This is exactly the kind of thing that destroys people's confidence in the criminal justice system.

What will it take to get the government to make judicial appointments a priority?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to talk about the judicial appointments we have made and to further emphasize and look forward to the judicial appointments we will continue to make.

I am pleased to have introduced a reconstituted judicial appointments process and reconstituted judicial advisory committees to ensure that there is a diversity of individuals on those committees and that the appointments of judges will reflect the diversity and face of our country. I look forward to making judicial appointments right across the country in our superior courts.

Oral Questions

• (1500)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beauport—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last fall the Minister of Justice pledged to fill 60 judicial vacancies in Canada in order to address the issue of inordinate court delays. Since then, only 24 positions have been filled, which is clearly not enough and has led to trials being dropped, including trials involving such serious offences as murder and rape.

When will the Minister of Justice finally keep her promise and show consideration and respect for the victims and their families?

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I again rise to speak about the comprehensive review of the criminal justice system that we are undertaking. I am very proud of the judicial appointments I have made, and will continue to make, under a reconstituted judicial appointments process to ensure that we appoint the highest quality of jurists who reflect the diversity of the country. This will, in turn, assist with delays in our courts, but I will point out that it is not simply judges who lead to delays. The administration of justice is a provincial and territorial responsibility, and I am committed to continuing to work in concert with my colleagues to address delays in the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

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SCIENCE

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting science and funding partnerships that lead to discoveries and the products of tomorrow. Today I was at my alma mater, the University of Ottawa, looking at research that, once achieved, will change the lives of Canadians by allowing everyday objects to become smart.

[Translation]

Can the Minister of Science inform the House of the strategic investments made by our government to ensure that we support scientists and encourage innovation and a strong middle class?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to supporting scientific research, both basic and applied.

[English]

Today I announced over \$50 million for projects in NSERC's strategic partnerships, which cross-connect companies with scientists who are advancing research in areas where Canada is a world leader. From the water we drink, to the air we breathe, to new technologies, support for science will help build a better future for Canadians.

* * *

*[Translation]***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limouilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding is home to 200 public servants who work for the Canada Revenue Agency. These public servants work very hard for

Canadians and their families, and, as one can well imagine, they have bills to pay. For the past year, the Phoenix fiasco has been hitting them hard. They cannot even get basic updates about their cases. What are they doing now? They are coming to my riding office to get help that the government should be giving them but is not.

When will the minister at the very least admit that she made a mistake in February 2016 when she gave the system the green light despite advice to the contrary?

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the government's payroll system ensures that 300,000 employees get paid every two weeks, there are public service employees who are experiencing pay difficulties in some categories, and that is totally unacceptable. That is why we have taken additional measures by putting in satellite pay offices to help those employees. We encourage them to reach out to us. In fact, the most recent office we put in was in Kingston. We are working really hard on behalf of our employees.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, both Conservative and Liberal governments have downloaded responsibility for Saskatchewan's environmentally critical grasslands without any concern for their future. These grasslands are unique ecological heritage sites. They act as important carbon sinks and are home to rare and threatened species. Now the government is considering giving away the last of these grasslands in southwestern Saskatchewan and ending the environmental protection they receive.

Will the Minister of Environment and Climate Change commit today to create a new national wildlife area to preserve these ecosystems for future generations?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take very seriously the obligation to protect our natural environment. I am committed to working with the member on this issue to find a resolution.

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*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Jordan's principle was established in response to the death of Jordan River Anderson, a five-year-old member of Norway House First Nation in Manitoba.

This principle seeks to resolve jurisdictional disputes so that first nations children can receive the care they need, when the need it. For a renewed nation-to-nation relationship, we must ensure that there is timely access to care in my province of Alberta and across Canada.

Can the Minister of Health inform this chamber on the measures she is taking to ensure that our government fully implements Jordan's principle?

• (1505)

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton Centre for this question.

Yesterday, our government announced that it is giving \$5 million to Alberta's new First Nations Health Consortium for enhanced service coordination for first nations children in that province. According to its president, Tyler White, the consortium will eliminate many of the barriers faced every day by first nations peoples.

This initiative together with others shows that our government is fully implementing Jordan's principle.

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[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Democratic Institutions' mandate letter was made public on February 1, so it is curious that the minister continues to be evasive about answering apparently innocuous questions about the date on which she received the mandate letter. One possible explanation might be that she does not want to admit that on January 31, she was telling stakeholders that the government was still open to changes to the electoral system, when in fact, the decision to betray this promise was already known to her. After all, a week before her mandate letter was made public, she was in cabinet arguing passionately, we are told, thanks to the Prime Minister's leak on this subject, against a referendum on electoral reform.

When did she get that mandate letter?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my mandate letter was made public on February 1, as it was to all Canadians that day, I was pleased to give a press conference on it at that time. I reached out to stakeholders the day before, because as Minister of Democratic Institutions, I believe it is important to engage with Canadians on all sides of the political spectrum. I continue to do that, and I will continue to do that moving forward. I look forward to implementing this mandate and to working with everyone in the House.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, three years ago in this place, we passed something called Lindsey's law, an act to create a DNA database for missing persons. It is named Lindsey's law out of respect for a missing person. Her name is Lindsey Nicholls. Her mom is a friend of mine. She is a constituent. Judy Peterson fought like a tiger to get something that would allow law enforcement to compare the DNA at crime scenes with missing persons. That bill was passed, but it was delayed and would not

Points of Order

come into effect until 2017. Now Judy Peterson has been told that there is an additional year's delay.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness tell us if he can stop there being a delay and bring it into force?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all share the pain of those whose loved ones have gone missing, and we strongly support efforts to help law enforcement with missing persons investigations. This includes the creation of the DNA-based missing persons and victims data bank. We are in the final stages now of doing the necessary due diligence, both with respect to cost sharing and privacy protection. My goal is to have this system up and running before the end of this year.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: As today we celebrate National Flag Day, and in light of Canada's 150th anniversary, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mrs. Joan O'Malley. Mrs. O'Malley is the distinguished Canadian who sewed the first Maple Leaf flag ever flown.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, Standing Order 18 protects all members of this House from offensive words spoken by any other member of this House. Words and actions carry weight.

I would like to bring attention to events which took place yesterday during question period. When the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities stated that he was a former bus driver, members of the opposition began to laugh.

I think I speak for many members of this House when I say that laughing at the previous employment status of a member of this House is offensive, especially when that service was a public service to the people of this country.

Every member of this House deserves to represent their constituents. Every member's diversity of employment adds to the richness of this House. I would ask that the laughter be withdrawn and the record be corrected. This is offensive to the values of this House, to the values of Canadians, and to the diversity of all of us.

• (1510)

The Speaker: I thank the member for Spadina—Fort York. I, of course, would wish that all members would be careful in their words and actions in this place.

I believe that other points of order will cover the same topic today.

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would agree. We all come from various backgrounds, and that is why we are called the House of Commons. We represent the people: farmers, bus drivers, receptionists. We represent everybody.

There are all kinds of laughter that occur here. We absolutely respect and honour all of the jobs that we have done, and the experience that we bring to this House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles say that the Liberals are the most crass people. I believe that is unparliamentary language.

Therefore, I invite him to pause and reflect, apologize, and withdraw his remarks.

The Speaker: As I have already said, I request that members be careful in what they say, that they be discreet and choose their words with care.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently you underscored the importance of not questioning the veracity of another member's comments and of not calling them a liar. In particular, you told us not to do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

[*English*]

It is for this reason that I think it is inappropriate for the Minister of Public Safety to say that repeating a falsehood does not make it true. It is pretty obvious that his statement was doing something indirectly that we cannot do directly.

[*Translation*]

It is especially odd considering that the hon. member for Outremont, the leader of the NDP, had every right to comment on the government's silence on Monday. I will not get into a debate here, but I would ask the minister to withdraw his comments.

[*English*]

The Speaker: I see the hon. Minister of Public Safety rising.

Before he does, I would request that members be careful in what they say. Clearly, one does not accuse another member of this House of intentionally misleading the House. This phrase was rather close to that, a little closer than I would like.

I wonder if the Minister of Public Safety would like to speak.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of maintaining good order in the House, if that comment was close to the line, I am happy to withdraw it. I simply want to assure Canadians that the issue under debate was indeed being taken seriously.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, today being February 15, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to observe a minute of silence in memory of the Patriots of Upper Canada and Lower Canada, especially those who were executed or exiled.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent. Perhaps some discussions on the matter could be had among the parties.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1515)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development entitled “Division and Human Rights Violations in Burundi”.

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

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PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at Lovesick Lake Park in Burleigh Falls, Ontario, located in the heart of the Kawartha's, in the riding of Peterborough—Kawartha.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time, year-round employees continue to be recognized and taxed as small businesses.

HEALTH

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition that has garnered over 1,400 signatures from across the country. It was started by a man in my riding who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to implement a national disability assistance program for Canadians with chronic disabilities, to fund life sustaining medical equipment, and to provide access to the necessary services to allow them to optimize their functionality over the course of their lifetime.

I am happy to present this petition.

ORGAN DONATIONS

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in support of my private member's bill, Bill C-316, which was submitted by Don Kryskow of Calgary.

The petitioners from Calgary and Red Deer are calling on the House to improve the organ donation system in Canada by making the process easier to register as an organ donor. This would be achieved by adding a simple question to our annual tax returns.

Every organ donor has the potential to save eight lives, but we need to make it much easier to register as a donor.

ACCESS TO UNCENSORED DOCUMENTS

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present e-petition 608. This petition calls on the cabinet to exercise its authority under the Canada Evidence Act to designate the Military Police Complaints Commission as one of the bodies permitted uncensored access to documents. This issue is particularly important, given the Military Police Complaints Commission's ongoing investigation into the role of the Canadian Forces in the alleged abuse of Afghan detainees.

Access to uncensored documents in this investigation is especially important as the Minister of National Defence has refused to authorize an independent inquiry into the issue of complicity in the torture of Afghan detainees, which was a decision taken despite the apparent conflict of interest arising out of the minister's own potential role as a key witness in any such inquiry.

• (1520)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from a group of civic-minded constituents in my riding of Guelph.

With 36 signatories, the petition entitled “A petition to ensure Canadians have a fair electoral system” is calling on the government to continue discussions on electoral reform and to introduce a system of proportional representation.

While the 2019 election will not include a new voting system, I believe that by keeping the dialogue on electoral reform alive, we will be able to engage Canadians from coast to coast to take a keen interest in their democracy and how to improve it.

I will continue to present my constituents' initiatives on electoral reform to the House, and look forward to my continued work with them in Guelph.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONFEDERATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a number of medals have been issued by the Government of Canada on significant milestones in our country's history to recognize the contributions of everyday Canadians and their communities; contributions that mean so much to so many, but too often go unnoticed and unrecognized.

A medal was issued for our Confederation in 1867, the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation in 1927, the Centennial in 1967, and the 125th anniversary of Confederation in 1992.

However, as part of the Liberal war on history, there will be no medal honouring the country-building contributions of Canadians on the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The tradition is being ignored and community-leading Canadians are being forgotten.

Speaker's Ruling

The petitioners from Eganville, Ontario call upon the Government of Canada to respect tradition and recognize deserving Canadians, and reverse its decision to cancel the commemorative medal for the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's response to Question No. 827 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 827— **Mr. Jim Eglinski:**

With regard to the Prime Minister's trip to China in August and September of 2016: (a) what was the total cost to taxpayers of the trip; (b) how much was spent on accommodation; (c) how much was spent on food; and (d) how much was spent on other expenses, including a description of each expense?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the points of order raised on December 12, 2016 and February 7, 2017 by the member for Carleton, related to the government response to written Question No. 575, which was tabled in the House on December 9, 2016, and on the point of order raised on February 1, 2017 by the member for Calgary Shepard, related to the government response to written Question No. 510, which was tabled in the House on November 14, 2016.

Government Orders

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. members for Carleton and for Calgary Shepard for having raised these matters, as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his comments.

[English]

In his arguments, the member for Carleton indicated that, although the minister did provide a response to his written question, he was dissatisfied with the response which, in his opinion, lacked the specific information he had requested.

He later argued that he discovered that the government had concealed information in the answer it had provided to his written question. The member even suggested: “that this matter may rise to the seriousness of contempt.” Finally, he contended that, as Speaker, I had an obligation to compel the government to provide this information.

As for the member for Calgary Shepard, he explained that, although the government did answer three sections of his written Question No. 510, he did not receive an answer to the other parts. Although satisfied with the answers that he did receive, he explained: “I am not asking you, Mr. Speaker, to review the quality or accuracy of the response. I am asking you to address the lack of a response.”

[Translation]

For his part, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons contended, on February 7, 2017, that it was not the role of the Speaker to judge the content or quality of answers to written questions.

[English]

Written questions are a mechanism by which members of Parliament can obtain information from the government and hold it to account. The member for Carleton was correct in his assertion that, “It is a basic right of members of Parliament to ask these questions on behalf of Canadians.”

By raising their dissatisfaction with the responses to their written questions, both members are in effect asking the Chair to assess the quality and completeness of answers provided to written questions.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Members are fully aware that it is not the first time such issues have been raised in the House and members will note that the Chair has been consistent in its response to these concerns. My predecessor, on May 26, 2015, in ruling on a similar matter, stated on page 14137 of the *Debates*, and I quote:

Invariably, when members deem that the content or quality of responses to written questions falls short, the Chair is asked to adjudicate. In each instance, the Chair has sought to remind members of the clear and long-standing limitations of the role of the Speaker in this regard.

These limitations are made clear on page 522 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, which I cited on September 27, 2016, at page 5175 of *Debates*, in a ruling concerning a similar question. To quote it again:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions.

On February 8, 2005, Speaker Milliken confirmed this, at page 3234 of *Debates*, stating, and I quote:

[English]

Any dispute regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of this response is a matter of debate. It is not something upon which the Speaker is permitted to pass judgment.

This is much like the quality of questions and answers during question period.

[Translation]

My predecessor, on April 3, 2012, in ruling on a similar matter, further stated that it is not the Speaker’s role to determine if the contents of documents tabled in the House are complete.

[English]

Members place great importance on their right to hold the government to account, either by asking oral or written questions. It is a right that is legitimized by parliamentary procedure and the role of the Speaker in those instances is to make sure the rules have been followed.

In the cases before us, both the member for Carleton and the member for Calgary Shepard put their respective written questions on notice, pursuant to Standing Order 39, and pursuant to Standing Order 39(7), their questions were each made an order for return and the answer was tabled.

In view of the precedents available to me, the Chair is bound to conclude that the government has complied with the requirements of the Standing Orders. The Chair is not empowered to rule on the quality or completeness of the answers. I therefore cannot find that there has been any breach of the rules and practices of the House in these cases.

I thank hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.) moved that Bill C-37, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related amendments to other acts, be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise on the third reading of Bill C-37. I am particularly gratified at the speed with which the bill has moved through the House of Commons. I want to thank all members, including all parties, who have been very helpful in agreeing to time allocation, agreeing to expediting the committee process, and the fantastic work at the committee level to move the bill along. This demonstrates the serious nature of the bill, and recognizes the ongoing opioid crisis and the need for urgent action.

Government Orders

Bill C-37 is one of a range of comprehensive responses to this very challenging issue. We are eager to advance the bill through Parliament to help protect the health and safety of Canadians and their communities.

It has been said before in the House that problematic substance use is an issue that affects Canadians of all ages. It affects people from all socio-economic groups. We should also point out that there are, however, particular groups that are excessively vulnerable to the risks associated with problematic substance use, people living in poverty, people who have experienced trauma in their lives, and indigenous peoples of Canada.

We are facing nothing short of the greatest drug crisis our country has faced. It is a national public health crisis related to opioids. For example, one may draw attention to the fact that in British Columbia last year more than 900 people died from overdoses. That was an 80% increase over 2015. The majority of those deaths were related to the rapid spread of the drug fentanyl.

Elsewhere in Canada, we are hearing from law enforcement officials that there are increasing numbers of seizures of fentanyl and carfentanil.

Last week, we heard about the distressing number of deaths linked to opioids in Alberta. For example, in 2016, 343 people died in Alberta from fentanyl overdoses. That was an increase over 257 the previous year.

It is necessary that the Government of Canada use every single tool at our disposal to help turn the tide on this crisis. We need a policy approach that is comprehensive, collaborative, compassionate, and evidence-based.

Bill C-37 would further strengthen our government's response to the opioid crisis.

Lest there be any doubt that we are pulling out all the stops to respond to this crisis, let me review what we have done over the past year. It includes things like ensuring naloxone, which is the antidote to overdose, is available on a non-prescription basis across the country. That involved me ensuring that we had naloxone nasal spray available on an emergency order so it would be available to Canadians, and expediting the approval of naloxone nasal spray.

We also launched Health Canada's opioid action plan. This is a plan to improve access to education for both the public, as well as prescribers, to ensure that we support better treatment options, that we reduce access to unnecessary opioids, and that we expand the evidence base.

In the matter of expanding the evidence base and getting better data, we supported McMaster University to produce guidelines for prescribing opioids in situations of chronic pain. Those new guidelines are now available for consultation.

We overturned a ban on prescription heroin so doctors might use it through Health Canada's special access programs to treat the most severe cases of addiction.

We have supported the good Samaritan drug overdose act, which offers immunity against charges for simple possession for individuals

so they will call 911 if they witness an overdose and they will stay at the scene to help.

We have also put in place a number of regulations to schedule fentanyl precursors for controlled substances, making it harder for illicit substances to be manufactured in Canada.

I co-hosted, along with the minister of health for Ontario, the opioid conference and summit. At that summit, we had nine provincial and territorial health ministers. We also had 30 other organizations. We produced a joint statement of action that had 128 commitments.

In addition, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, we have put together a special advisory committee that includes the Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health. This committee is very active at ensuring we have better access to data that is up to date about the state of the circumstances.

We also have a task force within the federal health portfolio to work with all federal departments in a comprehensive response to the crisis.

We funded the Canadian research initiative on substance misuse. It is providing now evidence-based guidelines for medication-assisted treatment.

● (1530)

In December, I joined the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness in introducing Canada's new drugs and substances strategy. We reintroduced at that time harm reduction as a key pillar in drug policy.

I would like to talk now a bit about what we have done to support the establishment of supervised consumption sites. Early on, we granted an exemption to the Dr. Peter Centre in Vancouver to operate a facility, and we provided an unprecedented four year exemption to Insite to continue the good work it was doing.

For communities that have demonstrated a need and desire to have such a site in their community, we want to create an environment that will encourage applicants to come forward. That is why, pending passage of the bill, we have adjusted operational procedures in the interests of removing unnecessary barriers to the review and approval of supervised consumption sites.

Just last week, I was very pleased that we were able to issue exemptions for three new supervised consumption sites at fixed locations in Montreal. The time frame to approve these sites was unacceptable. It took a year and a half, and that was due to the onerous 26 criteria that existed under the previous legislation. However, finally we were able to get an exemption for them. These new sites, located in Hochelaga, Maisonneuve and Ville-Marie districts and operated by the Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal, will be able to provide care for people in those areas.

Health Canada has expedited a review of 10 pending requests for approval in other communities. There is an additional site in Montreal, three sites in Toronto, two in Vancouver, two in Surrey, one in Ottawa and one in Victoria.

Government Orders

Even while doing this, we have maintained the key essential criteria to ensure we protect the health and safety of staff, people who use drugs, and the neighbours who are in the areas of the proposed sites. We are working with all applicants to ensure that those applications are complete and that the department has received the necessary information.

Passing Bill C-37 will be so helpful to streamline the application process and it will be a big step forward for these communities.

Some have wondered why we have not declared a public health emergency. What I have said for months is that clearly we are in the midst of a national public health crisis of unprecedented proportions related to a growing number of opioid overdose deaths. However, the Federal Emergencies Act, which was formerly called the War Measures Act, is a tool of last resort. It is there to ensure public safety and security when a national emergency cannot be addressed by any other law. This act was not used in the case of SARS, H1N1 or Ebola. It is not the right instrument, but as I have already noted, we will make use of every tool at our disposal. We have already taken extraordinary steps at the federal level, and Bill C-37 is another essential step.

Bill C-37 needs to be passed without delay. This is not a political matter or an ideological matter; it is a matter of saving lives.

With the current growing rates of opioid overdoses and deaths, we have recognized there are gaps and weaknesses in the current federal legislative framework as it relates to controlled substances. To address those under Bill C-37, we will provide the government with the ability to more easily support the establishment of supervised consumption sites, a key measure in harm reduction.

We will also address the illegal supply, production and distribution of drugs. We will reduce the risk of diversion of controlled substances that are used for legitimate purposes to the illegal market by providing improved compliance and enforcement tools.

Bill C-37 would simplify and streamline the application process for communities that want and need supervised consumption sites. It would replace the 26 application criteria with the five factors that were identified by the Supreme Court in its 2011 decision regarding Insite.

It is important for all members to understand that Bill C-37 retains the need for community consultation, and it also adds increased transparency, making it a requirement for the Minister of Health to make public decisions on applications, including any reasons for denial.

To support these proposed changes, Health Canada will post information online about what is required in applications, how the process works, and the status of applications.

• (1535)

Supervised consumption sites are an essential part of a harm reduction measure. There is a vast abundance of international and Canadian evidence that shows that when they are properly established and maintained, they save lives and improve health without increasing drug use or crime in surrounding areas, they prevent infection, and, best of all, they provide a safe, non-

stigmatizing, non-judgmental way for people to be introduced to the health care system.

Harm reduction measures in Bill C-37 complement a number of other actions that the government is taking to protect community safety. For example, the RCMP is working with the Chinese ministry of public safety to combat the flow of illicit fentanyl and other opioids into Canada.

Bill C-37 is proposing to prohibit the unregistered importation of pill presses and encapsulators, which would make it more difficult to produce illicit drugs and, in turn, keep these illicitly produced opioids and other substances off our streets. Bill C-37 would also give border services officers greater flexibility to inspect suspicious incoming international mail. As has been said before, just a standardized envelope can contain enough fentanyl to cause thousands of overdoses.

Before I conclude, I want to say a few words about treatment. It is absolutely essential to understand that we will not turn this crisis around by harm reduction alone. People need to have access to the broadest range of treatment options. Delivery of health services, including the treatment of addictions, falls largely under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. That is why I am very pleased to say that this fiscal year the federal government is transferring \$36 billion to the provinces and territories to support the delivery of care. With the support of the Prime Minister, we identified new funding for the provinces and territories, in the order of \$5 billion for mental health over the next decade, which will help people facing mental illness, including addiction.

We need to address the social drivers of the opioid overdose crisis. That includes things like poverty, social isolation, unresolved trauma, sexual abuse, and mental illness. It is widely understood that untreated mental illness is a common cause of addiction and early intervention is absolutely essential if we are going to counter such addiction.

I want to emphasize in the House that we need to include all four pillars in our Canadian drugs policy: prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and law enforcement. Prevention is so essential, as we understand that issues like social equity are absolutely important, cultural continuity, people having the opportunity to have healthy and safe childhoods, and making sure people heal from any unresolved trauma and grief in their lives, which might drive them to problematic substance use.

There is no single action that, on its own, is going to end this opioid crisis immediately, but Bill C-37 is an absolutely essential step in the process of moving to that end. We need a balanced approach. We need to work collaboratively with all other levels of government and civil society organizations. All Canadians need to work together. We need to have partnerships across the country, including, as I said, with provinces, territories, and municipalities that are very much engaged on this matter and, of course, indigenous leaders. We need to protect Canadians, to save lives, to address the root causes of this crisis, to give people hope, and to make sure that all matters are addressed in order to turn the tide of the opioid overdose crisis.

Government Orders

I encourage all hon. members to recognize the importance of this bill and to support its speedy passage through the House. I look forward to working with all members to that end.

• (1540)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the Minister of Health, for her work on the health file. There is no question in my mind that she has the best interests of Canadians at heart. However, we may agree to disagree on a couple of facts.

First, we agree on this side of the House that the opioid crisis needs attention quickly and forcefully. There is no question about that. The other part of Bill C-37 refers to supervised injection sites. I think we would find on this side of the House, and, indeed, probably within each party, that there are differing opinions on that. In fact, some of the opinions are supported, clearly, by front-line police officers in terms of their safety and efficacy and public safety.

My question for the minister is this. Why did her party not allow the bill to be split into two component parts, which would have clearly allowed fulsome debate on both issues, and then, more importantly, why are Liberals shutting down debate and minimizing the amount of time that members of Parliament, who were elected to represent their communities here in the House, can debate this issue?

• (1545)

Hon. Jane Philpott: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member can understand the kind of pressure we receive when members of the communities are telling us every day that they are going out and literally seeing people dying in the streets. I recognize that the hon. member may struggle with the challenges associated with this, and there is always some anxiety related to how we best respond, but the evidence is clear. The hon. member should meet with the chief of police in Vancouver, and meet with the chief of police in Calgary, and talk to them. Although some leaders at first doubted whether supervised consumption sites would be helpful, they have become absolutely convinced that it is essential to save lives. It is reprehensible for us to not move forward on this. The lives of people are at stake.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, the NDP will be supporting Bill C-37. It is so incredibly important to my riding of Essex. I am holding an opioid round table this Friday with stakeholders, and very concerned families who are desperate for help for their family members, and for those in their community who are suffering under this crisis.

As a member of a committee of this House, it is incredibly important that we honour the work that is done at committee. Therefore, my question to the minister revolves around the health committee and the emergency study that it conducted into the opioid crisis. The very first recommendation that was made with all-party support was to declare opioid overdoses a national public health emergency. This would give the public health officer of Canada extraordinary powers to act immediately while Bill C-37 works its way through Parliament.

My question to the minister is this. In the face of this mounting death toll across our country, will the minister stand today and declare a national public health emergency so we can start saving lives in Canada?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her work, and the members of the NDP for their support in passing this bill in a rapid way.

With respect to the recommendations of the health committee, it has made an excellent series of recommendations, and has done fantastic work. I would encourage the member to read the Emergencies Act to make sure that it is well understood, and to realize that this particular circumstance does not require the invoking of the Emergencies Act. If the member can tell me a single thing that we could do by invoking that act that we cannot already do, I would be happy to hear it. I have told this House repeatedly that I will pull out every stop and will take every action that is necessary. However, there is nothing that act would allow that we cannot already do. We have the authority to do what needs to be done. I want to encourage provinces, territories, municipal leaders, and health care providers to also do their part. We cannot solve this alone. We will do everything within our power to make sure that it is turned around.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on this bill because I was a member of the health committee that studied it. We heard from doctors, nurses, scientists, and police, but the most compelling testimony was from paramedics. I want to mention the paramedics from Vancouver especially, because they deal with this issue day in, day out, all day long. I do not know how they can do it repeatedly. They told stories about finding young people unconscious in alleys with needles still in them, how they would bring them back to life, and then two days later they would get another call and come back to the same situation with the same person. It was an incredible story. What we are dealing with is an incredible emergency, and Bill C-37 is designed to deal with that emergency.

I want to ask the minister this. How can passing Bill C-37 help those paramedics especially, because I do not know how they can do it, day in, day out? It must have a tremendous effect on them and their families.

Hon. Jane Philpott: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his excellent leadership role on the committee, which has done such outstanding work on this crisis. He draws attention to something that is very important, which is that we need to recognize the incredible work of first responders, in particular, paramedics. The pressure on these paramedics is remarkable, and I have heard similar stories.

Bill C-37 would allow the increasing availability of supervised consumption sites so that these paramedics would have somewhere to take people where they would be welcomed, where people would know that they can be introduced safely into the health care system, and where we can prevent death from overdose. They might have an opportunity as well to be introduced to treatment when they are ready for that. Therefore, we encourage the availability of these sites, and encourage all players to make sure that we increase access to treatment so that lives will be saved, so that people will find that there is a way to find hope for their future, and so that we can also make sure that first responders are respected and do not have to go through this terrible ongoing crisis.

Government Orders

•(1550)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the health minister can very clearly explain to us why the government did not accept our request for unanimous consent to split the bill. Had the government accepted that, four-fifths of the provision of this bill would already be in the Senate and perhaps would already be law. Why did the government not accept our offer to expedite those sections of the bill so that we could have gotten on with the parts we agree on faster without forestalling the debate on the one section on which we disagree? Why was the government not willing to work in that non-partisan way to actually get those key sections done?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased that the Conservatives were able to vote in favour of the expedited process in the committee that agreed to move on this. It speaks to the fact that some of their members recognized that this is an urgent matter. When we look at the data from British Columbia, we see there are four, five, six people dying every single day. This is absolutely unacceptable, that we would stand by and continue to debate a matter when we have a bill that could help communities like not only Vancouver but Edmonton, Calgary, and Toronto to be able to have the facilities available. I would be happy to speak with members about any additional ideas they have, but we have to get this bill through.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, as members know, New Democrats support the bill. I spoke at length yesterday about the impact that it would have to support front-line RCMP, ambulance attendants, firefighters, and community volunteers who are doing their best to fight this huge epidemic. My community of Nanaimo has been hit very hard.

I would love, though, to hear more about the minister's reasons for not calling a national health emergency. I note that Dr. David Juurlink, the keynote speaker at the minister's own opioid summit; B.C. health minister Terry Lake; and stakeholders across Canada are all still calling for a declaration of a national emergency by the federal government. It is my understanding that this would facilitate more federal funding, community-based detox, addictions treatment, and emergency pop-up safe injection sites and safe consumption sites on an emergency basis.

Hon. Jane Philpott: Madam Speaker, I would encourage the member to speak to Dr. Juurlink, who now understands the reasons why it is not appropriate to declare a national health emergency, but there are many features that the member asked for that we are already doing. If she wants more funding, I encourage provinces across this country to accept the \$5 billion that we have offered through the health accord, and to put that money to work to provide better access to mental health care and treatment.

We have offered mobile units. The Public Health Agency of Canada has said to many communities, including those in British Columbia, "Let us know when you need our emergency mobile units. We will get in there and set them up."

Let those communities know we are prepared to do everything that it takes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and address Bill C-37, certainly a very important discussion as we confront what

is a national crisis around drug use. However, we have seen a funny pattern from government members, where they draw our attention to a significant problem yet actually refuse to collaborate in a non-partisan way to move these things forward. That is very clearly on the record. Members can laugh, but this is not a funny topic, and it is not funny that we tried to move this forward quickly and the Liberals got in the way.

Let us review the record of what happened. The bill contains certain provisions that are vital for addressing the challenges we face. It also, though, contains a provision that would remove effective community engagement on supervised injection sites. We have a big problem with that, and I will talk about why that is later on in my speech.

It is important for people to understand what the government has done here. Recognizing the need to move quickly on certain provisions but also the need to have thorough debate on this one particular provision on community consultation, our very hard-working member for Oshawa, our health critic, brought forward a request for unanimous consent to split the bill.

What he proposed was very reasonable, and it would have effectively addressed this issue. What he proposed was to split the bill into two sections. The sections on which we all agreed there be urgent action, and I will talk about what those are, he and all of us would agree to immediately deem adopted at third reading, fully adopted by the House, and sent to the Senate. Very likely the Senate would have moved quickly on that as well. Those provisions could already be law today and already addressing this problem right now as we speak. That was our proposal brought forward by the member for Oshawa.

However, the government said no. Why? It insisted that removing an effective voice for communities in the process had to be tied to these other important life-saving measures. It was the Liberals' decision to slow this down by refusing to split the bill. In fact, the offer we proposed in our unanimous consent motion was not just to expedite the provisions on which we agreed. It was also to immediately deem referred to the Standing Committee on Health the provisions on which we disagreed. We were even willing to move that immediately to committee for study while immediately adopting those things on which we agreed. This is how we proposed to work in a non-partisan fashion to move quickly on the things we could move quickly on to get this done.

The government, while pleading about the need and the urgency of this crisis, actually refused to give unanimous consent to our proposal to expedite those sections. Given the strong words coming from the health minister and other members of the government, it is utterly shameful that they refused to work to move this forward.

Government Orders

I would like to highlight the sections of the bill we agree on and the sections of the bill that could today already be law had the government been willing to work in a non-partisan manner. They will still become law eventually, but it is unfortunate that we were not able to move on the timeline we wanted.

The bill proposes to regulate the import of pill presses. Currently, pill presses, which are used for putting together illegal drugs, can be imported freely. The bill contains important provisions that would have any pill press imported registered with Health Canada and that would give our border services officials the authority to detain unregistered pill presses at the border. This is a very important measure that we have strongly supported. It could be law today if the government had been willing to work to expedite this in a non-partisan manner.

Another great provision in the bill would increase prohibitions against certain actions related to controlled substances. This would enhance the ability of the government to stop, in this instance, the transportation of illicit substances. It would enhance the power to do that under the relevant legislation. Again, it is a very positive provision. It would be making a difference if it were law today. It is something we could have moved forward on more quickly.

The bill would grant increased powers to the Canada Border Services Agency to open and inspect packages entering Canada, packages that it suspects may contain contraband such as drugs. Again, it is an important provision that CBSA be given the power to move forward and open packages that it believes contain illicit substances. Again, there is no reason anyone should oppose that. That is why it should have been done by now. It should have been passed quickly. It would have been passed quickly had the government agreed to work with the opposition and split the bill, as we proposed.

• (1555)

In terms of the category of things we agree on, the bill proposes temporarily accelerated scheduling, essentially allowing the Minister of Health to quickly, but temporarily, schedule and control new drugs and substances under the relevant legislation. This is important, because we have seen new drugs coming to the fore on a regular basis. These powers are important.

Four out of the five changes that we would say yes to on this side of the House could already have been law today had the government been willing to work with us.

Why was it so important for us to raise concerns and to insist on further debate on the one provision on which we disagree? The government is proposing to change the community consultation process on supervised injection sites. I have talked before about broader concerns about supervised injection sites. I know that there are many Canadians who do not believe we should have legal islands that allow people to use drugs legally. If we want to send the strongest possible message about the dangers of drug use, we may want to be optimistic in our compassion instead of pessimistic in our compassion. Many Canadians reflecting on that have broader concerns about these supervised injection sites.

Let us be very clear. That is not the question in this legislation. The question in this legislation is the degree to which, and the nature

of how, communities should be engaged in the conversation about that.

The original provisions that were put in place under the previous government established some key requirements with respect to how communities had to be engaged. There had to be strong engagement with the community to maximize the chances that these types of facilities would be successful. The previous legislation put in place a reasonable process to get that done.

The government is proposing in this legislation to significantly pare down any kind of engagement. Previously, there was a requirement that the period of consultation be at least 90 days. The new provisions would allow a period of consultation of up to 90 days. There would actually be no minimum. They could spend two days undertaking the consultation. The requirements in the legislation they put forward are pared down. It says:

An application for an exemption under subsection (1) shall include information, submitted in the form and manner determined by the Minister, regarding the intended public health benefits of the site and information, if any, related to (a) the impact of the site on crime rates; (b) the local conditions indicating a need for the site; (c) the administrative structure in place to support the site; (d) the resources available to support the maintenance of the site; and (e) expressions of community support or opposition.

They have to provide some of that basic information.

They would satisfy the provisions of the new bill if applicants simply said that they talked to a few people in the community about opening a supervised injection site and no one liked it, but at least they talked to some people. That would be sufficient under the proposed legislation.

Let us talk about what the Liberals took out. We hear a lot from the government about the importance of scientific evidence. Actually, the existing application requirements we put in place require “scientific evidence demonstrating that there is a medical benefit to individual or public health associated with access to activities undertaken at supervised consumption sites”. Among other things, the previous legislation actually requires that scientific evidence be presented on what the impacts would be in the context of the application. That would be removed by these new requirements.

We put requirements in place for consultation with local law enforcement and local governments, which are going to be called upon to respond to the challenges and situations that are in place. Those were things that were in place before and would now be pulled back.

One of the defences we hear often from the government and the NDP about supervised injections sites is that there are actually some drug treatment services available at the sites. I know that still does not allay many people's concerns, but the consultation process that currently exists, that we put in place, requires that a description of drug treatment services available at the site be provided with the application. If people are going to apply to open a supervised injection site, they actually have to provide information to the government about the kind of drug treatment services that would be available.

Government Orders

•(1600)

If that is one of the key arguments for allowing supervised injection sites, because it seems that it is, listening to the comments that have been made, then it should be particularly emphasized and required that the person who is applying to open a supervised injection site actually provide some information to the government about what is going to exist in that space vis-à-vis drug treatment. That should be there.

The existing legislation requires, for example, that we have criminal record checks for those who are going to be involved with these facilities. There are a lot of important requirements the existing legislation has in place, and these are basic things, like consultation and engagement with the community and providing information about what is going to be in place in terms of support for people who are trying to get off drugs.

All these things should be there, but we have this vastly pared down proposal in terms of what would actually be required for the application. It is going to be so much easier for people to apply to open these supervised injection sites, and there are no requirements to ensure that we will have the due diligence in place.

Again, members can debate the merits of supervised injection sites, but the existing legislation at least ensures that they are doing the kinds of things they are supposed to be doing. The new proposed legislation by the government completely turns the page on that by not engaging communities and not requiring the kind of due diligence we included in that application at all.

I will conclude by saying again that we had an opportunity to move forward with those provisions on which we all agree. Those could be law today, but instead, we are still debating the entire bill, because the government refused to split it. The Liberals brought in closure on these important community consultation measures.

I say that we move forward with the things that will save lives now, but let us continue an important conversation about whether communities should be engaged when these types of injection sites are opened.

I think it is important that communities be engaged in conversations. I believe that communities are compassionate and that they care about these issues. It is not only the federal government that cares. If we engage communities, if we engage local law enforcement, we will get better solutions that will be more responsive to the needs of the community and will be more likely to solve this problem.

The government needs to know that it cannot fix this problem on its own. It needs to work with the opposition. It needs to work with other levels of government. It needs to work with communities. If we are going to address this problem, we need more voices at the table and more collaboration. That is what we are standing for in the opposition, and that is why, in its current form, I have to oppose the bill.

•(1605)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the section the member's party is suggesting be separated from the bill is the section that would

change the 26 criteria the previous government put in place to five criteria, which would streamline the application for safe consumption sites in communities where they are needed and where they are appropriate.

Under the current criteria of the previous government, three sites were approved in Montreal. Does the member know how long it took for these three sites to be approved? It took 22 months, nearly two years.

Does the member think it is reasonable, when we know that there are people dying in various cities across Canada, in record numbers, to wait such a long period of time before we approve these sites? These are sites that are asked for by local health professionals, by communities, and by provincial governments.

Does he think it is reasonable, when we have people dying in record numbers, to wait such a long period of time? Does he not think instead that we are better off moving to what the Supreme Court of Canada has stated should be the five guiding principles when we approve these safe consumption sites?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, Winston Churchill said that it is not enough to do your best. One has to know what to do and then do one's best.

This is why having a proper review process in place is important. It is not enough to say that we just have to do something, without actually having the proper due diligence in each case to make sure that we are doing the right thing and that it is going to have the greatest impact and save the greatest number of lives.

If we are concerned about scientific evidence, the government should have left the criterion in that required the presentation of scientific evidence as part of the application. If the Liberals are concerned about people getting off drugs, they should have left the criterion in that requires the government to receive information about what is going to exist at a facility in terms of drug treatment.

Of course we have to respond to this crisis, but we have to do it in the right way. If we remove the due diligence that is involved in setting up these facilities, there is no guarantee at all that we will save more lives. In fact, we may well put more lives at risk. This is why we have to get it right. This is why we should expedite the sections on which we can agree, but we need to have full debate. I think we need to reinsert some of these criteria back in to ensure that these things are being done in an appropriate and effective way that maximizes the chances that we can give people the best hope we can.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a little hard to listen to the member in this debate. I am part of a community that has been very hard hit by the opioid overdose crisis. I have observed the operation of the supervised injection site, Insite, in Vancouver, and the Conservatives thwarted every effort to open additional health-based life-saving supervised injection sites for the 10 years that they were in power. It is a little hard to listen to the words of my colleague.

Government Orders

Only an hour after the Conservatives introduced Bill C-2, the Conservatives were fundraising, stating that Liberals and New Democrats wanted addicts to inject heroin in people's backyards. It is no wonder we ended up with communities being concerned about the impact of actually delivering a health care service to people who are addicted and whose lives are now in peril because of the fentanyl crisis that no one has been able to get ahead of.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on that. Even though he was not in Parliament last time around, I would also like his thoughts about his own party having cut addictions treatment funding by 15% while the Harper Conservatives were in power.

• (1610)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, obviously we have wider philosophical disagreements about whether somebody using dangerous hard drugs really should be considered in the same category as other health care services. We can have a longer discussion about supervised injection sites specifically. Again, my view is, and I do not have a problem saying it, that we should be focusing our efforts and resources on things to get people off of drugs, such as rehab, more investments in chemical detox, and these kinds of things.

I am very supportive of those kinds of investments. Of course, generally speaking, more of that activity happens at the provincial level, but there is a role for the federal government as well. I see the importance of that and I am happy to advocate for it. I do think, though, it does not follow that if we believe action is needed, we need to take power away from local communities in terms of determining the process of that action.

Communities, families, local governments, and provincial governments are compassionate and seized with this problem, so taking authority away from them to be engaged with their communities is not an effective way to address this crisis. We should, in fact, be doing more to mobilize the knowledge and experience of communities and families in terms of building the kinds of strategies that are going to address specific issues in specific areas.

The response that makes sense in one community may not be the same as the response that makes sense in another community. When an external group makes an application, and all it has to do is provide some general information to the government about whether the community was supportive or opposed with no timeline prescribed, I do not think that is an effective way to engage the community to actually respond to the problem.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleague first and foremost to recognize this issue as the national crisis it is. The Minister of Health and the government have taken a very aggressive and proactive approach to try to deal with this in a number of ways. A big part of it is working with others. Whether it is provincial or municipal jurisdictions, first responders, just name it, all of the stakeholders need to come together to try to resolve a very serious problem, a crisis, as the Minister of Health herself indicated.

There has been an immense amount of co-operation from the New Democratic Party on this issue. The issue that the Conservatives seem to be stuck on is the supervised safe injection sites. That was

part of the legislation, which many of the stakeholders are very anxious to see.

Does the member not recognize that this is, in good part, a holistic approach? It is not just the legislation, even though the legislation is absolutely critical, and that is the reason we are trying to advance this issue. The member desires further debate, but the issue was well debated in Parliament under Prime Minister Harper. The former questioner pointed out that the Harper regime had a fundraising scheme based on a theory that the Conservative Party is still advocating today. We disagree with that theory.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, there are some specific questions that the parliamentary secretary and the government need to answer about why the government refused to split the bill to actually allow it to move forward if the Liberals are so concerned about this crisis, because we all should be concerned about this crisis. At the end of the day, it does seem to be the case, with the NDP co-operating with the government, that we are the only party in this House that is standing up firmly for the role of local communities to be involved in these decisions. If we are the only party that has to stand up for that principle, so be it, because I am so convinced that we are right and that Canadians are on our side on that point.

Communities are compassionate. Local governments are compassionate. Local families are compassionate. We need to engage them in a conversation, in a meaningful consultation that gives them time to present ideas, looking at local evidence, and looking at the scientific evidence about the impact. What is wrong with engaging communities and looking at that local evidence? If we are the only party that stands up for it, so be it. If people donate to the Conservative Party, as is being criticized by others, because of our commitment to engaging communities in the process, well people donate to political parties for all kinds of different reasons and we are certainly going to stand up for our principles, whatever the consequences of that are.

• (1615)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to point out something that is just demonstrably false from the Conservative Party. It is right in the legislation before us, if my hon. colleague cared to read it. The bill would specifically require an applicant to furnish evidence of the local conditions giving rise to the site, the potential health benefits, and more important, expressions of public support or opposition. When the member tells this House and Canadians that the community's wishes are not part of this legislation, he is simply wrong.

I wonder if he could comment on that. Has he read the legislation?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, if the member had listened to my speech, he would know that not only have I read the legislation, but I actually have read into the record the specific section that he refers to.

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Here is the point, and the member would know it if he had been listening to my remarks. It is that the previous section requires scientific evidence demonstrating what the impacts would be in the community. It requires engagement with law enforcement. It requires specific engagement and support of local governments. Just asking the applicant to make some statement of expression of community support or opposition is not sufficient. It would not actually mean that the community would have had more time or ability to rule on the decision.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, for any Canadians who are watching, I am glad that they can see that the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, the Green Party, and I am not sure about the Bloc, are willing and ready to move quickly on this legislation and not sit here and debate and slow down legislation when Canadians are dying every day.

It has been well established that Canada is currently in the grips of an unprecedented national public health emergency. I am glad to hear both my Liberal and Conservative colleagues increasingly using that term to describe the opioid crisis. The New Democratic Party started using the term back in November, and that is because this is a national public health emergency and our fellow Canadians are suffering and dying every single day.

Fifty Canadians are dying every week from opioid overdoses in this country. That is a national crisis. It also bears repeating that this crisis has become dramatically worse in recent months.

In 2016, in my home province of British Columbia alone, there were 914 drug overdose deaths. That is an 80% increase from the year before. In December, just a couple of months ago, we recorded the highest number of overdose deaths in B.C.'s history with 142 lives lost. That is more than double the monthly average of overdose deaths since 2015 and a sharp increase over September, October, and November. There were 57 overdose deaths in B.C. in September, 67 in October, 128 in November, and 142 in December. I can only guess that the number will be even higher for January. While the Conservatives want us to debate and consult, New Democrats want to act and save lives.

In December, the B.C. Coroners Service announced that morgues in the city of Vancouver were frequently full as a result of the unprecedented number of overdose deaths, forcing health authorities to store bodies at funeral homes.

This crisis is in large part the legacy of Canada's now defunct anti-drug strategy. Decades of a misguided criminal approach to drug policy has proven to be counterproductive, fuelling Canada's unregulated illegal drug market and leaving a scarcity of evidence-based health services, including harm reduction and treatment programs for people suffering from substance use disorder.

The Conservatives cut 15% from the addiction service budget in their last year in office. International research demonstrates that the criminalization of drugs increases rates of drug production, consumption, availability, and adverse drug-related health effects, but that is the evidence, and for the last 10 years our drug policy in this country was not based on evidence. It was based on ideology.

Because this crisis has been years in the making, it will not be solved by any one action or piece of legislation. I think we all know

that. The passage of Bill C-37 must be the beginning of a much deeper examination of how we understand and respond to drug use and addiction in Canada.

For many years, New Democrats have been advocating for an evidence-based and health-focussed approach to drug use and addiction. Our party understands that substance use is not a moral failure. We also understand that criminal approaches that aim to punish or isolate those with addiction issues only serve to compound the suffering of those already experiencing tremendous pain.

As Dr. Gabor Maté, a Canadian physician who specializes in addictions has said:

Not all addictions are rooted in abuse or trauma, but I do believe they can all be traced to painful experience. A hurt is at the center of all addictive behaviours. It is present in the gambler, the Internet addict, the compulsive shopper and the workaholic. The wound may not be as deep and the ache not as excruciating, and it may even be entirely hidden — but it's there.

That is why New Democrats have pushed the federal government to reinstate harm reduction as one of the four pillars of Canadian drug policy ever since it was removed by Stephen Harper. That is why New Democrats led the fight against the Conservatives' Bill C-2 from the day it was introduced. That is why we have pressed the Liberal government to repeal or amend Bill C-2 since February 2016, one year ago, when the opioid overdose crisis was in its earliest stage.

Last fall, the NDP successfully moved a motion at the Standing Committee on Health to conduct a study on the opioid overdose crisis. This led to a report with 38 recommendations to the federal government, most of which have not yet been implemented, I would point out.

• (1620)

We were the first to call for a declaration of a national public health emergency. Such a declaration would empower Canada's Chief Public Health Officer to take extraordinary measures to coordinate a national response to the crisis, a measure the Liberal government, still to this day, refuses to take.

Last December, we attempted to fast-track Bill C-37 because of the dire need to deal with this crisis as quickly as possible, but that, again, was blocked by the Conservatives.

Indeed, Bill C-37 continues to be delayed because the Conservatives refuse to acknowledge the crucial importance of harm reduction, and the evidence that supervised consumption sites save lives now.

Today, I am saddened to see that the Conservatives still have not learned from their mistakes, and I am deeply troubled that they continue to liken supervised consumption sites and the approval of same to pipeline approval processes.

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After their bizarre offer to trade supervised consumption site approvals for pipelines, at the health committee, the Conservative member for Lethbridge argued that these health facilities should require the same social licence as energy projects before they are permitted to save lives. The member argued that we must maintain Bill C-2's unnecessary barriers because the placement of a site will impact the communities in which they are located.

For once, I agree with the member for Lethbridge. It is absolutely correct that these sites do indeed impact communities: by saving lives, by reducing crime, and by providing opportunities for recovery to people suffering from a disease.

The Conservative Party likes to imagine that supervised consumption sites might be imposed on communities by the federal government. The opposite is true. Supervised consumption sites only exist in Canada due to the tireless efforts of advocates and community members who contribute their time and talent to provide evidence-based, life-saving health services. Sometimes, they have even done so at the risk of their own liberty.

Vancouver's Dr. Peter Centre provided supervised consumption services, in violation of federal law, for over a decade, since 2002, before the federal government finally granted it a legal exemption.

Vancouver's Insite had to fight the federal government all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to keep its doors open. Even then, instead of complying with the spirit of the ruling, the Conservative government of Stephen Harper passed Bill C-2 as a thinly veiled attempt to prevent any new site from opening in Canada.

Today, as we speak, at least three overdose prevention sites are operating in the open in Vancouver without a legal exemption, against the law, exposing the staff who work there to criminal sanction because they are answering a higher call. They are answering the call of saving lives. That is why they are doing it.

The truth is supervised consumption sites do not harm communities; they help them. The evidence from Insite has been overwhelming and crystal clear.

By the way, the Conservatives talk about the negative impact of supervised consumption sites on communities. They never quote a single piece of evidence, not a shred, from any operating supervised consumption site because there are only two in Canada. Those two in Canada have been studied and written up in periodicals as respected as *The Lancet* and the evidence is crystal clear. They save lives. They reduce crime around the area. They stop open drug use. They reduce the spread of disease, and they stop the detritus of used needles in consumption sites from being out in the community where they can harm our community members and our children. That is the evidence.

When the Conservatives say that these sites impact communities, darn right they do, and they do so by helping the community. There is not an iota of evidence to the contrary.

Perhaps the Conservatives should listen to Edmonton's Mayor Don Iveson who recently said, "This is not a homeless, addicted issue. This is in pretty much every neighbourhood."

The opioid crisis is here. It is already affecting our communities. Every day, it is claiming the lives of our friends, our family members, our neighbours.

The Conservative Party's argument that supervised consumption sites will somehow introduce opioid addiction to unaffected communities is baseless fearmongering, and it is deeply stigmatizing to Canadians with substance use disorders.

The truth is communities across Canada have been asking to open supervised consumption sites for years. It was by refusing to grant section 56 exemptions that the federal government was overruling both my home city of Vancouver and my home province's repeated requests. Indeed as Vancouver's Mayor Gregor Robertson has said: "Factors such as the impact of the site on crime rates and expressions of community support or opposition should not be relevant to the federal government's approval process. Those issues are local matters, and as such, are best dealt with by local officials, such as municipalities, health authorities, and local police agencies, who understand the issue."

• (1625)

I will leave it to the Conservative Party to explain why it does not trust local authorities to make those determinations.

It has been community heroes, not the federal government, who have been on the front lines showing leadership throughout the current crisis. The efforts of these selfless people have undoubtedly saved lives and although there are too many to name individually here, I would like to specifically acknowledge the Herculean efforts of a few people.

The are: Ann Livingston and Sarah Blyth, founders of B.C.'s Overdose Prevention Society; Hugh Lampkin, long-time member of the Vancouver area network of drug users; Daniel Benson of the Portland Hotel Society; Gregor Robertson, mayor of Vancouver; Kerry Jang, city councillor of Vancouver; Maxine Davis, executive director of Vancouver's Dr. Peter AIDS Foundation; Katrina Pacey, executive director of Vancouver's Pivot Legal Society; Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.'s Chief Medical Officer, the first and only medical officer in the country who has declared a public health emergency in British Columbia because he recognizes the extent of the crisis facing our community; and Dr. Gabor Maté, who is an internationally-renowned expert in addictions.

Having repeated requests for a declaration of a national public health emergency ignored by the current federal Liberal government, these front line organizations and the Government of British Columbia were forced to take the extraordinary measure of disregarding federal law by opening non-exempt pop-up supervised consumption sites which are operating right now as I speak. These sites have operated for months despite the daily risk of prosecution faced by those working at them as staff and volunteers.

Here is what the College of Registered Nurses of B.C. said to its membership last month.

This crisis may be prolonged and continue to worsen; as these overdose prevention services are being established across our province, in any place there is a need, we are being asked by nurses, "Is my licence at risk if I provide nursing care in these sites and conditions that can be less than ideal?"

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Our courageous front line health workers should never be forced to ask that question.

That is why the NDP introduced an amendment at the health committee that would have allowed provincial health ministers to request in writing from the federal health minister emergency approval for supervised consumption sites in response to a local crisis.

Such an exemption would bypass the normal application process, and go into effect immediately for up to a year with the possibility of renewal. The federal minister would be required to post a provincial request online and post the response within five days.

This change was aimed at removing the potential for distant political considerations in Ottawa, many of which we hear expressed by members of the House today, to undermine or impede timely evidence-based decision responses to provincial public emergencies.

In the unusual situation where a province has declared a provincial health emergency, instead of forcing it to go through the application process which takes time, and time in a crisis like this costs lives, it gives the federal health minister the ability to grant a temporary approval quickly.

The Liberal government has repeatedly claimed that, with this legislation, it is now doing everything in its power to address this crisis, but that is demonstrably false. The government has failed to take many actions. There are literally dozens of them that are open to the government to take to respond to this crisis which it seems reluctant to do.

Recently, the City of Vancouver sent a list of nine recommendations to the federal government to help address this crisis, including calling for a central command structure, daily meetings with Health Canada, and improved treatment services.

A coroner's jury in British Columbia recently issued a list of 21 recommendations for action and the Standing Committee on Health in December issued a report detailing 38 recommendations for the government alone, again most of which remain unimplemented. The Liberal government is not doing everything it can to address the opioid crisis. It is taking some measures, but not all the measures it needs to.

When the health committee conducted the emergency study last fall into the crisis, the first recommendation made with all-party support was to declare opioid overdoses a national public health emergency. This call was echoed by Dr. David Juurlink, the keynote speaker at the health minister's own opioid summit last fall and now by B.C. Health Minister Terry Lake, a Liberal, and stakeholders across the country. In the face of a mounting death toll, a declaration of a national public health emergency would allow us to start saving more lives today.

• (1630)

Furthermore, during our study, the health committee heard that access to treatment for opioid addiction is almost nonexistent in indigenous communities, and where there is access, it is short-term access. That is because nurses employed by Health Canada do not have the scope of practice to support indigenous people in addressing opioid addiction in their own communities beyond 30

days. Yet, the Liberal government has made absolutely no commitment to ensuring full access to long-term, culturally appropriate addictions treatment in indigenous communities.

Finally, the health committee's recent report on the crisis made three separate and specific recommendations, calling for significant new federal funding for public community-based detox and addictions treatment. But the federal government will not commit to making any new funding available for detox and treatment in budget 2017, so far.

The health minister continues to recycle money dedicated to mental health, and claims that money can be used for addictions treatment. We are looking for new, specific, targeted funds for addictions treatment in this country. Mental health is a huge area, and there are many needs in this country. We all know that. We wanted targeted money from the government, and the government has refused to make that commitment so far.

I believe it behooves this House to be honest with itself. Would the federal government be so noncommittal and cautious in its approach if these deaths were caused by any other disease? As we look to the future, we must let go of our prejudices in order to hold on to our loved ones. Donna May, the founding member and facilitator of mumsDU, moms united and mandated to saving drug users, lost her daughter Jac to addiction at the age of 35. She said:

Most people would think that the hardest thing I've ever had to face was her death; the death of a child; the death of my only girl. However, that's not it at all.

The hardest thing I've had to face in my life is realizing how my ignorance towards my daughter's addiction cost me years with her that I will never get back. There are no 'do-overs' when your child is dead! Now I can only share my experience and what I've learned since, so that other parents can take something from it.

In many respects, substance abuse is one of the last remaining acceptable targets for health care discrimination. With all the evidence available to us, we should know better. If we are to succeed in treating addiction as a disease, which it is, we need to acknowledge that fear, stigma, and ignorance about those who suffer from addiction are widespread and in many respects have framed our approach to this crisis.

That is why, although these legislative changes are long overdue, they do not go far enough, fast enough. We need federal coordination and funding to address the crisis right now and over the long term. Canada's failure to treat addiction and substance use disorders by successive federal governments as a medical condition was explained to the health committee by Dr. Evan Wood from UBC.

He said:

I'll just ask you to imagine a scenario of somebody having an acute medical condition like a heart attack. They would be taken into an acute care environment. They would be seen by a medical team with expertise in cardiology. The cardiovascular team would then look to guidelines and standards to diagnose the condition and to effectively treat it. Unfortunately, in Canada, because we haven't traditionally trained health care providers in addiction medicine, we have health care providers who don't know what to do, and routinely do things that actually put patients at risk.

In addition to the lack of training for health care providers, the overall lack of investments in this area has meant that there aren't standards, guidelines [or beds] for the treatment of addiction.

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Dr. Mark Ujjainwalla, medical director of Recovery Ottawa, said:

The problem we face here is that the real issue with addiction is not opiates. The real issue is the inability of the present health care system to treat the disease of addiction. An addiction is a biopsychosocial illness that affects 10% of society, probably more if you include families, and it is the most underfunded medical illness in our society.

The problem is that it's also a highly preventable and very highly treatable illness. It's very unfortunate that people don't see that. When it affects your family or you, you can feel the pain and suffering, and you watch the tragedy unfold in front of you.

I would like to conclude my remarks by imploring this House to take a lesson from Estonia, a country that recently overcame an opioid crisis very similar to Canada's. The head of Estonia's drug abuse prevention department said, "I think the most important thing is you don't waste time. If you really want to learn from us, that's the mistake we made. Don't look for some new solutions, because you have them."

We could say that history does not look kindly on those who dither in times of crisis. To put it bluntly, it is not the history books that should keep us up at night; it is the lives that we continue to lose every single day to entirely preventable causes.

Canadians are looking to us to provide leadership in a crisis. It is time for us to deliver.

• (1635)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to acknowledge the presentation by the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway. Members of his caucus have been raising this issue with great clarity, great intelligence and with great compassion. I would like to acknowledge the efforts they have made to get the House to act faster, not just this year but over the last couple of decades, on this issue, and in particular the MPs who come from Vancouver.

Some of the issues he has raised we have addressed. I have sat with the big city mayors, and in particular Mayor Gregor Robertson of Vancouver, and listened to their calls for action. I immediately approached the Minister of Health. We are moving on those urban issues very quickly in concert with our cities, because cities and towns are on the front lines of this issue.

We have the call for a national disaster and immediate action, which is being taken by the government. What actions in the national disaster designation are not being taken as a result of us not designating it that could not be taken as a result of good advice from the member opposite? In other words, we believe we are doing everything we can. What would the additional designation do that we are not doing now?

• (1640)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, first, I would like to thank the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York not only for his kind and generous words in here, but for approaching this issue in the spirit from which it ought to be approached, which is one of collegiality and working together on all sides of the House. Addiction knows no ideology. Our children, who are exposed to death, illness and overdose, are not interested in politics, so I really appreciate those kind words.

He asks an excellent question. Under the Emergencies Act, the declaration of what is called a public welfare emergency is open to the government, and it is clearly written in the spirit of some sort of natural disaster or outbreak of disease, if we read the legislation. There is a number of powers it gives the national chief public health officer in a case like that, and two of them in particular I would encourage my hon. colleague to consider.

One is that it would authorize the government to flow emergency funding in an expedited fashion, as opposed to having funding go through the normal processes of this place. Second, and more important, it sanctions the opening of hospitals and clinics on an emergency basis.

If there were a virus spreading around the country and we were losing 50 people a week, we would be opening pop-up clinics, almost like MASH, all over the place where people could go to get vaccinated, to get treatment. Those are the kinds of clinics I believe these supervised overdose prevention facilities could be designated as. Then they would not be operating illegally as they are now. Cities and towns could be opening these supervised consumption sites on an emergency basis and do so legally under the Emergencies Act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Anyone who was lucky enough to hear his speech will understand the emotional intensity triggered by this problem. This is something my colleague has to deal with every day, which was reflected in his comments.

I think he was right to slam the Conservative Party, because we have been debating this problem, namely, the injection site issue, not the opioid crisis, over the past several Parliaments, with still no resolution.

I appreciate the collegiality among most parties of the House, since most of us want to expedite the passage of this bill. However, the Liberal government is expected to present its upcoming budget perhaps next week, or in two weeks' time at the latest, and my concern is this: what if there are no new investments to address this crisis? Would that not be truly Machiavellian, the perfect example of doublespeak?

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I think all members of the House would probably agree that one of the fundamental solutions to the crisis facing us is its prevention and treatment as a health issue. That means our words are not particularly helpful unless they are backed up by actions. The action I would like to see by the government is significant and substantial new funding for addictions treatment facilities of every kind across the country. There is no one size fits all. We need facilities for young people, women, and indigenous communities. There are differences with respect to alcohol and drug addictions. We need the full panoply of resources for the country to really start making a dent in this.

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In generosity to the Conservative colleagues, I will say this. They express in the House the perspective that drugs are a dangerous product, and they are right. I think everyone in the House views drugs as unhealthy, and we wish Canadians would not use or abuse them. Ultimately, we need to get to that next level where we take an evidence-based, health-based approach to drugs. That will start with the Liberal government providing significant funding.

I asked a question today about the fact that 90% of Canadians right now were operating without a new health accord. While the government is negotiating with the provinces, I would ask it to recognize the emergency before us and find money in its budget that can be diverted from other places and put into addictions services. It would be money well spent and it would help save the lives.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Vancouver Kingsway for his work on this, and on the health committee. I had a chance to be part of the clause-by-clause on Bill C-37, and I appreciate all his efforts there.

I want to thank him for raising the comparison to pipelines, which has been made all too often here, that somehow there is a contradiction in trying to save lives and reducing the obstacles to saving lives that can be compared to the reasonable regulatory hurdles for building thousands of kilometres of pipeline across first nations lands, which would threaten every stream it crosses, and the oceans and coastlines that will be traversed by tankers carrying bitumen and diluent, which cannot be cleaned up. I found the comparison distasteful, and I appreciate him dealing with it in the House this afternoon.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, in the spirit of generosity, I understand where the Conservatives are coming from. What they are talking about is the need to have appropriate regulatory processes for the approval of varying projects in our country. However, we would all do well in the House if we viewed the issue before us as one of public health. Although it is tempting to draw on analogies from other areas, I do not think we can really do justice to this issue unless we focus on the fact that the decisions we make today and the steps we take as parliamentarians will have not only an economic impact but one of life or death.

Everybody in the House probably has a family member, a relative, a friend, a colleague or a workmate who has suffered from an addiction. None of us are immune to that. Therefore, let us work together in a spirit of collegiality, look at the evidence, move swiftly, and deal with this very serious social issue, which has been ignored for far too long by every level of government in our country.

• (1645)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's support for real action on addressing the opioid overdose.

My own community of Nanaimo—Ladysmith has seen a tremendous effort by first responders and community organizations that have worked very hard to fill the gap in the failure of federal and provincial leadership.

I hope the member can describe the human cost on the first responder side, and what this government action might do to

alleviate pressure on firefighters, nurses, and community organizations.

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, the front-line workers, the firefighters, police, paramedics, nurses, and volunteers across the country, are nothing short of heroes and heroines for what they have been doing for us. They have been responding to people in the most extreme circumstance, literally when they are dying or dead, and they have been bringing them back to life. They are doing this day after day. These are the people we need to be supporting. Let us do that by moving the bill forward as soon as we can.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, National Defence; the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Rail Transportation; the hon. member for Vancouver East, Foreign Affairs.

[*English*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brampton South.

The bill before is an extremely important one. We have a health crisis, and we need to respond quickly. Our government, with the support of many members in the House, is doing just that.

I would like to begin by extending my sympathy to all those who have lost a friend, neighbour, family member, or co-worker through this crisis.

In the past eight years in Nova Scotia alone there have been over 800 overdoses, and half of those have been due to the use of opioids. This is the situation in Nova Scotia, but the situation is much greater in other provinces. For example, in British Columbia, 900 people lost their lives through overdose in the last year, which is 80% more than in 2015. At a national level, overdoses now outnumber the deaths due to motor vehicle accidents. This gives us an interesting comparison, and shows how sad this crisis is.

This crisis has no boundaries. There is no age, gender, or income factor. This is an addiction; it is an illness. All governments need to respond to this crisis. We have to find the root causes and then find solutions through the most current evidenced-based policies to support that. Addictions can take hold of someone trying to cope with physical or emotional pain.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

The tragic thing about fentanyl is that the drug is so powerful, a minuscule amount can have dramatic effects and even cause death. As little as 30 grams, enough to fill a regular envelope, can cause as many as 15,000 people to die of an overdose.

That is why our government and all members of the House must pass a bill quickly, because every moment counts.

[*English*]

This legislation would roll back changes made by the previous government, the so-called Respect for Communities Act. That legislation added an unnecessary burden on provinces, local governments, and communities in applying for an exception under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to establish a safe consumption site. Bill C-37 would accomplish this by simplifying and streamlining the previous process and its 26 application criteria. That is why only three sites in the last two years have been established under those criteria.

Our government is applying the wisdom of the Supreme Court of Canada, which indicated five important factors: one, evidence on the impact of such facilities on crime rates; two, local communities indicating that there is a need for those types of sites; three, establishing regulatory structures and making sure they are in place to support the sites; four, having the necessary resources; and, five, having communities express support or opposition. That is what is important and what the bill would provide. In addition, whichever applications are denied or approved, the decisions would be made public. It is important that they be public.

[*Translation*]

The fact is that supervised consumption sites save lives. That is the important thing here: they save lives. The Vancouver sites help integrate people with addiction problems into the health system in an environment where they are not judged or stigmatized.

Harm reduction is not our government's only strategy. Our government has made it clear that we will invest \$5 billion in mental health as part of the health agreement.

[*English*]

Prior to 2006, the Government of Canada had a federal drug strategy that had a balanced approach between public health and public safety that included the four key pillars: prevention, treatment, enforcement, and harm reduction. The previous government removed harm reduction as a pillar in our national drug strategy. This was unfortunate, because evidence has shown time and time again that harm reduction strategies are needed to ensure good public health outcomes.

As part of this government's commitment to evidence-based policy-making, the Minister of Health has reinstated harm reduction as a pillar of our strategy.

Along with harm reduction, our government has also eased access to the life-saving overdose treatment naloxone. Canadians can now access this drug antidote without a prescription and we have ensured emergency supplies are available for all Canadians.

In terms of enforcement, the RCMP has been diligently working to try to stop the flow of fentanyl. An agreement was recently reached with China on this issue. Furthermore, under this legislation, the Canada Border Services Agency would have more flexibility to inspect suspicious mail which it believes may contain prohibited goods. This measure would only apply to incoming international

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mail from areas of the world where prevalence of illicit drugs is greater.

In closing, I would like to commend the Minister of Health for her hard work in combatting this crisis and working toward a solution, and her leadership in bringing this legislation forward. I also want to thank members in all parties in the House for their contribution to this debate, as well as the NDP, the Bloc, and the Green Party that have directly supported this bill.

• (1655)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Madam Speaker, in my community what I am hearing is that there are a lot of people who are working on the opioid crisis and who are helping people with addictions but there is no coordinated effort. They are looking for federal leadership. They want this crisis to be declared a public emergency so that all of their efforts can come together in a coordinated way so they can use their resources to help more people. There is a desperate cry in my riding of Essex and also in southwestern Ontario for the federal government to show leadership.

Medical experts have also been clear that there is an alarming lack of access to publicly funded detox and addiction treatment centres. This is very true in my area.

I have heard the minister talk about funding for mental health, but could the member tell me if budget 2017 will contain significant new funding for addiction treatment specifically?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her hard work on this file. I cannot speak for our government with respect to what is going to be in the budget, but I can say that our government has already promised to advance \$5 billion over the next 10 years for health issues.

This bill would clear the way for the government to take immediate steps moving forward. Members must remember that our government has been working with provincial governments and local communities as well to move this forward.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook that there are many positive aspects in Bill C-37 but the real problem with the bill is that it would gut the Respect for Communities Act.

Some say that the criteria in the Respect for Communities Act is too onerous and I disagree with them. Nonetheless, we on this side of the House try to work with the government. We put forward some simple amendments that, for example, would require a letter of support from the local municipality and local police force, an amendment that would require that persons within a two-kilometre radius of a supervised injection site be consulted, and an amendment that would require a 45-day consultation period, given that Bill C-37 would gut the minimum 90-day consultation period.

What could possibly justify the government rejecting all three of these common-sense amendments? Is it really just because the government wants to gut—

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is only five minutes for questions and comments. We cannot be giving speeches during questions and comments. It is very long.

The hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, we have to keep in mind that the Conservative government in the last 10 years did all it could to close these centres and made it so difficult that it was unachievable.

This bill would allow us to move forward quickly and get it done. The debate has been going on for years and it is now time to move forward. This is a first step but there are many steps to take. This is an extremely important first step that will help people on the ground today.

• (1700)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last July, the city of Surrey had more than 60 fentanyl overdoses in a 48-hour stretch. Our office held an emergency summit and we asked all first responders, health care professionals, and members of all parties to come together to come up with a strategy. I am glad that the minister has taken the lead on this.

The hon. member mentioned safe consumption sites. How would safe consumption sites help my riding of Surrey—Newton and the city of Surrey in general? My constituents are asking the government to expedite safe consumption sites.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, research clearly shows that these sites save lives. We plan to do this as quickly as possible.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-37, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related amendments to other acts.

While I am supporting this positive move, I must say I am still deeply troubled by this crisis that continues to hit communities. On a personal note, I was deeply touched after hearing from those affected. As a member of the Standing Committee on Health, I, with my colleagues from all parties, studied this crisis. In fact, we chose to pass a motion to undertake an emergency study of the crisis.

We were all in lockstep with the minister, trying to make a positive difference and to make choices that would save lives. That motivation drove us to work hard, and work together. We worked collectively and openly on this. That is something I am quite proud of and something I have valued in my time as the MP for Brampton South, and as a fellow parliamentarian of all who serve together in this place.

In committee, we heard from wide-ranging front-line perspectives, experts, and from the Minister of Health directly on this. I would like to make particular note of the testimony the committee heard from indigenous peoples on October 25, which I feel was compelling, honest, and a real wake-up call about what we need to do to ensure we address the needs of indigenous communities. For starters, improving access to naloxone treatment, the life-saving medication used in the case of an opioid overdose, was needed for rural and remote first nations in particular. That was a key part of the minister's action plan coming out of the summit, and goes to show what we can do when we consult all communities.

In looking at the bill, I see that Bill C-37 addresses what we heard from the Canada Border Services Agency about practical changes that would help prevent drug-making materials from entering the country. I applaud the minister's work also to check suspicious international mail packages that are 30 grams or less, which could be used to smuggle in any amounts of substances that may cause harm. This is a good precaution to benefit Canadians.

I want to remind colleagues that the bill is the product of hundreds of voices coming together. Our committee members were graciously invited to join in the health minister's summit on this as well. Coming out of the summit, we saw action. In fact, the joint statement of action by 42 organizations to address the opioid crisis was a broad but concrete approach that includes all those involved, from health care providers, to first responders, to educators, to researchers, and to families as well. I want to applaud our Minister of Health, and Ontario's minister of health as well, for leading that conference, which focused on concrete steps and delivering clear results.

Our government has taken action from day one, building on our five-point action plan to address opioid misuse. We have taken concrete steps, such as granting section 56 exemptions for the Dr. Peter Centre and extending the exemption for Insite for an additional four years. We made the overdose antidote naloxone more widely available in Canada. Our government recently approved three safe consumption sites in Montreal that the community asked for.

Further, at the local level, we have seen action already undertaken. In the city of Toronto, the mayor met with the mayor of Vancouver and other officials in order to plan a proactive not reactive response for Ontario as the crisis drifts eastward. The mayor of Hamilton held a discussion about this as well, and other municipalities have been doing the same. I hope more municipalities will reach out, learn from one another, and take proactive measures in their communities.

The numbers and the experts support this as the right way to public health, and it also delivers cost savings. I see how various aspects of the bill address a lot of the concerns we heard at committee and at the opioids summit. While many members have made note of the urgency of passing the bill, I think the majority of members showed time and time again in recent weeks that they were willing to collaborate to move quickly on this.

I want to reassure members that I believe the bill is an extremely collaborative and well-thought-out bill that responds to experts in the field as well as front-line needs. It gives me comfort to know that this bill would make a difference.

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•(1705)

As others have said before, and I agree, we are in a national public health crisis in Canada. In 2016, thousands of Canadians tragically died of accidental opioid overdoses, and more will die this year. Our government and its partners must work together aggressively to save lives.

If people have friends or neighbours who are hearing the Conservatives' argument that facilities like Insite are the wrong approach, I would encourage them to contact me or other members on the health committee who would be happy to provide non-partisan, evidence-based information on why that does not reflect the safe consumption site model we see working already in Canada. All members of this House can agree that our hearts go out to the families and friends affected personally when a loved one has lost his or her life instead of having another chance. Last year in British Columbia alone, more than 900 people died from a drug overdose, an 80% increase from 2015.

This legislation simply proposes to ease the burden on communities that wish to open a supervised consumption site, while putting stronger measures in place to stop the flow of illicit drugs and strengthening the system in place for licensed controlled substances facilities. Experts and stakeholders told the previous government and then told our government that Bill C-2 as it stood was not helping this crisis. That is why we took action to reverse the barriers that were holding back communities that have long been asking for the ability to save their citizens' lives.

We know there is more to be done as we move forward. We know that sadly the situation is getting worse. The deaths from overdoses will now be greater than deaths caused by car accidents. This tragic crisis continues to move eastward in Canada, with increasing drug seizures of fentanyl and carfentanil across the country. We will continue to work with our partners across the country to continue bringing forward evidence-based solutions to save lives and ensure that 2017 is the year that will mark a turn in this national public health crisis.

Many people in Brampton South have asked me about my work on the health committee, and I have mentioned over and over that we all agreed we should turn our focus to this study due to the emergency at hand. They ask me why and they are always engaged when hearing about how we can work together at committee to address real problems and issues that our fellow Canadians face. Again, the way our committee worked together is one of the cherished moments I have of being an MP, and I hope we get more chances to work collaboratively again. This crisis called on us as leaders in our communities and as parliamentarians to take action.

In October 2016, I put forward a motion that the health committee call upon the Minister of Health to move as quickly as possible to conduct a review of the laws and regulations in place with regard to safe injection sites. I suggested that the review have an end goal to improve the health and safety of Canadians, using a strong evidence-based approach. With Bill C-37, I feel the minister and government have responded fully to the motion that the health committee passed in October of last year.

I am proud to be supporting this legislation that would save the lives of Canadians who need our help.

•(1710)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, certainly on this side of the House we have unanimous agreement that we need to work on this challenging problem.

A number of weeks ago in committee, our health critic offered to actually split this bill into two parts to deal with the crisis part and then to work on the issues that we might have some disagreement on. In fact, the parts of the bill that should be implemented could actually be law right now had the Liberal government agreed to do that.

My question has two parts. One, why did the Liberal government not agree to allow us to split the bill into two parts and facilitate the quick movement of this bill? Two, now that the bill is here, why did the Liberals limit debate on this bill for those of us in Parliament who have been elected by our constituents to represent them to be able to give their voice here in Parliament? Why did the Liberals limit debate by closing down debate?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's passion on this issue, but as he heard, 900 lives were lost in Vancouver. This is an urgent matter. We have to take steps. Evidence shows that when properly established and maintained, supervised consumption sites save lives and improve health without negatively impacting the surrounding communities.

Our minister brought forward Bill C-37. I want all members to support this valuable bill so we can save Canadian lives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech on this important bill.

The government is taking the necessary steps to respond to the fentanyl overdose crisis across the country. I think my colleague would agree that our government bases its decisions on facts, science, and sound evidence. That is why we want to support the establishment of supervised consumption sites in cities that want them, because this reduces harm.

I wonder if my colleague could tell the House about other beneficial effects the bill will have on the health and safety of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Speaker, our government made the overdose antidote naloxone more widely available in Canada. It saves Canadians' lives. I appreciate that our Minister of Health took this step.

Last November, the Minister of Health co-hosted a conference on opioid overdose crisis which resulted in 42 organizations bringing forward concrete proposals on their own.

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Our government is also continuing to respond to the tragic crisis in the way that is comprehensive, collaborative, and compassionate. We will continue to work with our partners across the country to continue bringing forward evidence-based solutions to save lives. That is why all members, as well as those across the way, are debating Bill C-37. We are all working together to save Canadians' lives.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague about the situation she has looked at. She indicated there were some 900 deaths in Vancouver. They have injection sites, as has been pointed out by colleagues and others and I just want to also follow up. We still have not received an answer to the question that we have placed multiple times today about why the government did not split the bill. There is about 80% of it that we have agreed with. It could very well have been enacted by now and perhaps saved even more lives, yet the government seems to be against community consultation. I am wondering if she can provide an answer to both of those.

• (1715)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Speaker, we need to have a comprehensive approach in order to face this crisis. This is not the time to play politics. This is a time to act. We need to act urgently.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1750)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 199*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag
Alleslev
Anandasangaree
Arya
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval

Alghabra
Amos
Arseneault
Aubin
Badawey
Bains
Baylis

Beaulieu
Bennett
Bittle
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Bossio
Boulerice
Bratina
Brisson
Caesar-Chavannes
Caron
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chan
Choquette
Cormier
Cuzner
Damoff
DeCoursey
Di Iorio
Dubé
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dusseault
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gameau
Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Grewal
Hardcastle
Harvey
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jolibois
Jones
Jowhari
Khalid
Kwan
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Lemieux
Levitt
Lockhart
Ludwig
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)
Monsef
Morneau
Mulcair
Nantel
Nault
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Ratansi
Robillard
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Sahota
Samson

Beech
Bibeau
Blaikie
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Breton
Brosseau
Cannings
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chen
Christopherson
Cullen
Dabrusin
Davies
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Dubourg
Duguid
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Foote
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Garrison
Gill
Goodale
Graham
Hajdu
Hardie
Hehr
Hughes
Hutchings
Johns
Joly
Jordan
Kang
Khera
Lametti
Lapointe
Laverdière
Lefebvre
Leslie
Lightbound
Longfield
MacGregor
Malcolmson
Marcil
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Saainich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendés
Mihychuk
Morrissey
Murray
Nassif
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Pauzé
Petipas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Rioux
Rodriguez
Rota
Ruimy
Saganash
Saini
Sangha

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sorbara
Spengemann	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Stewart
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Thériault
Tootoo	Trudel
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Virani
Weir	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Zahid— 215	

● (1755)

*[English]***NATIONAL SICKLE CELL AWARENESS DAY ACT**

The House resumed from February 8 consideration of the motion that Bill S-211, An Act respecting National Sickle Cell Awareness Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill S-211.

● (1800)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 200)***NAYS**

Members

Abouttaif	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Arnold	Barlow
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Block
Boucher	Brown
Calkins	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Deltell	Diotte
Doherty	Dreeshen
Egliniski	Falk
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Harder	Hoback
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Lebel
Liepert	Lobb
Lukiwski	Mackenzie
Maguire	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Nater	Nicholson
Obhrai	Poillievre
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Ritz	Saroya
Scheer	Schmale
Shields	Shipley
Sopuck	Stanton
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tilson
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Viersen	Wagantall
Warkentin	Watts
Waugh	Webber
Wong	Yurdiga— 80

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

YEAS

Members

Abouttaif	Albas
Albrecht	Aldag
Alghabra	Alleslev
Allison	Ambrose
Amos	Anandasangaree
Anderson	Arnold
Arseneault	Arya
Aubin	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Barlow
Barsalou-Duval	Baylis
Beaulieu	Beech
Bennett	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block	Boissonnault
Bossio	Boucher
Boudrias	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Bratina
Breton	Brisson
Brosseau	Brown
Caesar-Chavannes	Calkins
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chan	Chen
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Cormier	Cullen
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeCoursey	Deltell
Dhaliwal	Di Iorio
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Drouin
Dubé	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseau	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Egliniski	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Eyolfson	Falk
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Footé
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Fry	Fuhr
Gallant	Garneau
Garrison	Généreux
Genuis	Gerretsen

Private Members' Business

Gill	Gladu
Godin	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Gourde	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardcastle	Harder
Hardie	Harvey
Hehr	Hoback
Holland	Hughes
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Jeneroux
Johns	Jolibois
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kang	Kelly
Kent	Khalid
Khera	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kwan
Lake	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Laverdière	Lebel
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Liepert
Lighthbound	Lobb
Lockhart	Longfield
Ludwig	Lukiwski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maguire
Malcolmson	Maloney
Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
Mathysen	
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Mihychuk	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morneau	Morrissey
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nassif
Nater	Nault
Nicholson	Obhrai
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Pauzé	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Plamondon
Poilievre	Poissant
Quach	Qualtrough
Ramsey	Rankin
Ratansi	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rioux
Ritz	Robillard
Rodriguez	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Ruimy	Rusnak
Saganash	Sahota
Saini	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Saroya	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schiefke
Schmale	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Shields	Shipley
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sopuck
Sorbara	Spengemann
Stanton	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Stewart
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Thériault	Tilson
Tootoo	Trudel

Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vaughan	Viersen
Virani	Wagantall
Warkentin	Watts
Webber	Weir
Whalen	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Wong
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Yurdiga	Zahid — 294

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Health.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

● (1805)

The Speaker: It being 6:04 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

* * *

SYSTEMIC RACISM AND RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear; (b) condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination and take note of House of Commons' petition e-411 and the issues raised by it; and (c) request that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a study on how the government could (i) develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia, in Canada, while ensuring a community-centered focus with a holistic response through evidence-based policy-making, (ii) collect data to contextualize hate crime reports and to conduct needs assessments for impacted communities, and that the Committee should present its findings and recommendations to the House no later than 240 calendar days from the adoption of this motion, provided that in its report, the Committee should make recommendations that the government may use to better reflect the enshrined rights and freedoms in the Constitution Acts, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

She said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues who have stood with me today.

Today I am honoured to speak to my Motion No. 103. This is a motion that seeks to continue the important conversation about how we can strengthen our Canadian fabric by studying systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia, in Canada.

I am a member of Parliament in one of the most diverse ridings in Canada. I like to say that the whole world is represented in my city of Mississauga. We live beside each other as Canadians. We all, in our different ways, contribute to the building of Canada. We all form part of this beautiful Canadian fabric. Our Prime Minister has often said that our diversity is our strength. Our government of today focuses its policies on being inclusive and on leveraging our strengths to the benefit of all of us as a nation.

Private Members' Business

However, when it comes to the ground reality, I often find myself wondering how it is that we can come from so many different places, be of every colour, practice different faiths, and yet collectively, be one of the most peaceful countries in the world. Balancing the interests of such a diverse and dynamic group of people like Canadians requires a lot of work. It requires partnerships between our policy-makers, civil society, which acts as a watchdog, grassroots organizations, which provide programs and services required, and individual Canadians and the respect they have for one another. Without that respect, our society cannot function. Let me be clear. This respect exists, despite Canadians having differences in ideology, skin colour, faith, and so on.

In light of the statistics, the media reports, and the personal stories I hear, I feel that this partnership needs more effort.

Motion No. 103 seeks three things from our government: first, to recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear; second, to condemn all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia; and third, to request that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a study on how the government could develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia, and collect data to contextualize hate crime reports and to conduct a needs assessment for impacted communities.

Racism is not new to Canada. From the struggle of black Canadian communities, to the turning away of the *Komagata Maru* from Canadian shores, to the internment of Japanese, Italian, and Ukrainian Canadians, to discrimination against our Jewish community, exemplified by the actions taken in 1939, when 907 Jewish refugees aboard the German transatlantic liner, the *St. Louis*, were seeking refuge from Nazi Germany. Canada refused to take them in, and the ship sailed back to Europe, where 254 would later die in concentration camps.

This brings us to the historic and ongoing struggle of our indigenous communities, and now, additionally, the targeting of the Muslim community in Canada.

Racism and religious discrimination is a reality. A recent survey commissioned by *The Globe and Mail* and conducted by Nanos Research in 2016 suggests that seven in 10 respondents say that there is still a lot of racism in Canada. One in five have had a racist remark directed at them, and more than one-third have made a racist remark in the company of others.

In 2016 alone, there were cases of discrimination and racism against almost every community in Canada. On September 20, 2016, the University of Alberta woke up to posters put around campus depicting turbaned men of the Sikh faith with racist insults written above them.

●(1810)

In December 2016, in Edmonton, a man went up to two women wearing hijabs. He then pulled a rope from his pocket, tied the rope into a noose, and said, "This is for you".

In November of the same year, swastikas and racist slurs were spray-painted on a church in Ottawa that had a black pastor. "Go

home" was spray-painted on the front doors of the Ottawa Muslim Association. Anti-Semitic slurs were spray-painted on synagogues.

Statistic Canada's most recent hate crime data from 2014 shows a doubling of hate crimes perpetuated against Muslims over a three-year period. Many Muslim Canadians have told me personally that they do not feel safe practising their faith here in Canada.

When I tabled Motion No. 103, not even in my wildest imagination would I have envisioned the Quebec terrorist attack, where six Canadians lost their lives for the simple reason that they were practising their faith.

When over 69,000 Canadians came together to call on our government to act on Islamophobia through e-petition 411, sponsored by the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, it was a signal to me that we need to act.

The first step toward engaging in these conversations of inclusion is to recognize that we have a problem. Words have impact. When we as a government stand together and condemn intolerance manifested through racism and religious discrimination, we can begin to tackle the issue.

I have been asked by some to change the wording of my motion to remove "Islamophobia" and other references. I will not do so any more than I would speak of the Holocaust and not mention that the overwhelming majority of victims were six million followers of the Jewish faith and that anti-Semitism was the root cause of the Holocaust. We cannot address a problem if we fail to call it by its true name.

What is Islamophobia? The most commonly used definition, and the one I ascribe to, is that Islamophobia is the irrational hatred of Muslims that leads to discrimination. With that definition in mind, I find it hard to believe that any member of the House would vote against a motion that condemns this.

I cannot believe that some Canadians are practitioners of Islamophobia. There are certainly a small, and unfortunately growing, number of individuals who are driven by dark motivations to commit acts of violence or even murder to silence or marginalize Canadians who ascribe to certain beliefs and values.

I would like to address the question of freedom of speech, which is a central and dearly held Canadian value protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The passage of my motion will do nothing to affect the status of the charter, despite many allegations to the contrary. To suggest that my motion, the aim of which is to initiate a study of systemic racism and religious discrimination in Canada, could possibly impact the freedom of speech enjoyed by Canadians demonstrates a lack of understanding of how our charter works.

Private Members' Business

A study of systemic racism and religious discrimination would bolster the state of freedom of speech in Canada by making certain that all voices are able to be heard on a level playing field. In essence, this study would shed light on areas in which the freedom of speech of Canadians belonging to racial and religious minorities is currently curtailed. The freedom of speech of all Canadians is strengthened by studies such as the one proposed by the motion, because having access to the experiences and wisdom of all Canadians makes our society, culture, and economy stronger. To recognize where we currently have a blind spot, where we “other” certain Canadian voices, can only result in an enrichment of our multicultural, secular national conversation.

• (1815)

To tackle this issue, we must go to our partners, our civil society, our grassroots organizations, and individual Canadians to assess the impact of racism and religious discrimination on Canadians. I propose that these conversations take place in the context of a formal study that brings everyone to the table and provides them with an opportunity to raise their voice.

It is not about one race over another. It is not about one religion over another. Hate does not discriminate. I am sure the black community, the Jewish community, the aboriginal community, the Sikh community, and many more communities feel what their brothers and sisters of the Muslim faith feel today. The reality is that none of us are immune. None of our communities are exempt from this sort of prejudice, bigotry, racism, and discrimination. This motion is about strengthening our country. It is about finding ways to work together to build on our diversity as our strength.

I ask all members of the House to join with me and pass this motion so the committee can conduct a fulsome study of systemic racism, religious discrimination, and Islamophobia. I would expect the committee to call witnesses from all affected communities as well as hear from experts both in the field of evidence gathering and from those who can offer potential solutions through greater education and understanding.

This motion was never meant to be a divisive one, and I am indeed sorry that some have tried to turn the intent of the motion into something that it is not. The motion would not expand or change the Criminal Code in any way. The intention of the motion is to show all Canadians that Parliament is united in its opposition to all forms of discrimination that weaken our Canadian fabric.

I look forward to the support of all members of the House.

• (1820)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned at the end of her speech that she would like to see Parliament come together. She had a chance to amend the motion in some very minor ways that would have allowed for perhaps near unanimous support in the House for her motion, but she chose not to do that.

Could the member tell us why she and/or the PMO have resisted an opportunity to bring Canadians together on this very important issue?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Speaker, the wording of the motion as it stands today is supported by members of the House from across

party lines. The wording of the motion as it stands today is supported by organizations all across Canada. It is supported, as it stands today, by Canadians at large all across Canada. Watering down the language of the motion will not be in the best interest of Canadians.

I really would like to address the concerns raised by the member and his colleagues, and I would like to see the committee study these issues as presented.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my past work, I worked in an organization that served newcomers to Canada. A big part of what we did was work in our community around strengthening the bonds of multiculturalism.

When one lives in a community as I did in Campbell River, when somebody showed up who looked a little different, people noticed very quickly. I was always very heartened by the fact that so many people would call our office when they saw people who looked a little different. They wanted to ensure they were connected to my organization and were getting the support they needed.

It is also very important that we look at the reality that Islamophobia is a growing discrimination in our country today, and we need to address it.

How does the member think the study will impact the Muslim community, and how does she envision the study assisting the broader issues of systemic racism and religious discrimination?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Speaker, it is so important to engage in conversations to recognize a problem and to tackle that problem. Through this motion, I think by recognizing Islamophobia and then a call to action would really help Canadians come together. It would create a dialogue among our policy-makers, our civil society, our grassroots organizations, and Canadians at large, because the more we get to know each other, the more we realize that we are more the same than we are different.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her eloquent speech and strong advocacy on this issue.

I want to get a sense from her as to the last two months and what kind of responses she has had as the member moving this motion. What kind of reaction has she received from the Muslim community, as well as all the other communities across the country, particularly against her? I know the personal toll it has had on her over the last few weeks. I would like to get a sense of how that has impacted her vision on this motion.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Speaker, I can say that the past few weeks have been a great learning experience. When my staff and I were going over the wording of the motion, the first people we went to were those with our grassroots organizations. We consulted them to see how they felt about it. I am very happy to report that I have letters of endorsement from my local synagogue, from my local mosque, and from our Christian communities in Mississauga—Erin Mills and all across Canada. The support has been overwhelming. It has really humbled me.

Yes, there has been some negative criticism and some hatred directed toward me and some of my colleagues, which only strengthens my resolve that this is something that we are going to champion together.

Private Members' Business

•(1825)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be here today to talk to Motion No. 103. My colleague and I have served together on the subcommittee on human rights, and I respect her commitment to these issues. However, we disagree on some points of her motion.

For those of us who have worked on issues of religious freedom, there is nothing worse than to hear of a faith community attacked simply because of who they are and because of the faith they hold. This is much too common around the world. We were reminded that we are not immune when we heard of the massacre in Quebec City, and the killing of people as they were praying.

I come to this discussion as a person of faith. Like so many other Canadians, my faith informs my life at every point. I know there are millions of Canadians, of many different faith groups, who live more confidently because of their faith. However, that does not always mean that we are always understood by the culture around us. Holding to a faith perspective often puts people at odds with the world around us. To hold a different perspective from our neighbour is to run the risk of being misunderstood. We live in a country made up of people from around the globe, from over 150 different cultures, histories, and beliefs. In the past, we have bridged those gaps. This has been done by insisting that each person has the right to believe or not believe, as he or she chooses, without coercion. He or she has the right to live out those beliefs, and has the right, and I would argue the obligation, to communicate those beliefs. The right to religious freedom and belief and the freedom of speech go hand in hand. When we find language that clarifies our perspective to others, we stand a chance of being understood and our issues being explainable to those who hold a different viewpoint. That is how we come to an understanding and acceptance of the fact that others can hold very different beliefs than we do. When we understand those differences, they are no longer threatening to us but actually complement what we are as a nation.

We have over one million Muslims in this country who are a part of the Canadian fabric. They have been here for decades. Generations have lived in Canadian society. Many live alongside their neighbours, who perhaps do not even know that they are Muslim. First, they are neighbours and then they are friends.

In the last few years, the events in the Middle East and around the world, including here in Canada, have put a new focus on Islam. One thing that is obvious is that not all Muslims, and indeed not every Muslim in Canada, hold the same views. When people see what is happening around the globe, they want to know more. They want to hear more information. They want explanations. This is where we find ourselves. The radical few are making a lot of trouble for everyone else. They have been successful in creating an atmosphere where both Muslims and non-Muslims are uncomfortable and fearful. As a country, we need to find long-term solutions to those divisions. However, to find solutions we need clarity. We need to be able to talk clearly.

That leads us to today and to Motion No. 103, which is highlighting one religion in particular but without clear language on what that means. It is unfortunate that this motion does not encourage conversation, because in the content of the motion the

focus is on one term, Islamophobia. This is a word that we see often but one that many people are uncomfortable with because they do not know what it includes. In Motion No. 103, Islamophobia has been left undefined. People do not know what it means in this motion. It is not good enough for it to go to committee to be defined there, as the mover suggested yesterday. It was her responsibility or the responsibility of the PMO when it wrote this motion to define it if their intention was other than to play some sort of political game with it. No one knows how the word is defined in Motion No. 103 because we do not know what the mover intended. She tried to lay a bit of a definition out for us tonight. That is unfortunate, but not surprising, because there is no consensus on the meaning of the word in Motion No. 103. Is it so inclusive that it covers any and all criticisms of Islam?

There are many in the radical community who are trying to use this phrase as a catch-all. Does it allow for the asking of difficult questions? It sounds silly, but I have been to seminars where people were told they did not have the right to ask probing questions because that would mean that they were defining another religion in some way. Is “Islamophobia”, in Motion No. 103, only referring to the extreme hatred that we see as mosques are desecrated and people are killed? If that is the definition, Canadians can clearly understand that. However, because of the lack of a definition, this term can be applied differently depending on the priority of the user. Some apply the term to only serious acts of hostility, while others apply it to every critique and every act against Islam. Canadians have been confused by this and have been contacting all of our offices. I know every member in this Parliament has heard from their constituents, who are asking such questions as, “Is the term meant to inform us or intimidate us? Does it encourage free speech or is it shutting it down?” We cannot answer those questions because we do not know what is meant in the motion.

•(1830)

This word is a conversation stopper and it needs to be set aside. We do a disservice to actual victims and their families when we describe what happened to them with the same word that we use to describe insulting language. Those attacks are not on the same level. Let us not describe them that way.

As Conservatives, we have focused on these issues for years. That is why we established the office of religious freedom to protect religious expression around the world. It was working well until the Liberal government shut it down.

We wanted to make this motion work. We went to the member opposite and suggested amendments. A simple change to amend it to say “hatred against Muslims” rather than “Islamophobia” would have made it much clearer. Everyone can understand that. They know what those terms mean. We did that so that this motion could be supported unanimously, if possible, but it was refused by the member, or by the PMO.

Private Members' Business

Why not change it to easily describe what we are trying to address? Would that not have allowed us to have a mature debate? The mover, who should want this more than any of us, refused our suggestions, and so we are stuck with this version. We are stuck with a divisive term that means nothing, or everything, which is not clearly defined. It is of little value in the debate about the role of Islam in Canada. That is unfortunate, because this motion could have set a new direction. It could have set us on the path to talking together, to walking together, and to working together. Perhaps it would have been easier to pretend that all is well and say nothing other than we oppose Islamophobia, but that leaves too many things unresolved, especially around issues of free speech.

This has a lot of people concerned. We are hearing from people across the spectrum. Moderate Muslims are left without the kind of comfort they need to have. The Canadian public that is interested in this issue has no safe place to take their questions and concerns. They are becoming reluctant to ask questions publicly because they do not know what they will be accused of. That is not healthy for our country. It is time we began to talk about these issues in much more mature terms.

If Liberals are using Islamophobia as a political football, they are not serving Canadians well. While they may be thinking they will get some sort of short-term political gain in passing this motion, the reality is this is not addressing the issue at a level necessary to deal with Canadians' concerns.

We need to have an open conversation in this country in order to support and promote the right of people of faith to live safely. To do that we need to have the freedom to speak clearly, openly, and in well-defined terms. The road to stress and persecution comes through the failure to communicate and to identify and protect safe spaces to have these discussions.

This debate tonight and the one tomorrow give us the opportunity to rise above clichés and to engage in a real debate about the future of religious freedom, free speech, and the place of religious communities in that conversation.

This is not just theoretical. I have worked with MPs from around the world on these issues. I have a friend, a Muslim MP, who is a moderate in a modern, democratic country. He is using his voice in his country to speak to these issues of what Islam is and is not. Because of his courage, he is under constant threat, under police protection because radicals do not want him speaking. To them he is an Islamophobe; to his constituents he is speaking on the issues of religious freedom and free speech.

Let us elevate this debate so that we can begin to deal with these issues in Canada maturely. If we do not, we will pay a heavy price in division and conflict. We have the opportunity to avoid that, so let us do it. Otherwise, we will be allowing a small group of ideologues who are trying to cause trouble around the globe, and a small group of people in our own country who hate for no reason to have their way, to drive a wedge between moderate Muslims and the Canadian public, both of whom reject the hatred that we saw two weeks ago.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak on Motion No. 103, racism and religious discrimination. I sincerely wish I could go to the heart of the matter, to speak on the intentions of this motion. Sadly, I rise

today amidst a growing campaign asking members of the House to reject the motion.

I want to address some of the concerns now, stand up, and speak truthfully. It is unfortunate that there is so much misinformation surrounding Motion No. 103. There is a growing world where alternative facts are presented as reality. It is very important that we take our responsibilities seriously to understand the motion before us today. However, so-called media venues are bending facts and creating an environment of fear that can create hate. I hope all members of the House stand against so-called alternative facts that are based in fear and not in fact.

These truth-bending facts have promoted fear that this motion would suppress freedom of speech, emphasize one religion ahead of another, and create a media ban, just to name a few. These are falsehoods, so let us break it down.

The “M” stands for “Motion”. Motions are symbolic in nature. They do not impose any legal obligation on the part of the government. They simply indicate to the government that they have the moral support of the House. Motion No. 103 is not even written in a format that directly suggests any clear legislative action. This motion only asks to carry out an assessment. It is asking the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for context and recommendations on the state of systemic racism and religious discrimination in Canada in order to reduce it.

I want to pause here, because this motion asks for context and recommendation of the state of all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination in Canada. Asking a committee to explore the state of these important issues makes this completely in conformity with the charter. It is compliant.

As a party that supports freedom of speech, we believe that we should be encouraging a vigorous debate and discussions about issues, including Islamophobia. Some have suggested that this motion would limit our ability to debate or censure discussion. As a motion, it cannot do that, and, notably, that is neither the intent nor the consequence of Motion No. 103.

I have been very touched and inspired by the members of the Muslim community, who opened the doors of their mosques to have members of the broader community enter and learn more about their Muslim faith. This is an example of opening doors and building bridges, rather than closing doors. I would like to stress the importance of doing everything we can to protect and maintain our democracy and essential freedoms.

The reality is that Canada has experienced an increase in numbers of targeted attacks toward Muslims. The recent attack in Quebec City, where members of the Muslim community were killed and many wounded in their place of worship, is a stark reminder that we need to stand together against racism and discrimination. Any form of violence or discrimination against a specific community is unacceptable in our country.

Private Members' Business

The incidence of anti-Muslim hate crimes, or incidents reported to the NCCM, the police, or in the media, has risen sharply since 2015. That some do not seem to understand or want to understand Islamophobia is shocking to me. Are they not aware of the gradual increase of verbal attacks and attacks on property over the last four years?

It is very important that we also remind people that some brothers and sisters of the Muslim faith are visibly apparent, especially some Muslim women, in the risk that they take by just practising their faith. We are not stepping up to say, "In Canada, we will not be okay with this." We need to do that in the House. We need to take that leadership.

Fighting against these discriminations is a profound way to protect our most cherished and fundamental values as Canadians. New Democrats hope this motion is an opportunity to reach out, give voice to impacted communities, and start a dialogue. We can build more inclusive communities.

• (1835)

It offers an opportunity for all parties to work together on an issue that concerns the very fabric of our country. The NDP is committed to multiculturalism and we would be pleased to play a positive role in the upcoming study.

Let us be clear. This is a worldwide issue that is broader than Trump's latest action of putting up a Muslim ban, one that is impacting Canadian citizens as we have recently seen.

In Canada, there are about 100 active white power organizations. These have been re-energized and welcome divisive rhetoric. Twitter users can self-identify as white nationalists and neo-Nazis have grown 600% since 2012, according to a new study by George Washington University's program on extremism.

Death threats, physical harm, and property destruction have become a sombre norm for many and this for partaking peacefully in Canadian society. We cannot be complacent. We cannot be fearful. We must stand together against this current global climate of hate, fear, and violence.

Our multicultural society will only flourish in a context of cultural diversity whereby religious discrimination is clearly unacceptable. Let us rather confront these types of discrimination head-on and make progress together.

This motion is about addressing the issue directly. I want to express my deepest thanks to the communities across Canada that circled the mosques in our country to provide a sense of safety when people went back to their holy place after the Quebec terror attacks. This was a true testament to Canadian values of safety and inclusion.

I thank the mosques that have opened their doors to share their beliefs with Canadians across Canada. This action is one, again, that opens doors to have conversations and to grow understanding. We cannot let fear be our guide. I hope Canadians will choose openness and curiosity instead.

In my last job, one of the things we did was open very meaningful conversations. We held dialogues and community circles, where diversity would come together and have open conversations, places

where we could actually ask those questions that were sometimes hard to ask.

One unfortunate thing was when the then Conservative government took the funding of immigrant services back from the provinces. We found there was no support to continue that very important work, of working in communities one by one, to bring diverse groups together to have meaningful conversations, to build those bridges.

I hope that out of the research done at the committee, one of the things we identify is the need to give some support to those organizations that bring diverse people together to have those really meaningful conversations. That is how we build a Canada of which we can all be proud, one of which we have a long history.

Let us do that work together. I hope to see everyone stand in this place, stand up against Islamophobia and support the motion.

• (1840)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Motion No. 103, introduced by the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills. The motion calls on the House to recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear, and condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination.

The motion calls on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to study how to develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing systemic discrimination and racism, including Islamophobia, and report back to this chamber.

The standing committee would make recommendations to better reflect our enshrined rights and freedoms, examine how the government should collect data on hate crimes, and conduct needs assessments for impacted communities.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), I am proud to state in this chamber that our government supports Motion No. 103. I am proud to stand here today to recognize the importance of overcoming all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination in Canada, in particular, the pressing issue of Islamophobia, with a view to building a more equitable society grounded in the important values of inclusion and acceptance.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world. In our country, people from all backgrounds, including immigrants and refugees, from around the globe, live and work side by side and contribute to today's rich and magnificent mosaic. I am a product of our great national experiment as I am a Muslim refugee from Uganda who arrived here about 45 years ago. Today, I am a parliamentarian. The member for Mississauga—Erin Mills is also a product of a culturally diverse and pluralistic Canada, just like our colleagues born abroad who come from no less than 41 different countries.

Our nation is composed of people from many countries, with many religions, many languages, many races, and many cultures. This is a place where Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Christians, and members of many other religious groups live together in solidarity. This is a nation of proud francophone and anglophone communities, speakers of a large number of aboriginal languages, and of other citizens whose mother tongue is neither French nor English.

Our country continues to change and diversify. By 2036, it is expected that more than 30% of working-age Canadians will be made up of non-whites, or of members of a visible minority. It is even estimated that this percentage could climb to roughly 65% in Toronto and more than 60% in Vancouver.

I am emphasizing our diversity not to reiterate well-known facts about our multicultural population, but to point out that we owe the success we have enjoyed since Confederation to our diversity.

People from diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds and very different religious beliefs have contributed to Canada's success over the 150 years since Confederation.

• (1845)

[*English*]

Yet, significant challenges remain. The terrorist attack that occurred at a Quebec mosque on January 29 was a tragic reminder of the persistence of hate in our society, and how such hatred can have deadly consequences. As a Muslim Canadian and as a member of this chamber, my initial reaction to the shootings was shock and horror, followed by rage and anger, and eventually mourning for the senseless loss of innocent lives. Indeed, Canadians of all backgrounds are still grieving across the country. Our hearts go out to the victims and their families.

This incident should not be viewed in isolation. It must be seen in context, and that context is one of growing intolerance fuelled in part by the politics of division where groups have driven wedge issues in an attempt to divide the electorate for partisan gain.

I reject outright the characterization by the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands that some members of the Liberal Party have been responsible for this politicization. Our party and our government stand against the politics of division.

Growing intolerance has manifested in escalating actions. Take, for example, the appearance of racist posters targeting members of the Sikh community that surfaced in Alberta. Subsequent to the Quebec terror attack, we have witnessed anti-Semitic graffiti in Ottawa, and Islamophobic insults hurled at passengers on the

Toronto transit system. These incidents cast a shadow on our reputation as a peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive society, and remind us of the vital need for initiatives such as Motion No. 103.

They are a reminder, as the member for Louis-Hébert put it so passionately in this chamber two weeks ago, that we must never be complacent in the face of racism and discrimination. Instead, we must confront it, in all its forms. Canadians have started to do so.

In the wake of the horrible shootings in Quebec, we have also seen a broad outpouring of solidarity, support, and compassion from Canadians across the country. We have seen thousands braving freezing temperatures to mourn the innocent loss of life at vigils. We have seen Jews and Christians gather to form circles of protection around mosques to give worshippers a sense of safety and security for their Friday Jumu'ah prayers. We have seen, in my very own riding of Parkdale—High Park, the development of inter-faith dialogue groups to better understand one another's religions, in the hope of breaking down barriers.

However, fostering the inclusive and compassionate Canada we aspire to, where difference is not only tolerated but celebrated requires vigilance. It requires a re-dedication to the task of rooting out systemic racism and religious discrimination, which is precisely what the motion seeks to do. However, this attempt at remaining vigilant has come up against a few objections, which I will turn to now.

The first is that condemning Islamophobia will serve to limit the freedom of speech of those who have genuine concerns about Islam and its tenets.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing in this motion that would curb or limit the constitutionally protected right to freedom of expression guaranteed under section 2b of the charter.

Let me go further. I know that we, as Canadians, will never be able to truly overcome intolerance, and build a more inclusive country unless we are to have candid, open, and respectful discussions about the challenges presented by a changing and rapidly diversifying population, and pose honest questions.

As a Muslim, I have asked those questions myself, and I pose them regularly to religious leaders in my own community.

Make no mistake, Motion No. 103 is not about limiting respectful discussion. It is about curbing hatred. Motion No. 103 is about all members of this House standing up and affirming that racism and discrimination, whether toward Muslims, Jews, Black Canadians, indigenous groups, or any others, runs contrary to the values we hold dear as Canadians.

In this context, I want to address the plethora of misinformation and fearmongering about Motion No. 103 circulating on social media. This motion is not about bringing Sharia law to Canada. Such statements are pure conjecture and should be rejected out of hand because they lack any merit.

Private Members' Business

On top of the erroneous information circulating on social media, it is the abuse that we have witnessed which concerns me. The online attacks that are circulating about this motion are just that, attacks. They illustrate, quite directly, the climate of hatred, which this motion recognizes. These online attacks constitute abuse and insults meant to intimidate and shut down discussion, not promote it.

Our government wants to have a discussion, because discussion is vital to building a more inclusive country. By calling for a parliamentary committee to study systemic racism, Motion No. 103 fosters freedom of expression. It does not limit it.

The second objection we have heard, and we heard it again this evening, is that this motion is flawed because it singles out the vague term Islamophobia for special consideration. I have several responses to this.

First, reaching a resolution on this matter is not a question of the PMO's approval. It is a private member's motion brought forward by the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills. We have heard her response this evening. Let me reiterate her response on why Islamophobia is important to enumerate.

First, understanding what we mean by Islamophobia is not difficult. When we speak about Islamophobia, we are not talking about legitimate questions about a religion or a respectful criticism of religious practices. When we speak about Islamophobia, we are talking about taking a stand against prejudice, against abuse, against discrimination targeted toward individuals for no reason other than the fact that they practise Islam.

Second, singling out a particular religion has precedence. As the member for Wellington—Halton Hills has observed, this House has a long tradition of passing motions denouncing discrimination and hatred against particular groups, such as Jews, Yazidis, Egyptian Coptic Christians.

Third, the motion enumerates Islamophobia because words matter. It is incumbent on us, as parliamentarians, to use words which accurately depict and call out by name the intolerance we are observing, and that we are honest with the facts, which show an overall increase in the number of hate crimes in this country against Muslims.

While all of us in this chamber stand opposed to all instances of racism and discrimination, 24 days after six Muslim men were gunned down in cold blood in a mosque simply because of their religion, it is incumbent upon this government and this Parliament to signal to Canadians that we recognize that there is an acute problem with anti-Muslim sentiment, and that we are committed to working steadfastly to address it. If we cannot call out Islamophobia now, at this junction, when will it ever be appropriate do so.

Our government supports Motion No. 103. I do, and I urge all members of this House to do the same.

• (1850)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I address Motion No. 103, I will attempt to draw upon two sources of experience that may be relevant. First, I was the chair of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human

Rights from 2008 to 2015. Second, I co-chaired the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Anti-Semitism in 2010 and 2011.

Let me start by noting the very close textural relationship between Motion No. 103, which we are debating today, and the Conservative Party's motion, which we will be debating tomorrow. Both condemn all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination. Both use identical language to instruct the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to undertake a study on hate crime and to seek out ways of reducing or eliminating discrimination. Both instruct the committee to report back to the House in 240 days.

The two motions differ in only three particulars.

First, the Conservative motion condemns racism, religious intolerance, and discrimination against all of Canada's largest religious groups: Muslims, Jews, Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus, while Motion No. 103 mentions only Islam by name.

Second, the focus of Motion No. 103 is on the undefined term Islamophobia rather than on protecting Muslims as individuals. This implies that what Canada needs is state protection for faiths rather than for the safety of the faithful.

Finally, the Conservative motion specifically names, as the paradigmatic example of impermissible hatred, what it describes as "the recent and senseless violent acts at a Quebec City mosque". This wording reiterates that it is the faithful who must be protected rather than the faiths they profess, since eternal truth is under the protection of an almighty and all-loving protector far more powerful than the Government of Canada.

Based on these distinctions, I will be voting against Motion No. 103 in favour of the alternative motion which we will be debated tomorrow.

The contrast between these two motions is reminiscent of a similar contrast between the motions considered during the course of a decade-long debate at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

In 1999, Pakistan introduced a motion calling for all UN member states to take measures in their domestic law to ban the defamation of religions. Pakistan's motion went through a number of incarnations. Initially it referred only to Islamophobia, but as time went on, reference was made to other religions as well. For example, the 2009 version condemned the defamation of religion as a human rights violation and authorized an annual report "on all manifestations of defamation of religions and in particular, on the serious implications of Islamophobia".

Pakistan's set of motions met with consistent opposition from many democracies, including both Canada and the United States, and from many civil liberties groups as well. Human rights groups pointed out that this measure could have the effect of authorizing or even mandating domestic blasphemy laws, with citizens of any complying state potentially being found guilty in their domestic courts of blaspheming against religions in which they had never been participants or believers.

Private Members' Business

As well, in 2007, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, himself a Muslim, reported back that the special and isolated reference to Islam in the motion was widely seen as creating what he referred to as “the hierarchization of forms of discrimination”.

Eileen Donahoe's critique of the motion is also worth repeating. She was President Obama's ambassador to the United Nations. She said:

We cannot agree that prohibiting speech is the way to promote tolerance, and because we continue to see the “defamation of religions” concept used to justify censorship, criminalization, and in some cases violent assaults and deaths of political, racial, and religious minorities around the world.

In 2011, this deadlock was broken when the United States and Pakistan co-authored a new resolution which was adopted as Resolution 16/18, under the title, “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion or belief.” It is a long but comprehensive title.

Resolution 16/18 bears the same relationship to the Pakistani delegation's previous motions that the motion we will be debating tomorrow bears to Motion No. 103, which we are debating today.

This episode reminds us that freedom of religion and freedom of speech are not opposed concepts. It is no accident that they are protected side-by-side in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

● (1855)

Section 2 of the charter reads as follows:

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:
 - (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
 - (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
 - (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
 - (d) freedom of association.

We cannot have one of these freedoms unless the others are protected in equal measure. We cannot have freedom of religion without having the ability to try to convince others to share in one's thoughts and beliefs and therefore to abandon the religion, or absence of religion, to which they presently adhere. We cannot have freedom of religion if we cannot assemble peacefully to pray, whether that be in a church, a mosque, a synagogue, or a public place. We cannot have freedom of religion if we cannot associate with other like-minded individuals.

To better make the point about the spirit that lies behind tomorrow's motion, and to distinguish it more clearly from Motion No. 103, let me now turn to the classic jurisprudence on the issue of the relationship between speech and safety, which comes from the Supreme Court of the United States in its 1919 ruling in *Schenck v. United States*. Speaking for the unanimous court, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the following:

The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic.... The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature as to create a clear and present danger that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent.

In other words, it is when, and only when, speech is a form of action, and when that action itself would be a criminal offence, that speech may be prohibited by law.

By the way, lest anyone regard the reference to “shouting fire in a theatre” as being merely a rhetorical flourish, I should point out that Justice Holmes was referring to a real-life event: the fatal stampede that occurred after someone shouted “fire” at a party in a crowded community hall in Calumet, Michigan on Christmas Eve, 1913. This disaster, which killed 73 people, was disturbingly similar to the mosque shooting in Quebec City, and it is correctly regarded to this day as the worst act of mass murder in Michigan's history.

I should point out as well that there are practical dangers in developing new categories of legislated impermissible speech, as opposed to legitimate bans on the kind of speech that constitutes criminal incitement.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Ernst Zundel was able to turn his serial prosecutions on charges of inciting hate to generate far more publicity than would otherwise have been possible for so marginal, and frankly, contemptible and laughable a character. Had he simply been ignored, it would have been better for the cause of openness in Canada. Indeed, he was able to use this publicity, this notoriety, to turn himself into a sort of media celebrity. Similarly, the existence of laws in Weimar Germany against the defamation of religions, including Judaism, did nothing to slow down the rise of the Nazis.

Seven years ago, this fact led me, along with other Conservative members of Parliament on the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism, to disagree with our Liberal colleagues, who wanted to expand the definition of hate speech. We believed it would be very counterproductive. I believed that in 2011, and my goal was to find ways to combat hatred against Jews. I believe that today, in the context of the debate taking place just weeks after this country's worst ever act of hatred against Muslims.

Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are united concepts. Embracing all religions, allowing ourselves to speak freely about them, and ensuring the protection of individuals to practice their faith is the best way forward.

I encourage all members to vote against Motion No. 103 and in favour of the motion that will be debated in the House tomorrow.

● (1900)

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Motion No. 103, a private member's motion put forward by the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills. I congratulate her for the work she has done to bring forward the motion.

Motion No. 103 asks the government to undertake a study looking at ways of reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination, including Islamophobia. The key points of the motion are to tackle systemic racism and religious discrimination.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let us start with systemic racism. Systemic racism exists whenever the system itself is designed or came about to inherently discriminate against one people. If a barrier is in place, some people say we should reach over the barrier and bring people to the other side, but tackling systemic racism and discrimination means removing the barrier.

My own family's history has been touched by the fight against systemic racism. More than 50 years ago, my mother, Gloria Leon Baylis, a young black immigrant from Barbados, was denied a job because of her skin colour, because of her race. When that happened, she did not throw a rock through a window at night or write graffiti on a wall. No, she took them to court. She found a young Jewish lawyer, who told her he would stand with her and take on the case. Remember that this was over 50 years ago, when such discrimination was commonplace and, quite frankly, accepted.

Her case would take over 12 years to be settled, and when it was done and she won, the perpetrators were fined the measly sum of \$25, some \$25 for a 12-year case. However, the case was never about money. Her case would be the first in Canada to be fought and won against racial discrimination in the workplace. After that, it would no longer be legal in Canada to deny someone employment strictly because of their race.

I am very proud that my mother, a woman with an indomitable spirit, helped shape our nation by taking down the systemic racism in employment. This is what removing barriers is all about. Unfortunately, the battle is not over. To this day, the highest number of hate crimes are those against black Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I will stop here and continue on later.

• (1905)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have seven minutes remaining when the motion comes forward again.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise two nights in a row for the late show, along with my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. I will give him a chance to reiterate his comments from last night. I understand the answer was provided to the October 26 debate, in which I first raised this question, to the question I raised yesterday, which was October 27. Today's question is about the transparency of the government as it relates to what our troops are doing in Iraq.

So far, the government has put a veil of secrecy around what our troops are doing in Operation Impact in Iraq. It really does play to this overall level of control that we have not witnessed of the government in controlling the flow of information about our military back to Canadians and Parliament, so that we can do our job as opposition and hold the government to account, which is a fundamental role of making sure that our parliamentary democracy works.

I know the parliamentary secretary last night wanted to talk about all the technical briefings the government has done. In less than a year and a half, when the Conservatives were government back in 2014-15, 19 technical briefings were held on what the troops were doing and what the air force was doing in the combat mission against ISIS in support of our allies, including the Kurds and the Iraqi security forces. Canadians were able to see the benefit of our troops being in theatre.

There have only been four technical briefings in a year and a half, since the government came to power. We appreciate those technical briefings when they happen, but we were also told at the last technical briefing that took place that for operational security reasons, the government is no longer going to be sharing this information.

We know for a fact that this mission, which was an air combat mission, was expanded into a training mission. The Liberals pulled our CF-18s out of the fight against ISIS. We were supportive of having more boots on the ground to do the advise and assist, the command and control, and the training to work with our Kurdish peshmerga partners and Iraqi security forces, among other allies, in getting rid of ISIS. As we witness today, it is paying off in multitudes by pushing ISIS out of Mosul and Iraq.

We know that our troops are doing more. Images have come from the front line showing Canadian troops, not in an advise and assist role anymore but actually providing cover by using anti-tank weaponry to stop any attacks coming at the peshmerga or Iraqi positions as they are pushing ISIS out of Mosul. All of these images are getting posted through other media means, whether it is social media, Iraqi television, or other foreign media sources. Canadians expect more transparency from the government, not a veil of secrecy, not the iron fist over the dome of silence, to tell Canadians what a great job our troops are doing and the risks that they are taking.

It is important that the Liberal government share the facts with Canadians so that we know what our troops are doing and whether we can hold the government to account.

• (1910)

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to discuss Operation Impact.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

Let me explain our mission. I will be completely transparent. Our government decided to invest \$1.6 billion in security, stabilization, humanitarian aid, and development assistance in that region. The work Canadian Armed Forces members are doing in carrying out that mission is very difficult, and I am extremely proud of what they have accomplished so far.

Thanks to their tireless work and dedication, they have played an important role in making the Iraqi security forces more effective in the fight against Daesh.

Since fall 2014, our special forces personnel have trained more than 2,000 members of the Iraqi special forces. Our military personnel are there to advise and assist the security forces. Our personnel are advising Iraqi security forces on their operational and tactical planning. We are also providing Iraqi security forces with key tools such as increased intelligence capabilities.

Since October, Iraqi security forces have been actively engaging Daesh in their campaign to liberate Mosul. To date, Iraqi security forces have retaken approximately 62% of the territory once controlled by Daesh in Iraq and have liberated 115 cities and towns. Our advise and assist role has become increasingly important to the Iraqi security forces' success.

On top of those efforts, we have increased our intelligence capability in order to better protect our forces and our partners' forces. We have also deployed Griffon helicopters to transport troops and equipment. In addition, we will continue to support the air task force by conducting air-to-air refuelling sorties and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions.

In terms of medical assistance, we are proud to say that beginning in November 2016, the Canadian Armed Forces assumed the lead of the Coalition Role 2 medical facility in Northern Iraq. The team is made up of doctors, nurses, medical technicians, lab technicians, and diagnostic imaging technologists, as well as a dental team and support staff. Approximately 50 military personnel are currently working at the facility, and a total of 364 patients have been treated there so far.

Our government has always been and will continue to be open and transparent about this mission, while always considering the safety and security of our troops. Canadians want to know what our troops are doing, and our government has worked very hard to keep them informed, in a number of different ways. There have been several technical briefings about the mission in recent months.

The Canadian Armed Forces also made it possible for journalists to visit operations, as they did in November 2016, and we will continue to do so regularly.

We are extremely proud of the work that our troops are doing in Iraq. Canada will continue to work with our allies, as the Minister of National Defence did this week in Brussels and Munich.

We will continue to work in co-operation with local and international partners to defeat Daesh and bring peace and stability to the region. We will continue to support the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people on their journey toward becoming a stable and secure country.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that the parliamentary secretary would not just regurgitate the talking points from the minister's office, and actually tell us what our troops are doing. We know that our troops are no longer training. We support our troops 100%.

We are proud of the work they are doing, especially the Special Operations Forces on the ground today, as well as the air combat mission that is taking place based out of Kuwait. Of course, the Liberals are cutting back the danger pay and benefits that are provided to our troops in Kuwait.

The Prime Minister said, when he was in opposition, that the Liberal Party could not support any military mission where the arguments to support it are not represented in an open and transparent manner. He demanded that of the prime minister of the day, Stephen Harper, and yet he is not providing those facts.

We know that our troops are accompanying the Kurdish peshmerga and the Iraqi security forces into Mosul, but there have been no technical briefings about how they are doing and what the safety factor is. We know that they are pushed right up to the Tigris River, without any details, which Canadians expect. Opposition members are trying to hold the government to account. If the Liberals want to be effective on this mission, they have to be open and transparent.

● (1915)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, the government is being open and transparent about this mission, but it would never do anything to put our troops in danger.

Daesh has proven in the past that its fighters care not only about what is done, but also about what is said. We will therefore continue to communicate what can be communicated, and we intend to keep confidential what needs to be confidential. I repeat, we will continue to act openly, while taking into account any risks that we could be inadvertently exposing our troops to.

Canada will continue to work with our local and international partners and allies in order to defeat Daesh and bring peace and stability to the region. We will continue to inform Canadians of the progress made in the fight against Daesh.

I would like to reiterate once again just how proud we are of the progress made to date and of the role played by our soldiers in the global fight to defeat Daesh. Our military personnel continue to provide extraordinary support to the coalition.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening after a hard day in the House of Commons.

Adjournment Proceedings

The adjournment proceedings give us an opportunity to provide details and talk at greater length about a subject that concerns us. Often, during question period, we do not have time to get into the details, which means that the answers can sometimes be quite evasive and much broader. This evening, I will reiterate the questions I have asked the Minister of Transport many times about the Lac-Mégantic bypass.

To be clear, I would like to say from the outset that I know that the current government is working on the bypass file. I think that this issue must transcend political partisanship. This is an issue that directly concerns the people who were affected by the worst rail tragedy in the history of Canada.

As a reminder, this tragedy struck on July 6, 2013, when a train pulling 72 tanker cars full of crude oil got into an accident in the middle of the night. The train flipped over in downtown Lac-Mégantic. It was a disaster that killed 47 people and destroyed many homes, apartments, and commercial buildings. More than 100,000 litres of heavy oil spilled in the very heart of Lac-Mégantic.

Many families had to leave their homes for several weeks. Many of them were unable to return because the soil was contaminated or because their homes no longer existed.

It is important that we remember these facts, because three years after this tragedy people are very slowly getting back on their feet and are still feeling very vulnerable. This feeling is only heightened by the reconstruction of the downtown area, the class action lawsuits in progress, and the wait for confirmation of the construction of a bypass.

Based on everything I have heard here and in committee, I believe that all parties, as well as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport, agree that it is important for the people of Lac-Mégantic to have this bypass.

It is important to mention that the Eastern Townships public health department has conducted research on the health of people living in Lac-Mégantic. I will point out a few facts that may surprise some parliamentarians here this evening. Three years after the tragedy, the health of the people of Lac-Mégantic has not improved; in fact, it has deteriorated. The use of anti-anxiety medication has increased. Why? The people of Lac-Mégantic still hear the train passing through the downtown core every day. In fact, the people of Lac-Mégantic have to relive this tragedy day after day. Until the cause of their fear is removed and a bypass is built, their health is not expected to improve.

My question is simple. Given that the government, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Transport, have promised to expedite the study, can they provide assurances today to the people of Lac-Mégantic and give them hope by simply saying that things will move more quickly and that they will get their bypass?

● (1920)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to thank the member for Mégantic—L'Érable for the question and for his tenacity on this file. Obviously, this terrible tragedy had a devastating effect on his community. We recognize that, and we must reach out to the people of Lac-Mégantic.

Rail safety remains the Minister of Transport's top priority. When he visited, he heard loud and clear the concerns raised by local residents regarding rail safety. The incident that occurred in 2013 was one of the most tragic events to ever happen in Canadian transportation, and our thoughts are still with the families of the victims of that tragedy.

During his visit to Sherbrooke, the Prime Minister met with the mayor of Lac-Mégantic and committed to doing everything he could to speed up the process. After that visit, the Minister of Transport got in touch with the Government of Quebec to organize a meeting with the Province and the Town of Lac-Mégantic in order to discuss the bypass and the possibility of expediting the study.

We continue to monitor railway companies closely to ensure that they are complying with the rules, regulations, and standards by conducting audits and inspections and taking all necessary measures to rectify problems. That includes monitoring train speed and infrastructure in the Lac-Mégantic region.

Since taking office, the Minister of Transport has introduced a number of measures to enhance rail safety. He has established stricter requirements for track inspections, emergency response plans, and dangerous goods classification. That includes the accelerated removal of DOT-111 tank cars, which is a crucial step toward strengthening our rail system by making sure that crude oil no longer travels in the least crash-resistant tank cars.

The Minister of Transport was honoured to have Denis Lauzon, the Lac-Mégantic fire chief, join him for the announcement of Transportation 2030, a strategic plan that includes speeding up the review of the Railway Safety Act to build on our actions to improve rail safety across Canada.

The bypass feasibility study is still ongoing. According to the City of Lac-Mégantic, the cost of this study is nearly \$1 million. Funding for the study comes from Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions and the Province of Quebec.

In April 2016, the project manager presented Transport Canada with the results of the first phase of the feasibility study and the preliminary recommendations for potentially building a bypass in Lac-Mégantic. The city then presented the preliminary results to the residents of Lac-Mégantic. There are three phases to the study, and to our understanding, phase two is moving along nicely.

Our government made Lac-Mégantic's economy recovery a priority and it is committed to revitalizing the community and healing its citizens. That is why we will continue to work with the city as well as other stakeholders to ensure that this is a collaborative effort.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, that is what the minister has been saying from the start. I am well aware that the minister is working on the Lac-Mégantic file, that he is in contact with the population and the mayor, and that the Prime Minister has been very clear about his desire to speed up the rail bypass study.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, a desire to speed up the study is not necessarily enough to help people get off their anxiety medication. The government needs to commit to building the bypass.

I am asking the government to commit to speeding up not just to the study but the healing process by announcing that it will build a rail bypass. That would be a good answer to give the people of Lac-Mégantic, who could then start to heal faster. I think that everyone here agrees.

I thank the parliamentary secretary for his collaboration and response. Does he agree with me that it is the duty of all parliamentarians to help the people of Lac-Mégantic?

• (1925)

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member once again.

As I mentioned before, rail safety is a priority for our government, and our thoughts continue to be with the families of the victims of the July 2013 tragedy.

Representatives of the Prime Minister's Office and the office of the Minister of Transport also met with a group of people from Lac-Mégantic when they were in Ottawa. Unfortunately, today, it would be premature for the Minister of Transport to make any decision based on the first phase of the study.

Nevertheless, our government is committed to finding ways to speed up the study and pursue the dialogue with the community of Lac-Mégantic and other stakeholders in order to help the community get back on its feet.

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cherish their role as global citizens. There can be no question that Canadians are exceedingly generous and compassionate. This was reaffirmed with the Syrian refugee initiative.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, I had the opportunity during our study on Canada's resettlement efforts for Syrian refugees to hear first-hand from sponsorship agreement holders about their experiences and drive to help those vulnerable individuals and families rebuild their lives in Canada.

I also had the opportunity to hear from the advocates and the advocacy for sponsorship agreement holders in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The drive and enthusiasm of the sponsorship community has not waned, but I fear the government is squandering this desire to help instead of fostering it.

The arbitrary cap on the group of five sponsorship applications of 1,000 has stifled sponsorship agreement holders who wish to do more, and that is just baffling.

Since Trump's attempt to ban refugees seeking asylum based on their race, place of birth and religion, Canadians are rising to the occasion and are calling for action. If the Trump administration is going to fail to live up to international humanitarian obligations, Canadians do not want our own government to stand idly by. Canadians are demanding that the government lift the arbitrary cap

on sponsorship applications and allow Canadians to further demonstrate their generosity and compassion with real action.

The Liberal government's business as usual and refusal to re-examine its immigration and refugee targets in the wake of Trump's discriminatory immigration ban simply makes the Prime Minister's words ring hollow.

The call for action is strong and is coming from not just a humanitarian perspective, but from a legal standpoint also. Amnesty International, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Universities Canada, 200 of Canada's law professors, law students and countless others are not afraid to take a principle stand against the U.S., and they are calling for Canada to stand up against Trump.

In our hearts, we know that the U.S. can no longer be considered a safe country for asylum seekers. People should not be forced to risk life and limb to get to safety, and that is what is happening.

Canada needs to immediately suspend the safe third country agreement. Our Prime Minister should not be a bystander in the face of Trump's racist immigration policies.

Over the weekend, I was at a rally, and a young person held up a sign that said, "No one is free when others are oppressed". Another one read, "Make racism wrong again". Perhaps this one says it best. It speaks to the hope and courage of those who are not afraid to take action to reaffirm their principles and values. It read, "If you build a wall, my generation will knock it down".

Will the Prime Minister and the Liberal government join in and help cement our Canadian values in this important moment in our country's history with real action?

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

[*English*]

The member opposite talked about the 1,000 person cap. Let me begin by making it very clear and clarifying that there is not a 1,000 person cap on privately sponsored refugees.

[*Translation*]

There is not a 1,000-person cap on privately sponsored refugees. The 1,000-person limit in question is a cap related to new applications for Syrian and Iraqi refugees that can be submitted by a specific stream of sponsors, namely groups of five and community sponsors.

The limit on new applications should not be confused with the number of privately sponsored refugees that Canada will welcome this year, currently set at 16,000 refugees.

[*English*]

A group of five is five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents who have arranged to sponsor a refugee living abroad to come to Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

[Translation]

All of the group members must be at least 18 years of age and live or have representatives in the area where the refugee will settle. The group must agree to give emotional and financial support to the refugees they are sponsoring for the full sponsorship period, which is usually one year.

Once again, I need to stress that the limit on new applications for groups of five and community sponsors should not be confused with the number of privately sponsored refugees Canada will welcome this year, which is currently set, as I said, at 16,000 refugees.

[English]

As the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship said, “We have always welcomed people in need [of protection] and will continue to do so.”

[Translation]

This year, the overall target for resettled refugees is 25,000, which is divided among our various resettlement programs.

In fact, in 2017, we will welcome one of the highest numbers of refugees in Canadian history. While 2016 was an unprecedented year, planned admissions for resettled refugees in 2017 are double those established in 2015 and in preceding years.

The department already has enough applications in the system to meet its target for privately sponsored refugees.

It is a priority for this government to provide timely protection to privately sponsored refugees. That is why the department is taking steps to reduce the inventory of applications, which will help to significantly reduce wait times.

[English]

It has been a long-standing Canadian tradition to help the world's most vulnerable, and it is a tradition we will maintain as a government.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Why the government has a cap on any of the streams of privately sponsored refugees is a mystery to me. The fact of the matter is the government has not changed its immigration policies since the Trump administration's very disturbing and troubling discriminatory ban on immigration policies came forward. It is business as usual.

Does the government not realize that by sitting silently by, it is complicit in these discriminatory policies? With each passing day, we see more asylum seekers risking their lives to illegally cross from the U.S. into Canada. How many more people must risk their lives in -20°C or lower temperatures to reach Canada before the government acts? How many more discriminatory immigration policies must be enacted before the Canadian government will speak out? I ask the government to do what is right and what is necessary for us to take our place and have the courage to stand up—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, the main question was about the cap on the number of people.

[English]

There is no 1,000-person cap on privately sponsored refugees.

[Translation]

The 1,000-person cap the member mentioned in her question refers to new sponsorship applications for Syrian and Iraqi refugees by specific groups of sponsors.

This specific cap on new applications is not to be confused with the number of privately sponsored refugees that Canada will welcome this year, which is currently set at 16,000.

This year, our goal once again is to welcome 25,000 refugees, one of the highest numbers in the history of Canada.

[English]

It has been a long-standing Canadian tradition to help the world's most vulnerable. It is a tradition we have maintained, and we will continue to do so.

●(1935)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:35 p.m.)

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