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Monday, May 1, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 1, 2017

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1100)

[*English*]

The House resumed from April 13 consideration of the motion, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Waterloo.

I have had the opportunity, like many members of this House, to listen at great length in regard to what is indeed a very serious issue. We all acknowledge the importance of unfettered access to the Parliament building and the parliamentary precinct. We all understand why it is so absolutely critically important that as members, we treat the issue very seriously. I would suggest that all members of this House recognize the importance of this issue. It is one reason we believe the matter needs to be dealt with by the procedure and House affairs committee, or PROC.

We had an incident a while back when members did not have that unfettered access. It would appear that unfettered access was, in fact, denied. I want to be very sensitive to that issue. Members of the procedure and house affairs committee are genuine in wanting to have the issue dealt with. I used to sit on that committee, and I have dealt with this very issue of unfettered access. We have had reports from the procedure and house affair committee in the past regarding the importance of unfettered access. Through this debate, we have had members stand in their places and talk about what is stated on the back of their MP cards, the passionate reasons they want to represent their constituents inside this House, in particular, and why it is so critical that we have unfettered access.

Having said that, I have found that the majority of the discussion or the debate coming across from the other benches seems to have focused not necessarily on that issue as much as on the issue of what has been taking place in PROC and some of the issues related to it. I want to use the same latitude that has been given on these important issues, because the opposition has been tying it in as one and the same, which ultimately has led to the privilege issue we are debating today.

I have been a parliamentarian for well over two decades. I have had the opportunity to participate in House leadership issues virtually from the day I was elected, when then leader Sharon Carstairs appointed me, as my colleague from Winnipeg Centre would be very well aware, because we were both elected to the Manitoba Legislature at the same time, back in 1988, the official opposition party whip.

I understand the importance of the chamber and the proceedings of the chamber. I understand the importance of the opposition and the tools that are available to the opposition. I was in opposition for over 20 of those years as a parliamentarian. I understand the importance of the rules. Unlike many members, I suspect, I am actually very passionate about the rules of this House and Parliament, whether it is here in Ottawa or in Manitoba. Quite often when we talked about or made rule changes in the province of Manitoba, we would look at what was taking place in Ottawa.

I believe that the Prime Minister is genuinely trying to modernize Parliament. I really believe that. There were commitments made in the last federal election by the Prime Minister to do just that. It has been a long time, the last decade plus, since I have heard so much coming from a leader about the need to reform, and there is a need to reform. There are so many things we could be doing to improve this place.

An issue many members have chosen to talk about, and I use it as an example, is the issue of Fridays. I tell whoever wants to hear it that as an MP, and I am not unique, I work seven days a week. I suggest that this applies on both sides of the House. It is only a question of where it is I am actually working, Ottawa or Winnipeg.

• (1105)

Through the discussion paper, we were asking the procedures and House affairs committee to have this issue, among many other issues, discussed and to have some professionals and individuals who have first-hand experience come before the committee to express what they believe.

I will share with members my thoughts on this issue. If it means readjusting some hours to put in more hours on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays, I am open to that, because I see the benefit. I am not in favour of reducing the number of hours. Friday is only a half-day, after all. We started today at 11 o'clock. I am personally okay with starting a couple of hours earlier on Monday or Tuesday. I am not shy about working. I am sure all members of this House are not shy about working.

Another issue the opposition members tend to want to talk a lot about is the issue of a prime minister's question period. I sat in opposition for many years, and I may not have been in the first or second round of asking questions. I can say that if there was a prime minister's day, where the Prime Minister was answering every question that was posed, then the Prime Minister would be responding to many of the individuals who would likely not have that opportunity, for a wide variety of reasons. The idea of having only one day a week on which the Prime Minister would come in is something that is being talked about on the other side. There is not one Liberal, including the Prime Minister himself, who is saying that this would be the case.

There are many different issues that will come before this chamber over the next number of years. I would suggest that we would be doing all Canadians a service if we recognized that we must modernize our Parliament. We can do better. It saddens me that there is a feeling that there is a conspiracy taking place, when I know that it is not the case. We have a wonderful opportunity to improve this House and to ensure that members are more effective in what they do.

I would challenge all members of the House, on both sides of the chamber, to understand and appreciate the significance of modernizing Canada's Parliament. The government House leader has gone out of her way to engage with individuals, whether through PROC or in informal discussions with members. She has been open to anyone who has wanted to talk about it. She understands how important it is that we move forward on this file, as do, I believe, most members of this chamber and the cabinet. If we are successful in making these changes, it will modernize this Parliament and will be of great service to the constituents we represent.

We like to say, and as members know, I speak quite often in this House, that we believe in representing our constituents in Ottawa and that we are maximizing our time and effort and are doing good. We can do so much more if we are prepared to recognize what other legislatures across this country have done, which is modernize. Other countries in Europe have done so. We do not have to drag our feet. I have been involved first-hand in trying to change the Standing Orders in Ottawa. I sat on PROC. We can do some minor tweaking here and there with a comma or a period, but we need to modernize. My challenge to all members of this House is to let us get down to business. All Canadians will benefit if we can get this right.

• (1110)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are all excited to hear what the member has to say.

Will any changes be built on consensus, or will they be rammed through unilaterally by the government?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let me share with the member some first-hand experience. When I sat down with governments in Manitoba, whether they were NDP or Conservative governments, both of which made rule changes, never did I say to my respective counterparts that if they did not give me a veto, I would not agree to any changes.

We need to recognize that there needs to be a sense of goodwill. It would be irresponsible to say that unless we have unanimous consent, we are not going to attempt to modernize Parliament. As a majority government, that would be irresponsible. Equally, it would be irresponsible for members of the House not to recognize that there is a role for all parliamentarians to play to see if we can, in a more co-operative fashion, get some rules changed. Because one party decides it does not want to see any rule changes, for whatever reasons, does not mean it should ultimately prevail. That is not in Canada's best interest.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not here in the last Parliament, but I understand that over the last several years, changes have been made, and I understand that the member was involved in some of those changes. Could my colleague elaborate on the procedure in the last Parliament and how those decisions were reached? My understanding is that they were consensus-based. Could he confirm or deny that?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, no significant changes based on consensus came out of PROC. There were a couple of significant changes that occurred through a Conservative member and a government member, through private members' issues, for which unanimous consent was never sought. It was a simple majority determination. They were related to the Speaker in the chamber and electronic petitions, if I recall correctly.

• (1115)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have heard that claim over and over again, and it is untrue. The report that came back from PROC on e-petitions was approved unanimously. I invite the member to correct the record.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe that is debate, but I will let the hon. parliamentary secretary continue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. I was in committee when it was actually being debated. For the member to say that there was unanimous consent is just wrong. I do not know why the member would say that. I sat—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe we have another point of order.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member misheard. When the report from PROC came back to the House, it was unanimously—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): That is a point of debate. We will let the hon. parliamentary secretary continue.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is trying to be tricky here. The member would do better if he were straightforward. He just admitted that I was right. There was no unanimous consent. I sat in that committee as it went through committee. There was a sense of excitement during the discussion on electronic petitions, but to try to give the impression that at the very beginning there was unanimous support for it is just wrong.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join this debate and to address some of the statements that have been made by hon. members in the days we have discussed this matter of privilege.

Let me start by saying how seriously our government takes matters of parliamentary privilege. We believe there should be no doubt about the fact that members of Parliament should have unfettered access to this chamber and to the entire parliamentary precinct.

As Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, I believe strongly in the rights of all members to be present here to represent their constituents, so anytime that a member draws to our attention an incident in which he or she was denied that privilege, we must look at it closely and look at what happened.

Canadians have sent each of us here to be their voice and to improve the way that Parliament works. It is for this reason that earlier this spring I released a discussion paper on the Standing Orders. It contains ideas on how to modernize the House of Commons to make it more effective, accountable, and transparent. The debate on this motion of privilege has from time to time veered into disagreements over this discussion paper. Some of my colleagues across the aisle have drawn certain conclusions about the purpose of the paper.

As government House leader, I had truly hoped we could start a discussion about modernization at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This has not happened, and I regret that. It was always my intention to engage members in a respectful discussion about how we could improve this place. I accept and respect that members have heartfelt and legitimate views on the important ideas we have raised for public discussion. I also accept that our disagreements on this matter have had an impact on the work of the House in recent weeks.

It is time to get back to work, to focus on what Canadians have sent us here to do, and to chart a path forward. That is what I would like to discuss today.

In the last election, we promised real change, to give Canadians a voice in Ottawa, to make the government more accountable in Parliament, and to modernize the House of Commons. Our goal was clear: to better service Canadians, to make this place more effective and transparent, and to encourage more people, from all walks of life, to run for public office so that this House truly reflects our country.

Canadians responded by electing a Liberal government with a clear mandate to bring change to Parliament. We are committed to acting on that mandate. Yesterday, I informed my Conservative and NDP counterparts of our plan going forward. We will move ahead with the specific commitments from our election platform, all of which would make the government more accountable, not less. This includes a regular prime minister's question period, in addition to the current practice. Our Prime Minister has shown it can be done. He can and will answer many more questions in this chamber. We believe Canadians will benefit if this practice applies to future governments as well.

The second measure is to ensure that governments are forced to justify their actions if they shut down Parliament through prorogation. Governments should pay a price if they resort to legislative tricks to avoid accountability.

The third measure is to prevent the inappropriate use of omnibus bills. Parliament should have the power to properly scrutinize legislation that contains unrelated policy changes.

The fourth measure is to strengthen committees. We all know how important committees are to the work that we do here. We need to ensure they have the resources they need, and we need to change the rules so that ministers and parliamentary secretaries do not have a veto on committees.

The fifth measure is financial oversight. Governments have an obligation to ensure that MPs have consistent and clear information when they are voting on matters such as estimates.

It is time to make that happen. These are the pledges we made to Canadians in the last election. They are changes that will improve accountability in Parliament. We hope our colleagues on the opposition benches will agree. However, we will not give the Conservatives a veto on the implementation of these commitments that we have made to Canadians.

Another question that we hoped to discuss is Friday sittings. The issue revolves around whether we should continue the practice of half-day sittings here on Fridays, or to switch to a full constituency day in our own communities. If we make the change, it would be important to reallocate those hours of debate from Friday sittings to other days or weeks. We will now conduct additional consultations with our caucus on this issue of Friday sittings and reallocation of time, and we expect that our colleagues in other caucuses will want to do the same.

● (1120)

There were many other new ideas in the discussion paper. All of them were offered in good faith. I have now told my Conservative and NDP counterparts that our government does not intend to move forward on those ideas at the present time. We had hoped there would be a willingness to examine the concept of legislative programming to manage time for debating legislation. Unfortunately, that willingness does not exist. Therefore, it is with regret that I inform my colleagues that under these circumstances, the government will need to use time allocation more often to implement the ambitious agenda we were elected to deliver. This will be done every time with full transparency.

As we move forward, we remain committed to strengthening and modernizing Parliament. I will always welcome a dialogue among House leaders about how we can work together to make the House of Commons a place where we can better represent our constituents.

In closing, let me make one thing clear. Canadians have high expectations of all of us in this place, and so they should. They want a Parliament that holds government to account. They want a House of Commons where political discourse is respectful and debate is constructive, and they want a Parliament that is productive. It is time to get to work, so let us join together to make that happen.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians have seen over the last year and a half is a Prime Minister they cannot trust, a Prime Minister who says one thing and does something completely opposite, a Prime Minister and a Liberal government that is arrogant and has misled Canadians on a number of occasions. The Minister of National Defence has not told the truth and has now given himself credit for something he did not do. We have a House leader who is saying that changes are going to be rammed through that will make ministers and the Prime Minister less accountable. He will only have to be here for one hour on one day a week when the House is sitting.

How can Canadians trust the Liberals and the Prime Minister on anything when they have said one thing and done something different on so many levels? Now he wants to be here on only one day a week for one hour to answer questions.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. All of the changes we are recommending will allow the government to be held to greater account, not less. When it comes the prime minister's question period, we have shown that this is possible. This one day would be in addition to the other days in a week that the Prime Minister is here. What the hon. member is saying is not true. No members in the Liberal caucus are recommending that the Prime Minister only attend on one day. We are recommending that the Prime Minister be held to greater account, so that not just the leaders of the opposition, but private members are also able to ask the Prime Minister questions and receive a response directly from the Prime Minister. We believe that this will allow the government to be held to greater account.

• (1125)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the effect of this motion that the government intends to bring regarding the vast majority of items contained in the discussion paper is that the government will, with its majority, ram those changes through against the opposition of recognized parties in this place?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, when we ran in the election, we made commitments to Canadians. We made a commitment to modernize the way that this place works. We made a commitment to make government more open and transparent. We are committed to delivering on those promises. A motion will be introduced in this place and will be open to debate. As with the discussion paper, we would like to have a conversation to talk about these ideas. I will continue to encourage all members to be part of that discussion.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saainich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. government House leader for withdrawing the most offensive portions of the proposed discussion paper. That is a positive move as we go forward. However, I am concerned.

As she will know, I presented a very substantive response to her discussion paper, suggesting ways that we could reduce the greenhouse gas content. The carbon footprint of our schedule is large and is brought about because of technology. We are modernizing Parliament, but society around us is modernized. Parliament is still operating in an antiquated fashion, but we do not want to modernize in the interest of government majorities always getting their way without a real effort at consensus. We also do not

want to modernize in a way that increases the number of flights and the cost to taxpayers.

Can we have any sense from the government House leader if her government, whether all of us together or the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, will have an opportunity to discuss and debate more than the suggestions that came from the government, for instance, proposals such as those from the Green Party?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the hon. member for reading my discussion paper and responding with other constructive ideas. My door will remain open, and I look forward to working with the hon. member, as well as all colleagues in this place.

We believe that we can modernize this place and bring it into the 21st century. This government takes the environment and the economy very seriously. We believe they go hand in hand. We need to make important decisions that are in the best interests of all Canadians. I will continue to engage on this important conversation.

When it comes to the commitments we have made to Canadians, we are committed to advancing those commitments and delivering on those promises. We will continue to work well with all members in this place. We know that is what Canadians expect, and so they should.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Regina—Lewvan.

It is a privilege to rise today on what happens to be a question of privilege. I am a member of the House of Commons in Ottawa, and I represent the people who duly elected me in 2015, the people of Drummond. It is a privilege to speak on behalf of all of the nearly 100,000 people of the greater Drummond area. It is a privilege to rise here today, a privilege of particular importance because we are in fact debating a question of privilege.

A few weeks ago, an incident transpired on Parliament Hill that had to do with security on the Hill. We must ensure that the Prime Minister can move about safely and that dignitaries can do so as well, all under the watchful eye of the RCMP with the necessary security measures in place. However, problems arise when we are called upon to do our job, to do our duty as MPs and politicians. We come to the House of Commons to give speeches, attend question period, and present petitions on behalf of our constituents. For example, hundreds of petitions about mandatory GMO labelling have been presented. This is an issue of great concern to the people of Drummond, Quebec, and Canada.

My colleague from Sherbrooke is doing great work. He tabled a bill that should come to a vote in the next few weeks. I hope the members will support this bill. These days, people in Drummond, Quebec, and across Canada want to know what they are eating. They are in favour of mandatory GMO labelling.

It is important that I, as an MP, have access to the House of Commons to be able to table petitions regarding mandatory labelling for GMOs, for example, on behalf of Canadians. In order to do so, I must be able to move freely on the Hill.

Some of my colleagues had a bad experience recently. They had to go from one area to another to attend a vote, but unfortunately, they were prevented from doing so. They were not allowed to go through because of a security issue. Given that the Prime Minister's security motorcade was on the move, my colleagues had to wait. MPs must not be prevented from getting to the House of Commons, because that is their privilege.

When we speak of "privilege", we are not talking about anyone being "privileged". MPs are not privileged individuals. We are not talking about privilege in the sense of a Prime Minister who spends his vacation on a private island. That is not what this is about. When we speak of "privilege", we are talking about a duty. MPs have a duty to represent their constituents. In order to do so, we must carry out various tasks, and this includes being present in the House of Commons to give speeches, to table petitions, to attend question period, to ensure that the government responds to questions from Canadians, and to vote. In fact, we will be holding some extremely important votes shortly.

I myself introduced a bill to require Supreme Court judges to be bilingual. For many Canadians, it is extremely important that they be able to speak the official language of their choice when they appear before the Supreme Court of Canada, the highest court before which Canadians can defend their rights. Canada has two official languages, going back to the founding of this country.

• (1130)

It is extremely important for Canadians to be able to use the official language of their choice when they are before the highest court in the land. That is why I introduced a private member's bill. It is my privilege and duty as a citizen and a member of Parliament to do my work on behalf of my constituents and of all Canadians, whose interests I defend, including every official language minority community across Canada.

My bill will be put to a vote in a few weeks. I hope that members of the House will vote in favour of it. It is extremely important that all Supreme Court justices understand the arguments and are able to read all the evidence and arguments submitted to them when ruling on a case before the Supreme court so that citizens are properly represented.

Let us come back to the question of privilege, which brings me back to my journey as an MP. I was first elected on May 2, 2011. Tomorrow it will be six years since I was first elected. To me, it is extremely important to acknowledge that and to thank my constituents for the confidence they have placed in me. I will continue working hard for them to protect their rights.

I remember very well that at the very beginning, in May 2011, I was new at this or, as they say, I was green, or inexperienced. I was learning all about this job. We were given a lot of training at the beginning. Among other things, we learned about our privileges as members of Parliament and, especially, what that meant in terms of our duties. As MPs, we have responsibilities. We have a

responsibility to show up and vote on behalf of our constituents. We have a responsibility to speak to all sorts of issues and stand up for our constituents.

In June 2015, there was a lockout at Canada Post. People have forgotten that it was not a strike. In fact, people believed that it was a strike rather than a lockout. The NDP did everything in its power to encourage management and the union to negotiate an agreement because there is nothing worse than an imposed solution. We worked hard. We gave speeches into the early morning hours. I remember giving my speech at three o'clock in the morning because our constituents asked us to work on getting a negotiated solution.

When we speak of privilege, we are talking about the privilege of being able to stand up for our constituents and being able to share opinions that represent their interests so that we can find the kinds of solutions that the people who put us here expect. That is why, in June 2011, I had the privilege of speaking in the House at three o'clock in the morning. It was not because I am privileged that I was awake at three in the morning fighting for my constituents. I was there because it was my duty.

When it comes to this question of privilege, it is important to understand that it is the duty of MPs to come to work, to do all that is required of them, and most importantly, to vote.

We need to resolve this issue once and for all. How is it that obstruction is occurring even today, in 2017, and that a member was prevented from coming to work and doing her duty of defending and representing her constituents? Something needs to be done about that. That is why we are asking that this matter be sent to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that it be given priority, so that we can resolve this problem once and for all and so that all members of the House can do their duty and properly represent their constituents. I consider it an honour to do that.

• (1135)

I am pleased to represent my constituents.

[English]

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

Mr. Speaker, I suspect that if we were to canvass the House right now, not one member of Parliament would question the importance of our parliamentary duties and responsibilities, as entrusted to us by our constituents, and the absolute importance to have unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. I listened to all the things the member said. I concur that it is important we do the jobs we have been asked to do.

We support the subamendment. We, from best I can tell, have always wanted to see this go to committee. Would the member agree that one of the best ways to get this issue dealt with, after it has been debated here, is to let PROC do its work? As a standing committee, PROC can do wonderful things. This is one of those issues which is best given to PROC to deal with. Does he, like I, have confidence in PROC's ability to come back to the House with a recommendation as to where we go from here, knowing full well we support the subamendment?

•(1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague, and I have tremendous respect for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

A few weeks ago, I was there at three in the morning. My plan was to be there until five in the morning standing up for the people of the greater Drummond area. The Liberals had moved a motion to destroy the balance in the House of Commons. The House is not just about the executive; it is about the members too, and they have a very important role to play.

That balance must be preserved so that we can come up with solutions that work for people. It was my privilege to be at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs at three in the morning with the intention of staying there until five in the morning, not because I like working nights, but because it is my civic duty to stand up for the people of Drummond and all Canadians, and that is what I will keep doing.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention and his fine words about my bill, which will soon be studied and put to a vote.

I was quite surprised to hear my colleague from Winnipeg North say that he was in favour of the amendment to the amendment, after voting for the motion to adjourn the debate on it.

What does my colleague think of what happened to the first motion, which sought to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and was rejected by the government before we went back to our constituencies? The Speaker felt that it was inappropriate for the government to completely shut down the debate and intervened to have the debate resumed in the House.

What does the hon. member think of the debate on the question of privilege being adjourned?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, before I answer that question, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Sherbrooke on the incredible work he does to try to make GMO labelling mandatory. He has campaigned for this cause far and wide and even came to my riding, in Drummondville, to explain the situation to everyone. A lot of progress has been made on this file and, again, I congratulate him on that.

To answer his question, indeed, the Liberal government's attempt to unilaterally change the rules of the House is incomprehensible. We are not talking about a bill to introduce a Liberal policy. We are talking about the rules governing how the House of Commons works. We should all see eye to eye on that. Any changes made to the Standing Orders over the past 100 years were made with the consensus of all hon. members, and we want the same to be true today.

[*English*]

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard from the government House leader a scaling back of the proposed changes to the rules that govern Parliament as proposed by her government. We appreciate there has been some movement on the government side. We appreciate there is perhaps some indication

of a willingness to compromise. We on the opposition side are certainly prepared to take a very serious look at the new package of proposals from the government.

However, this initiative is coming at the very last minute. In fact, this set of proposals was presented yesterday to the media before it was presented to any of the opposition parties. Therefore, this obviously has not given us a lot of opportunity to consider the rule changes being proposed and it certainly is not something that builds a lot of trust or instills a lot of confidence.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to see a somewhat revised set of proposals coming forward. We are also pleased to hear from the member for Winnipeg North that the government is prepared to have the procedure and House affairs committee consider this question of privilege, rather than use that committee to try to ram through the much broader set of changes to the rules governing Parliament for which the government had previously advocated.

We also heard a very interesting argument from the government House leader about the need to make these changes to the rules governing Parliament because some of them had been in the Liberal election platform. That argument is a bit rich coming from the government. A lot of things were in the Liberal election platform that the government is not doing. One example that leaps to mind is electoral reform. The government was elected on a very clear promise that 2015 would be the last election conducted under the first past the post voting system.

We had the whole process of consultations on electoral reform with a view to making that change. The overwhelming majority of experts consulted by the committee of the House and the overwhelming majority of citizens who showed up at public meetings across the country said that we should implement a proportional voting system in which the share of seats that a party received in the House would more or less line up with the share of votes that it had attracted in a general election. The government's response was that there was no consensus and therefore it could not move ahead.

When it comes to this issue of changes to the rules governing Parliament, there is clearly no consensus at all. There is far less consensus on this than there was on electoral reform, yet on this point the government's argument is that some of it was in its platform so it had to do this, even if meant using its majority to ram it through. On electoral reform, why is the issue that the Liberals need 100% consensus to do anything even if it was in their platform, whereas on the issue of changes to the rules governing the House, the argument is that they have to do it because it is in their platform even if there is no semblance of consensus, even if there is nothing approaching agreement on these changes?

Beyond the analogy I just made, there is another connection between what the government is doing on changes to the rules governing Parliament and what the government is failing to do on electoral reform. What the government is trying to do is pass some of these changes to the rules and procedures of Parliament and then say it achieved something on democratic reform, that this was its democratic reform agenda and it has done it. We in the NDP certainly are not going to let the government get away with that. The Liberals very clearly promised a new voting system. There were very clear recommendations, something that was pretty close to a consensus in favour of a proportional voting system. The government has blatantly broke that promise and intends to go ahead with the outdated, outmoded first past the post voting system.

• (1145)

Whether or not the government puts forward some changes to the rules governing Parliament, it certainly does not make up for that very severe broken promise on electoral reform. In terms of these proposed changes to the rules of Parliament, we on the opposition side are going to need to take some time to take a look at this scaled-back package that we just heard about from the government House leader.

I would like to return to the question of privilege that we are discussing today. I do think it is a matter of great importance that should concern every member of this House. It is an integral principle of this institution that members of Parliament have unfettered access to the parliamentary precincts. As members of Parliament, it is fundamental that we be able to be here to vote and in general that we have access to Parliament in order to represent the people who elected us. When events happen that prevent members from accessing the parliamentary precincts and therefore prevent us from doing our jobs, it is very important that we investigate seriously.

According to the Compendium of House of Commons procedure:

The House of Commons and its Members enjoy certain constitutional rights and immunities that are collectively referred to as parliamentary privilege (or simply "privilege").

It goes on to say:

Any physical barrier preventing a Member's access to the parliamentary precinct or blocking their free movement within it may be treated by the House as a breach of privilege.

That is exactly what we are talking about today. When members are not able to come to Parliament, it fundamentally prevents each and every one of us from taking on the very specific and important role of holding the government to account.

The privileges of the member for Milton and the member for Beauce as elected representatives to this House have been breached. What happens after that is what brings us into this whole discussion of parliamentary privilege that was raised by the member for Perth—Wellington.

The member pointed out that it was an inappropriate violation of privilege for the government to end debate on the previous question of privilege in the manner that the government did without a vote. The Speaker quite wisely ruled that it is not appropriate for debate to simply end on this point. Equally problematic is that the government

continues to try to shut down debate and limiting dissent in this House.

As I acknowledged at the outset, the government seems to have backed off a little on the sweeping changes to the parliamentary rules that had been proposed at the procedure and House affairs committee. We welcome that, as far as it goes, but I would also note that when the New Democratic House leader asked the government House leader whether this new package of proposed rule changes would require consensus or whether the government would just ram it through using its majority, we still did not get much of a commitment to a consensual process or much of a commitment to actually consult with other parties, which we believe is the standard required for changes being made to the rules governing this House.

It obviously would not make sense and would not be democratic for whichever party has a majority to use that majority to rewrite the very rules of Parliament. It is kind of a different category from all sorts of other public policies that we accept the government has the mandate and the authority to control.

We are faced with a very serious question of privilege. We are hopeful that it will be resolved either here or before the procedure and House affairs committee. We are going to take some time to seriously consider the scaled-back set of rule changes that the government House leader just introduced here a few moments ago.

• (1150)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference that the NDP members are going to caucus over what was presented by the government House leader this morning. I would encourage the member, if there are any questions or comments specific to what he has heard here this morning, that he not hesitate to make direct contact with me, members of PROC, or the government House leader directly.

I have a specific thought that is outside what the member mentioned. It is an issue that has always been somewhat important to me. Every year in June, graduations take place. There are usually more than 1,000 graduates from grade 12 at those ceremonies. I would enjoy being at those graduation ceremonies. It sends a strong message to young people.

One of the thoughts is to sit more days in January as opposed to as many days as we do in June. We might be better able to serve our constituents by being there for things like graduations and have more sitting days in January when it is not quite as busy in our constituencies. I am interested in the member's personal thoughts on this issue.

• (1155)

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting question whether we should sit more in January versus in June and how sitting days should be allocated throughout the calendar year. This is the kind of issue that members from different parties operating in good faith could probably come to some kind of agreement on, but in order for that to happen, there needs to be a genuine negotiation process that includes all MPs from all parties.

The reason we have not been moving toward any sort of agreement or consensus on proposed changes to the rules of the House is that, so far, the government has been using its majority to try to ram a sweeping package of changes through the committee. I am optimistic that this scaled-back set of proposals from the government House leader presented earlier today signals a change in the government's approach and that there will be an opportunity to hash out questions such as the one the member just posed.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of discussion about eliminating Friday sittings which would mean probably sitting longer on Thursdays. If some of us from the west could not get out of here on Thursday night because of later sittings, we would have to get up at 3 a.m. on a Friday to get to the airport in time, and probably we would not touch down until 11 a.m. or noon, and probably would not get to our constituencies until 2 or 3 p.m. It is not a very good use of a Friday. By eliminating Friday sittings we would not really be gaining anything. It would mean more travel. Our constituents would hear that we are not in session on Fridays and they would expect us to be there. We would end up travelling every weekend to meet that expectation.

It probably takes the member for Winnipeg North almost as much time to travel to his constituency as it takes some of us from B.C. to travel to ours. Does he think it would be a benefit to eliminate Friday sittings, or as he said, with unanimous consent, would shuffling the schedule in other ways be more beneficial?

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, the member for North Okanagan—Shuswap makes an excellent point. I represent Regina—Lewvan and I am in a similar situation in terms of travel. There is no direct flight between Ottawa and Regina for most of the year. Eliminating Friday sittings but sitting later on Thursdays would not really make a positive difference for MPs from western Canada. That is exactly the kind of point that needs to be considered through a much more consensual and consultative process.

All members of the House agree there are a lot of trade-offs involved in these proposals. Eliminating sittings on Fridays could require sitting later on Thursdays which would entail other problems and difficulties for staff and employees of Parliament. Eliminating Friday sittings could involve adding sitting days at other times of the year which certainly would keep members out of their constituencies during those times. There are a lot of trade-offs and that is why we need to consider this very carefully and collectively.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand today to speak to a number of issues surrounding the question of privilege and also the proposal the government brought forward. In recent hours there has been discussion regarding some accommodation, or what government members think is accommodation, to see whether or not we can move forward.

There is one premise that overrides all of this based on what I have heard from constituents this week. I had a very serious conversation yesterday over coffee with someone who is heavily involved in provincial government. The conversation revolved around how it is unprecedented in our country's history that a government would make changes unilaterally to the Standing Orders without the consent of the other parties. We boil it down to the fact that the

government feels so empowered and so entitled that it wants to force its will upon the institution of Parliament. This is unprecedented in our country.

We are watching the Liberals go down a different avenue today from what we saw leading up to the constituency weeks from which we have just returned. We see them manoeuvring in a way to try to soften the approach, but the bottom line is it is still the same approach. They will force their will on Parliament on issues of the Standing Orders which, up to this point in the history of our country, have been primarily decided by unanimous consent. Unanimous consent means the will of the people, the will of all the people, not just the ones who voted for the government in the last election, but the ones I represent on the opposition side and the ones who voted for other opposition members on all of the opposition benches today.

If we really want to distill it to the point where we are today, I would say that is setting a very dangerous precedent not just for the next number of decades, but for our future as a country. This is the House of the people. When we change the rules of the House, we need to have all voices heard. We need to allow all voices to bring reasonable proposals to the table and all voices agree to those reasonable proposals.

On a number of fronts, in my personal portfolio now as the Treasury Board critic I have been dealing with estimates reform. Estimates reform was put on the table early on by the government and by the President of the Treasury Board. I want to speak to some of that today, because this is part of what the government wants to unilaterally impose on Parliament through changing the Standing Orders. It is not something which the government is prepared to step back on or moderate in any way.

We have spoken. Some of these changes are wise. However, that said, unilaterally imposing them on Parliament is wrong, number one. Number two is that these are changes which the government could undertake, and should undertake, and we agree with the President of the Treasury Board, in the current system without changing the Standing Orders. The four pillars of the Liberals' premise of changing and improving the estimates in aligning them with the budget are all items that could be undertaken within government offices, within government bureaucratic structures right now. They could be done, and there is no need to change the Standing Orders.

When we distill this one, it is that forever Standing Orders need to be changed for the convenience of the government and for the convenience of the people who work within the ministries and the bureaucracy of government.

As I said, there are reasonable explanations and discussions that could be had around these things if there were not such a digging in and arrogance of the government that we see over and over again. The Liberals say, “We know best. We are just going to do it. We do not care what the rest of the country thinks. We do not care what the opposition members think in their representation of the people who elected them in this country. Let us find a way to do this unilaterally. We do not have to worry about the opposition.” In our parliamentary system the Liberals have that luxury because they have a majority government.

• (1200)

I am here today to talk, to some extent, about the reasons and the comments that have been presented around estimates reform in terms of what it would mean for our country.

Any change needs to be unanimous. It should not be done by a government. It can be done that way, and I understand the Liberals are going to ram it through in a different government motion, but it would be much better to do it in a unanimous fashion.

The key, paramount element of estimates reform is it would drastically reduce the time Parliament would have to examine how the government plans to spend taxpayers' money. Let me put that in a different way. We should ask this question of Parliament: what is the appropriate amount of scrutiny for the spending of taxpayers' dollars? That is what we are talking about here. What is the appropriate amount of time for parliamentarians in considering what the government is proposing to spend, what it actually spends, and along the way refining those estimates by saying there are things in the estimates that we think should be questioned on behalf of our taxpayers, the people we represent.

When considering this proposal for estimates reform, let us not forget what we are trying to do here. We are trying to streamline the process in such a way that Parliament would have less time for scrutiny. The question then is, what is the appropriate amount of time for Parliament to have scrutiny?

Right now, the proposal is to move estimates up to May 1, to align with budgets. Estimates currently have to be tabled by March 31, so we would be missing the time between March 31 and May 1 for parliamentarians to take those numbers, crunch them, see what they mean, and bring them to the floor of the House, as we typically do, and ask our questions, not only on the floor of the House but also in committee, where it is of utmost importance. In committee we often have the advice and counsel of our parliamentary budget officer.

Let me read some quotes from our parliamentary budget officer with regard to the proposals put forward on estimates reform, which are now in a third or fourth iteration of being rammed through the House of Commons without unanimous consent.

This has been discussed since the start of this Parliament. It was one of the objectives of the President of the Treasury Board. He has said this is on their radar and is what they want to do as part of their mandate letter. It is all well and good for the government to say that, but there is a way to do it without diminishing scrutiny by Parliament.

I would like to address some of what has been said by independent thinking bodies, including the parliamentary budget officer's

considerations of reforming what is called the business of supply, which is equivalent to estimates reform. This is a direct quote from the parliamentary budget officer from November 22, 2016, from page 11 of his report. He stated:

PBO acknowledges that the Government's proposal to delay the main estimates seeks to address a problem identified by parliamentarians regarding the absence of budget initiatives in the main estimates.

What the parliamentary budget officer is saying is that we could have better alignment. We agree. However, the government can do this without changing the Standing Orders. Many countries that have gone down this road have fixed budget dates. That is one of the tools available for the government. If the government wanted to fix the budget day to a certain time frame, then we could align estimates to that time frame. That is a simple solution, without changing the Standing Orders. It could be the choice of the government to do that, as many countries have done.

• (1205)

The quote of the parliamentary budget officer continues:

That said, Parliamentarians will need to determine whether the cumbersome workaround of creating a new interim estimates, appropriating money based on the previous year's financial estimates, releasing a new main estimates in May and eliminating the spring supplementary estimates, is the best approach to meet their needs.

We have not had a discussion around the best approach to meet our needs. There has been no discussion of what this means that I am aware of. Rather, it has been an arbitrary statement of “Here is what we propose to do. Let's have sessions to show it to all parliamentarians of all parties and then tell them this is what we are going to do”, without much, if any, deep consideration of what it means for the long-term Standing Orders that make this House tick and are the rules of the floor of this House.

Ultimately the current government will be in opposition one day and will be sitting on this side of the House. Just as governments have changed over the decades and the course of our history, so too will the Liberals be over here. I cannot imagine, having been here almost nine years now, what the outrage would have been if our previous prime minister, Prime Minister Harper, had suggested that he would come into this House and put through changes to Standing Orders on this basis. We had a study of the Standing Orders to gain consensus. We were not able to get consensus, so we did not bring the changes forward. The current government seems so entitled, so arrogant, that it thinks it is entitled to determine a change for the course of this country on this floor. It is absolutely staggering to think how much arrogance that takes.

Another quote from the parliamentary budget officer states:

Unless the Government is able to present a clear plan to reform its internal management processes, this example shows that it is unlikely that delaying the release of the main estimates by eight weeks will provide full alignment with the budget.

This deep analysis of what estimate reforms mean, done by an independent officer of the government, it suggests that reducing the eight weeks of scrutiny that this House would have over estimates may not even return the result the government is looking for. I will grant that some alignments may be improved, but ultimately the total alignment of budgets and estimates will be determined by the government of the day when it tables its budget. It can determine that. It can have estimates align with the budget without changing the Standing Orders, yet the current government stands firm in saying that this is off the table, that there will be no discussion, that the government still wants the prerogative of tabling budgets when it wishes.

If we look at the history of the country, we see there were some periods when no budgets were tabled—and for good reason, in terms of what this House has to consider with respect to government spending—yet we are suddenly being told by the current government that it wants to maintain all of those privileges and prerogatives and that the opposition does not matter, because the Liberals were elected with a majority, which was 39% of the vote. When we won a majority government with those kinds of numbers, that majority was howled at by this side of the House. The opposition said that we had no legitimacy because we were elected with 39.5% of the vote. I look at what this means in the context of the long term and in the context of the hypocrisy being shown by the government side. When the Liberals were in opposition, they said that this approach was not acceptable because of the percentage of votes that we received when we were elected; now, all of a sudden, they are saying they have a mandate from all of the people and they do not have to consider the opposition on this one.

● (1210)

They are saying, “Let us just reduce the opposition's scrutiny on estimates. Let us reduce the amount of time the opposition has, and ultimately, if we continue the process and think it through, it means fewer confidence votes for the opposition.” Ultimately, that is what it means if we align the two and we do not have votes on supply, which are all confidence motions, and this House knows it.

Time and time again confidence motions come to the floor of this House, and they are at a time when the people can speak with some authority—not the 39%, but the ones who voted for opposition members, if they so choose. It has happened in our history, but the government does not want as many opportunities for that to happen. That is ultimately what the government is saying: “We want to reduce our risk factors as government in terms of confidence votes.”

I will continue with quotes from the parliamentary budget officer. There are a number of of them, and I think they are all worthy. The words are in the context of the report of the parliamentary budget officer, who has spoken quite a number of times on this issue, and I think they highlight not only the concerns that we have been raising to this point in this debate but also the concerns that our independent, non-partisan parliamentary budget officer brings to the table.

Here is a third quote:

The Government asserts that the Parliament does not play a meaningful role in financial scrutiny.

This is what the government asserts. The parliamentary budget officer disagrees with this view, stating in the report:

We note that notwithstanding the Government's performance information of admittedly poor quality, and their inability to reconcile the Government's spending proposals, parliamentarians have performed a commendable job of asking pertinent questions in standing committee hearings, Question Period and Committee of the Whole.

What has the parliamentary budget officer observed here and what has he reported on? He is saying the system works well in terms of scrutiny. He is saying the right balance is struck.

Why do we have to do it for the convenience of the administration of government? Why do we have to do it for the convenience of the minister? Why do we have to do it in order to reduce the powers of the opposition? This is what the government is driving at. The government is driving at reducing the powers of the opposition to hold the government to account. That is why we were put into opposition: to strike that balance. That balance, right now, is being threatened by the government. The government is taking another approach to accomplish the same types of results that it wanted previously.

Has the government dropped some of the more contentious things? I understand it has. I have been held up with delays in terms of travel, so I have not yet been able to read all of the discussions that have gone on, but when it comes to estimates reform, what the government could do today is act on reforming the estimates without changing the Standing Orders.

I stand here today as the opposition critic for the Treasury Board to oppose the reduction of the opposition's ability to hold the government to account and to be able to be the voice of the majority of the people, who did not vote for the present government.

We accept the results. I am not in any way, shape, or form diminishing that, but to say today that the government can unilaterally come into this House, put a motion on the floor, vote on it because it has the majority, and shove it down the throat of the opposition and the other people who care about the scrutiny of spending in government, who care about how dollars are spent, is absolutely wrong. It is something the government should not be doing.

● (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take exception to many of the things that the member has said this morning.

I want to highlight a different perspective. In my days in opposition when I was on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the government House leader never came before the committee to say that the government wanted to make these kinds of rule changes, or to even talk about rule changes to modernize Parliament. It was not a priority of the previous government. Instead, that government allowed the committee to do what it was going to do, and that was to look for any low-hanging fruit. It could maybe make some modifications, a period there, a comma here, or whatever it might be, and that was able to pass.

We now have a Prime Minister who is keen on modernizing Parliament. Conservative members have said that the government should not be allowed to modernize Parliament as long as the Conservative Party does not support it. Those members want to have a veto.

The Prime Minister has said he would like to see a rule change that would ensure that the Prime Minister is here for one day a week to answer every question. It would not prevent the Prime Minister from coming on other days. On that one day, every member who rises during that entire hour would get to ask a question directly of the Prime Minister. How is that a bad thing? I do not see it as a bad thing.

In the last election, I received close to 68% of the vote from my constituents, which is abnormally high. For me personally, I am very grateful for that and humbled by it.

Does the member not believe that this change would enable members of Parliament to better represent their constituents, if they know that for one day a week they can get up and the Prime Minister of Canada will answer their questions?

• (1220)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I want to be respectful of the member's question, which was more of a comment than a question.

The Prime Minister did stand up in a couple of sessions prior to the constituency break. Whether he answered the questions is a matter of perspective. We do not believe that he answered the questions. It is talking points 101 over and over again. Does that help Parliament? No.

Did the member across the floor listen to my speech? Did he listen to the fact that it was about estimates reform, about less scrutiny of how the government spends money? It was about the government's own purpose, not Parliament's purpose, to streamline its own initiatives, so we would have less scrutiny votes, less votes on money issues, and eight weeks less of debate.

Did the member hear those elements, or is this all about the Prime Minister being able to waltz in here and avoid questions? I think that is what he just said it is about.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight something that was just asked of the member by our colleague across the way from Winnipeg, who was so gracious in receiving 68% of the vote in the last election. He asked if the government does not have the right to change the rules of the House. I wonder if my colleague from my political party would agree that the House belongs to Parliament and to the people of Canada, not to any government.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I alluded to my colleague's comments in my speech.

Can one imagine what the howl and the outrage and the outright alarm would have been in this country if this had been proposed by our previous prime minister? It boggles my mind to think about it, and yet we have this entitled, arrogant approach by the Liberal government. The Liberals tried to take powers away from the opposition with Motion No. 6. They tried to shove it down our throats. They are trying it again, and they say they will do it unilaterally. This is the House of the people, as my colleague just said. It represents all of the people, all with diverse views.

The member for Winnipeg North may have well been honoured with 68% of the vote, but 39% of Canadians voted for the Liberal government. The Liberals are not entitled to do this. We should be

standing up for all of the people of Canada, not just the governing party and those who supported it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today it is important to review what we mean by a question of privilege and make sure that everyone understands. As I explained in my speech earlier, when we speak of a question of privilege, we are talking about a member's duty.

What do members need to do in order to properly represent their constituents? They must be able to appear in the House of Commons to work, to give speeches, and to introduce bills, such as mine, for example, on the bilingualism of Supreme Court judges. It is extremely important that MPs carry out these duties.

I want to ask my hon. colleague whether some degree of balance has been achieved in the House of Commons. This balance must not be unilaterally decided by the current Liberal government. That is what is dangerous about the Liberal government's proposal. It wants to strike a balance of power without the consent or agreement of the opposition parties. This has not been done in the past 100 years; it is unheard of. That is why I went to represent my constituents at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the wee hours of the morning to stand up for balance in the House of Commons. Indeed, we must be able to maintain a balance. If the government wants to make changes, it must work with the opposition parties.

Would my hon. colleague agree with that?

• (1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the NDP and I are totally aligned on that issue, and that is the issue of the day. Liberals use the word "modernization", which can mean different things to a lot of people. Their concept of modernization, or what they believe it to be, may not be the will of the majority of people in this country who have lived with a balanced system, the rules of this House, and who elect members to both government and opposition. We are called upon, as my colleague said, to represent those views and to strike a balance. The balance has served this country well. We need to maintain it and defend it, not only in this Parliament but in future ones, to ensure it does not deteriorate due to the will of a partisan government.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are using words like "arbitrary" and "arrogant". Following the introduction of Motion No. 6, the House erupted because of the dictatorial position that the government and the Prime Minister took, not only then but now, to take away the authority of opposition parties. That is not just my party but all opposition parties, so Liberals can have dictatorial authority over debate in this place and committee recommendations. The Prime Minister did a couple of trial balloons and talked to us during question period, which he can do, quite honestly, anyway. He just wants to do it on one day a week now.

Is the member concerned that Liberals are already prepared to ram this through because they have done the trial balloons to see what the Prime Minister looks like when he stands up for three-quarters of an hour?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, the agenda has been set, in case anyone cannot see through the smoke and mirrors of all of this. The discussion paper was tabled by the House leader. She said they were going to have a discussion on it and that Liberals wanted to accept other members' points of view. They said they wanted to have a discussion on estimates reform.

The government's presentations have been that this is the way it is going to be and if opposition parties do not like it, then tough luck. That is what the Liberal government is all about. It is all about doing what it did with Motion No. 6, as the member mentioned, and ramming it down our throats. It is trying to do it in a little softer, more pleasing way today, but we should make no mistake that this is the modus operandi of the government. It feels that it is entitled to do this. It says it is going to do it unilaterally, and that is wrong.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to speak here today, and I mean that with sincerity, because it is relevant to the topic of debate. We are talking about parliamentary privilege today. I will definitely speak on that, but I will also comment upon what the House leader and parliamentary secretary to the House leader have talked about today.

One thing I would like to point out is that in June of this year we will be celebrating the 802nd anniversary of the Magna Carta. I bring that up because all of what has happened throughout history, in English parliaments and parliaments around the world, is related to the debate we are having today.

If members will recall, the Magna Carta was signed reluctantly by King John at Runnymede in the 13th century. It was the foundation of parliamentary democracy. It was when barons stood up to the executive and said that they were not going to be taxed without representation. It was not at all a democracy at that point, but it was the beginning of a check on executive power. That is very important. However, from that initial document, a series of rules and institutions were built around the relationship between the executive, which in that case was the king, or eventually the queen, and those who were governed, those who paid taxes or were covered by the coercive power of the state. Really the Magna Carta in our history, and we are modelled on the English and then British and then U.K. parliaments, is a check on the executive, and that is important.

The Magna Carta was signed after a long period of turmoil, a very violent state of affairs at that time, but that violence and instability within England and eventually United Kingdom continued right through the period. Thank goodness we have a relatively peaceful period of time now. However, what began to emerge through history, as parliaments began to sit more regularly, was that the king would decide that he did not like what some members of parliament were saying and would have them arrested. The king would send troops and would block the entrance to parliament. I do not know if Queen Victoria did it, but we do know that previous kings did it. Most famously, Charles I tried to have five parliamentarians hauled out of parliament for speaking against the king and refusing to pay tax. That did not end too well for Charles I, who was beheaded during the civil war with Oliver Cromwell.

This might seem like an esoteric argument, but this is directly related to what we are talking about today, which is privilege. The deal that was made between the executive, the king or royalty, and those who were government was that they would be able to go to a place where they could voice opposition. They would be able to challenge, agree or disagree, with what the executive was proposing and not feel threatened. They would be protected under the law. That, of course, rises to the supremacy of Parliament. Those are the foundations on which we are built here today.

What we are talking about may seem like a relatively small incident, and why are we debating it at great length? We are debating it because it speaks to the principles of what we do in this place. We carry the weight of history, of people who fought and died so that we can stand in places like this today. Our job is to be caretakers of this place so that we can pass it on to future generations.

What was usually happening when rules were reformed and new rules put in place was that something bad was going on. Take, for example, the English Civil War, with the king trying to haul parliamentarians, MPs, out of Westminster, and then being executed, and of course the country dropping into a civil war, when Thomas Hobbes described the world as being "nasty, brutish, and short". This gives us a picture of what we do not want to happen.

After that settled down and peace broke out, parliamentarians and the executives sat down and asked what kind of rules could be put in place to avoid that from happening again. That is exactly where parliamentary privilege comes from. When we are in relatively good times, like we are today—we do not have any civil war on the horizon in Canada—maybe these rules do not seem very important, but they are important in bad times. Obviously, we do not wish for that; we see a bright future ahead of us. However, these things happen.

• (1230)

In governments around the world, we see surprising, shocking upheavals that we could not anticipate. I always think of the former Yugoslavia, which hosted the Olympics one year and then a few years after split up as a country. Things can happen.

We have to respect the laws that we have negotiated over the years. That is really what has happened. The bad times show what should not happen, and during the good times we negotiate the rules by which we try to avoid future bad times.

This is an important question of privilege. I have listened to the debate. There has been a good level of respect for this. The House allotted a good time for this. Again, it is good for us to remind ourselves of the boundaries of debate and our responsibilities here, and the roles we play. Of course we have a fused legislature here, with the executive sitting among the legislature. Sometimes it can get a bit confusing in that sense.

However, the role the opposition plays is essential. Voicing the will of constituents is one thing, but it is also keeping the government from making big mistakes. That is what we are supposed to do here. We are supposed to debate. I think all Canadians would agree, and a lot of people in the House agree, that these things could be improved, and we have seen some improvement.

We have to be careful to not take questions of privilege too lightly and ensure we consider them very carefully, if we feel privilege has been breached. Perhaps we can learn from this so we can make adjustments to ensure these things do not happen again.

A lot of this debate has been related to the changes to the Standing Orders. We have heard debate on the other side. In the last Parliament, I closely related to the change in the Standing Orders. I was able to put forward a private member's motion to bring electronic petitions to the House of Commons, which was eventually successful. I would like to walk the House through that a bit, because it has been misrepresented by the other side.

Initially I put forward a first motion and then after some discussion a second motion to Parliament. Right now in the Standing Orders, we have the ability to do paper petitions. If constituents write a petition in a particular way and they get 25 signatures, we are able to submit it to the House for consideration by the government and also speak to it briefly.

What my motion was designed to do, and did, was change the Standing Orders so these petitions could be accepted electronically. A new web page would be created, people could post their electronic petition ideas online, a parliamentarian would sign off on the petition, and then the petition, if it gained 500 signatures, would be sent to the government, just like a paper petition.

The innovation, of course, was that when the government issued a response, this response would be emailed to all those who had signed it. For example, with the recent e-petition on electoral reform, which had about 130,000 people sign, when the government issues a response, those 130,000 people will receive this notice.

That is an important innovation because with the paper petitions, people were not really getting the feedback. It was difficult for them to find out what the government response was to their petition.

I was of course hoping for more changes, such as if petitions received 50,000 or 100,000 signatures, it would trigger a debate in the House of Commons. There would not be a vote, but there would be a debate. This is modelled on the U.K.'s parliamentary system.

I brought forward a motion for a study of electronic petitions. It was not a motion to change the Standing Orders; it was a motion for a study of the Standing Orders, with some suggestions about how we could move forward with electronic petitions. That idea was opposed by Mr. Harper's Conservative government. However, with the kind support of the Liberals, the Green Party member, as well as the Bloc and eight government backbenchers, that motion passed, 142-140, in the House. What passed was a motion that we study electronic petitions and that it be sent to PROC for consideration.

● (1235)

The motion went to PROC. There was a lot of debate. Some of my ideas were adopted and some were not. The report was sent back to the House of Commons and in concurrence of the report, it was adopted unanimously. Even though the discussion started off as a close vote and there was rigorous debate at PROC, when it came back, a compromise was agreed to and it was adopted unanimously. Hundreds of e-petitions have been used at this point. Almost every parliamentarian has used them in one form or another.

Again, that has been represented as a majority vote, but it was not. It was concurred on unanimously at the end of the process.

That is important because it talks about how we amend the Standing Orders. What is being proposed is ham-fisted. Motion No. 6 was proposed by the previous House leader, who is no longer House leader because he muffed it so badly. He tried to ram through changes to the Standing Orders without any discussion. That did not work. Now a new House leader basically has decided to do the same thing. That is not working either. We are looking at a third attempt today to force unilateral changes on how we do business in the House. The processes have been agreed upon over a very long period of parliamentary history, both here and elsewhere.

The government has two things wrong. The first is the process by which we make changes and the second is the content. The process we have been using is a consensual process. We look at the Standing Orders, sit down with political parties, find a way to tweak these orders, look at how we incorporate new technology, those types of things. That is how we have traditionally made changes.

The Liberal government is in a panic at the moment. If we look at its legislative agenda, it has really passed nothing. It has had budget bills that have to pass through the House and the Senate, but really there is very little legislation. From the promise in the election to have real change, we have really had no legislative change.

For example, the assisted dying bill will be struck down by the courts eventually. Members in the other place are waiting for ideas to come from the House of Commons. As the opposition, that is not our responsibility. We try to do the best we can with private members' motions and opposition motions, however, it is the government's job to set the agenda.

The Liberals love campaigning. That is why they are trying to make changes so the Prime Minister does not have to be in the House, but they do not like legislating. This might make the other side upset, but it reminds me of what is going on in the United States. The U.S. President likes to campaign and does not understand how to govern. The President makes promises he knows he cannot keep, and he has not kept them. Apparently, Obamacare was supposed to be abolished in the first order, but that has dropped off the agenda.

Although it is being done with a smile here rather than a sneer, it is still the same thing. It is a government that is unable to accomplish its legislative agenda because it really does not know how to and now it is punishing us by trying to change the Standing Orders unilaterally to force legislation through more quickly. That is not the way it is supposed to be done. We did not vote for Donald Trump in Canada and we do not expect that kind of treatment here.

The process is really important. We found this on electoral reform. We had a committee that was built on consensus. The committee arrived at consensus. It was rejected by the government, but at least we got that far in looking at electoral reform.

● (1240)

The government ended up breaking its promise on electoral reform. We will see what happens in the next election. The Liberals promised they would abolish the first past the post single member plurality system 1,800 times and then they did not do it because they did not get their preferred system. The voters will decide in the next election whether that was a promise worth keeping. I think it was. I am a huge proponent of proportional representation and I am deeply disappointed we did not get that change. However, that is what the government has decided to do.

The process by which we make changes to the Standing Orders is very important. It should not be taken lightly, because it does set a precedent for other changes. If the government decides it will just ignore us or ram through Standing Order changes on this group of changes, why will it not do it again in the next round. It breaks the whole precedent about how we have managed to change the rules in the House in the past.

The other is the content. The content of this new proposal was dropped to the media first, again breaking precedent, and then mentioned in the House of Commons before it is brought up at PROC. The content is also problematic. I am of two minds about whether the Prime Minister should be here for every day of the week or if he should be here one day of the week mainly because I have not seen enough evidence of the impact that will have on how we do business.

I have talked to some colleagues outside the confines of this place. Some of them are okay with it and some are not. However, there is no real space for us to have that debate. Therefore, what happens is that the government brings in a so-called discussion paper, which is actually the motion that will go to PROC. It will go into this forum when we have to vote on something, but there is no place outside of either the chamber or PROC where we can have neutral discussions, have input without the pressure of having to have a vote.

Since we are talking so much about the United Kingdom, and this would perhaps fall on you a bit, Mr. Speaker, it has something called a Hansard Society. It has been there for a very long time. It is actually funded by the Speaker's office and by Parliament and it sets up a neutral place, run by academics, who continually review how parliamentarians do their business.

The Hansard Society came to prominence when there was a huge election expenses scandal in Britain in 2010. The Speaker of the House ordered the Hansard Society to review how the standing orders worked, and it is a great forum. Parliamentarians came in on their off times. They went to sessions, which are actually held in the parliamentary precinct. They would discuss what changes could be made with the public and with experts.

The Hansard Society releases reports and there is no vote, so parliamentarians can speak as parliamentarians. There is no rigorous partisan whipping that happens and it does a courtesy to those

members who have been sitting in the House for such a long time to hear their views. We sit here day after day doing good work, but also observing and thinking about how we can make this place work better. The Hansard Society allows that space for that discussion to happen without having the pressure of a vote at the end.

I have had many great discussions with Hansard Society researchers like Dr. Ruth Fox. In fact, they were kind enough to share their experience with electronic petitions with me and helped influence how we built our system here.

We are talking a lot about, for example, Prime Minister's question time being on a Wednesday, which is done in the U.K., but it was developed through neutral discussion in places like the Hansard Society, where parliamentarians could come, let down their hair and have a good chat about how they did their work. We could do the same thing here. If there is one thing that comes out of this discussion, it is perhaps that we need to think about how we can have these discussions without the partisan intensity that happens in this place and in PROC.

Although the privilege question is a serious debate, I am glad we were able to have these discussions, to think about how we do business in this place. I am glad there are thoughts about changing the Standing Orders. However, I am not happy about the way the Liberals are proceeding.

● (1245)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the process for bringing electronic petitions, and he recognized that consensus did not exist until the end of the process. I think there is a very important point there. Consensus came at the end, at the very end, at the implementation point rather than at the discussion point. I think that is a very worthwhile point.

He also made the point that the electoral reform committee had consensus, which I think is a totally spurious argument. I do not know in what world a whole lot of members not agreeing and having four supplementary reports constitutes consensus.

I wonder if the member could tell me how he sees consensus being important and how it actually exists in the context he describes, because I do not think it does.

● (1250)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between what is being proposed here today and how electronic petitions evolved. I was an opposition member who put forward a private member's motion for a study. I was not in government. We have a very different dynamic happening here.

If, for example, a private member said, “We’d like to go to prime minister’s questions being on Wednesdays”, and put it in a private member’s motion for PROC to study, and we then had a vote on it, it would either go to the PROC committee or it would not. However, that is not what is happening here. We have a government that has a suite of changes it wants to slip into PROC, kind of avoiding the debate here in the first place, and saying that it has arrived at some kind of consensus or has some kind of mandate to do this, and it does not. There is a big distinction between the two things.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not here in the previous parliament, but I know there was a lot of noise every time the government moved time allocation, and I am sure my colleague, who was here, was one of the ones who was making some of that noise.

This discussion we are having today, it seems to me, is following a trend we see with the Liberal government, which is that it does a bait and switch. It says that it was terrible when the Conservatives moved time allocation. It does not want to have to use it, but it still wants to implement its agenda.

Here is a quote, in a recent article, from the government House leader:

Canadians elected us to deliver an ambitious agenda. So, it is with regret, but with full transparency, that I want to inform you that under the circumstances the government will need to use time allocation more often in order to implement the change that we promised.

All of this seems to indicate that the government is trying to get around having to use time allocation. Does this appear to be a bait and switch, with the government saying, “We will never use time allocation, but now we have to, because we can’t make the changes we wanted to”?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, as an observer of parliament, what I see happening here is pretty simple. We have 200 new members in this place. We have a new Prime Minister, who is new to that job. We have a number of new ministers. I think when the emphasis was on campaigning and winning the election, there was little thought put into how to actually govern. I think that is what has happened in the first months we have been here. The attention has been on the exuberance of a majority government. I saw that in 2011 as well, but I think in the last Parliament, we had a prime minister who understood governing. I did not agree with much of what was put in place. However, what I recognized in the last Parliament was that although time allocation was used frequently, it was within the purview of what is agreed to in terms of the Standing Orders, so it was allowed. I do not agree with it.

What I see on this side is a party that does not have a plan for governance and is starting to scramble. One thing it is recognizing is that if it could just change the Standing Orders to limit the powers of the opposition, maybe it could push its agenda through more quickly. I think that is a wrongheaded approach. I think it is a bit confusing to the public. It would be better if the government just got its act together, rather than changing the rules.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Burnaby South, for a really excellent speech and for putting this apparently esoteric discussion into something of a historical frame so people who watch these debates will understand just how important it is.

Charles I, as the executive, lost his head over this very topic, and here we have a government that seems to think, as the executive, that it has the ability to ram through changes unilaterally. The government got 39.5% of the vote and believes that gives it the mandate to change the rules of the House.

He talked of the fused legislature and executive in our parliamentary system and how they think, as an executive, they can impose their will on this place. I would like the member to speculate on how that might have been done if the government wanted to make changes to another branch of the government, such as the judiciary. Would that have been acceptable?

Could he enlighten us with the experience he had when he made his changes to the parliamentary rules to bring in electronic petitions and how that compares with how the present government is choosing to proceed in this instance?

● (1255)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Victoria does excellent work as House leader in this place and in British Columbia.

What we are experiencing here is a newly elected government with too many jobs to learn all at once, one that is more excited about the campaigning side of things, being in public, and getting accolades than it is about focusing on governance. It is now starting to panic and is changing the rules unilaterally, which is going to get it in a whole pile of trouble, as it is already finding.

Opposition members have powers for a reason. It is to make sure that there is real deliberation, as we heard in the last speech by my Conservative colleague, on how we spend money and use the coercive power of the state.

If, for example, the Prime Minister decided he was going to make unilateral changes to the Supreme Court or other levels of our justice system, it would be met with shock and horror. While this is perhaps a little less dramatic, it is no less serious, and the Canadian public needs to be aware that this is breaking with precedent and consensus.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I generally agree with every word my friend from Burnaby South says, but I have to say I was disturbed to hear in a comparison that the Harper administration governed better than what we are seeing from the current government. I have lots of concerns about broken promises by the Liberal government, but I have to say that when it assumed power, I was encouraged by, for instance, initial signs, such as the transparency of the mandate letters. That suggested a readiness to govern. The Prime Minister’s Office is no longer all-powerful. Clearly, cabinet ministers are actually running their own portfolios.

What I am deeply distressed about in the current debate is that we must not conflate anything done by the Harper administration. Prime Minister Harper used prorogation, for the first time in the history of Canada, to avoid a vote he knew he would lose in this place. The current proposal from the government would improve that, but not as much as the proposal the Green Party has made to ensure that there is a vote of confidence in the House before any prorogation to keep any future prime minister from using and abusing powers egregiously, as Stephen Harper did. We must not, in our effort at the moment to make partisan points, forget what the last nine years were like, when we had 100 uses of time allocation.

Since my hon. colleague and I are actually friends and have worked academically on a new book looking at how Parliament gets distorted, I would put it to him that it is not that one party does it better than another. It is that the power of political parties over the lives of MPs inevitably erodes democracy.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of debate we should be having in this place, where we have different perspectives and work out the best way forward.

For me, this whole debate is about the process by which we make change. As I pointed out, and as we talk about in the book, there is really no place for debate. Because this place is so controlled by partisan politics and leadership teams, it is very difficult. It does not operate like the U.K. Parliament, where there are frequent disagreements within parties. That does not really happen in this place, where there is almost a uniformity of votes on every matter we discuss here. Because of that, it is very important that at least when we make changes to something like the Standing Orders, there is some degree of consensus and the Prime Minister's Office does not call the shots on how we do business in this place.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join this debate. My colleague from the New Democrats in his contribution mentioned King Charles. It was King John who dealt with the Magna Carta, and he was not beheaded, actually. He died of dysentery. It was King Henry III who reintroduced the Magna Carta a second time. Three of those clauses are still part of the United Kingdom's constitution. It speaks to the strength and traditions, which have lasted through the ages and form the rights and privileges that both members of the public and members of Parliament enjoy.

I want to begin with a quote from Lady Thatcher on the quality of debate and the arguments made by different sides. She said, to *The Times*, in 1980, "I love argument. I love debate. I don't expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me — that's not their job."

I very much agree with the emotion and sentiment she shared. When members of the House from the different political parties we belong to, but also some of us who are more independent thinkers than others, debate in the House, we do not necessarily have to come to an agreement. It is the same at committee. It is not a requirement that we always have consensus, with 100% of us voting every single which way. Fundamentally, all members, especially when in opposition, and members of the government caucus will be there some day, have to agree that the rights and privileges we enjoy as members of Parliament are worth protecting, not just for the work we do today on behalf of our constituents but for the work future members of Parliament will do on behalf of their constituents. These

seats do not belong to us. We are stewards for a next generation, for the future members who will sit in the House and defend the rights and interests of their constituents, as will be their right and privilege at that time.

I have listened to the debate. I have read and re-read the transcript of the debate when this was before the House before. Some members of the House, especially on the government side, must have some form of cognitive dissonance that must be experienced communally.

We have a ruling by the Speaker. The matter we have before us is a breach of the privilege of two members of the House. The member for Beauce and the member for Milton, who sit behind me, were affected directly by this, because they were unable to come to the House and vote on a matter the House had under consideration.

The Speaker's ruling established certain themes. He also said there were sufficient grounds for filing a prima facie question of privilege. Thereafter, the Speaker advised that the member could move the required motion to have this matter rightly referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It is a committee I have been at during the PROC filibuster, of course. It has been mentioned here several times now. I remember being there until 3 a.m. participating in debate. I remember doing a straight eight hours of debate. I promise not to do that here. I promise not to speak for eight hours, but I was required to do it at the time.

My point at committee was that we are here to defend the rights and privileges of members. The changes to the Standing Orders being proposed by members on the government side would reduce our ability as members of Parliament, especially the opposition, to serve our constituents.

Last year, in December 2016, Jim Prior passed away. He was a great House leader in the Ted Heath government as a member of the Conservative government in the United Kingdom. He said in his book that the way to make a well-functioning democracy work is to ensure that members of the opposition are able to do their work. It was a government House leader saying that the right way to do it is to ensure that the opposition members have the ability to speak up and take the time they need to deliberate, debate, and contribute. They need to both be able to do it and feel that they can do it. One is the actual function and one is believing that they are able to do it. Both have to exist.

Mr. Prior, although he passed away in December 2016, wrote a fantastic book. By no means was he a great promoter of Lady Thatcher. She was prime minister of the United Kingdom after 1979. He served in her government as a cabinet minister, but he was considered one of the "wets", while she obviously preferred the "dries" in her cabinet.

•(1300)

The matter before the House is on the Speaker's ruling that says there is a prima facie breach of privilege of two members of the House. It is definitive, insofar as it establishes that something went wrong and that the something is up for interpretation.

I am quoting from the Speaker's ruling and not the exact details that are then discussed based on the two reports that the Speaker received. Here is what appears to have happened. It "appears to have happened" does not mean that it has happened. It "appears to have happened". Many Liberals have confused this statement. The member of Parliament for York—Simcoe quoted Speaker Milliken, and I am paraphrasing here, that it is not the role of the Speaker to be definitively involved in making a ruling every which way on matters of a breach of privilege.

There is a role for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs here that must be undertaken. There must be a review. The matter of a breach of privilege must be reviewed, because it is serious. Imagine if this had been a deciding budget vote. We have had close votes in the House before. If it had come down to two votes going in any one direction, it could easily have been a much more tense, disruptive, and emotional debate in the House.

If a vote had been decided by one or two votes on that day, it would have been a far more serious matter. I am convinced that we would not even be having this debate. The issue would have been sent to committee immediately. There would be questions in question period about it to find out specific details. Thankfully that did not happen that day, but who knows what would happen in the future if members were obstructed from entering the chamber, whether direct entry to the chamber or by the bus service that gets us here from our offices.

The parliamentary precinct has grown over time. Some office locations have moved farther away. Members who are perhaps getting up in years, senior members, more experienced members who have mobility issues, take more time to get here. They all plan for that. All members, regardless of party affiliation, consider the time needed to travel from their offices. My precinct office recently moved, as have many others. We all judge how long it will take to get into the House to vote. This is one task of our jobs that no other job has. Voting is fundamental. It is critical. It is the one thing we do that no other job has as its most central role. If members do not like voting in the House, then they should not have decided to run for Parliament, because voting in the House is the most important thing that we do. It is the only thing that our constituents cannot do. Most parts of this job with respect to the functions and tasks that we do as members of Parliament can be done by somebody else, but only we, as elected members of Parliament, can enter the chamber to vote on behalf of our constituents. That is the most fundamental thing.

I have a Yiddish proverb here, and many members have heard it before. I like them and have used them at committee: "Nothing tastes more bitter than the truth." With respect to the Speaker's ruling, the member for York—Simcoe said that this matter must go to the procedure and House affairs committee. It can go nowhere else. This is a breach of privilege as a result of the two votes that were not able to be cast. Voting is fundamental to the role of a member of Parliament, and as a result we have to look into what happened.

The Speaker's ruling is clear. It appears that something has happened. Members of Parliament on that committee will be able to review the contents of those reports, and I truly hope that they will be provided. They will perhaps be able to ask questions of the member for Milton and the member for Beauce. They will perhaps be able to ask questions of other members of the House from past instances, where they were perhaps delayed entering the House, or they feel that security or other measures are being introduced or being removed that impede their ability to get to the chamber as quickly as they need. They might have suggestions with respect to improvements, as well.

The Speaker's role is that of a servant of the House, a servant of all members of Parliament. That is why Speakers are elected in this chamber by preferential ballot. It ensures that one candidate has the most support required in order to fulfill the role. The Speaker is not necessarily here to render judgment as a justice among members of Parliament, because at the end of the day the Speaker is equal to all members of the House. All 338 of us, including the Speaker, are equals.

•(1305)

We do not expect the Speaker to render judgment on things like a breach of privilege, especially in this matter. What kind of servant would a Speaker be if his or her judgment on this would be considered the facts, that there would be no other consideration given, and that the committee could not consider it going forward? A servant of the House cannot tell the House what to do. The House renders judgment through the vote. The House makes a decision through the vote. The best decision in this matter would be to approve the amendments to the original motion in order to take this matter to committee, so it can receive a complete review, a complete study, with witnesses and members of Parliament giving it full consideration.

It is a matter that is more important at this time. "At this time" are words that the government House leader likes to use quite often. She used them this morning, referring to the changes to the Standing Orders she would like to make "at this time". The government will not proceed with all of the ideas and changes that we on the opposition side find so reprehensible, and in some cases illogical. In the long term, it will hurt members of the Liberal government caucus when they some day return to opposition, some day soon I hope, in 2019.

That is a matter that the standing committee should review. The standing committee should review cases where there is a breach of privilege. The Speaker's ruling was clear. It appeared that certain things happened a certain way, based on two reports. I would very much prefer if a committee of members of Parliament were to review this. I have full confidence in the chair of the committee, the member for Yukon, and the other members who sit on the committee on a regular basis, to review this matter and render judgment, and then to get back to the House to instruct the House and the Speaker on the best way to avoid such instances in the future.

The Speaker's ruling, and this is something that the member for York—Simcoe brought up, said that the two reports provided an excellent minute-by-minute summary of events and were supplemented by witness statements. I know that the Speaker at the time he made the ruling did not refer to specific witnesses in this report, or outside of the report. It is not very clear, based on the Speaker's ruling. I would very much like to see the Standing Committee on Procedure and House affairs consider this matter, who the witnesses were and whether we could hear from them once again.

The nice thing about a standing committee is that all of us can attend. We can all participate by being there and listening to the conversation. I have been to these late sittings of the procedures and House affairs committee, even though I was not a full member. I was a fourth or fifth member on the Conservative side, sitting, participating, listening, having conversations, along with other members there, and at times, when I was substituted in, providing for a point of order. Then I contributed with some observations I had made, based on what I had heard at committee and read in the transcripts as well.

That line in the Speaker's ruling about "what appears to have happened" is critical to the entire matter before the House today. What appears to have happened is not a determination of fact; it is simply a collection of views provided to the House by the Speaker. It is not an instruction to the House on the facts of the matter. The standing committee can determine the facts and then return to the House.

Generally, though, we have heard many members speak about the problems that the government is having, and I do not mean the government caucus but the front bench, the members of the executive council, in pushing through the government's agenda. Many members have mentioned before that the government seems to be having a very difficult time in proceeding with its agenda.

It is having a great deal of difficulty passing legislation and following through with its platform promises. Some of it is simply because it does not have the public support it thought it had, such as on electoral reform. In other matters, the government is simply in no rush. Sometimes the government gets to decide the business of the day, to decide what we debate during the day, and sometimes I see legislation that, in my mind, should not be such a priority. A priority should be border security or taxation.

I hear a great deal of things from constituents. I held an open house on Thursday in my constituency. The primary concern for people in Calgary Shepard is jobs, pipelines, oil and gas industry jobs, getting people back to work, and making sure we have the right policies to assure industry that it can hire workers again and proceed with the construction of large energy infrastructure projects. None of that exists right now, and I do not see that as a priority on that side.

We also saw the government push through Motion No. 6, which was dropped because of public pressure. We see the continuation of a filibuster at the procedure and House affairs committee at this point. I do not know how long that will continue, based on what we heard from the government House leader this morning.

● (1310)

The Senate changes are being rammed through the Senate, which are very similar to the ones being proposed in the House. We cannot forget the other chamber. We form Parliament together; we are not a unitary form of government. We have another chamber that does good work in reviewing the government's legislation.

What about the Prime Minister's obstruction of a New Democrat and the manhandling of our opposition whip last year? It is a trend. It is a pattern of behaviour, and it is typical of how the government has been run. Liberals say the nice things and use all the right words, buzzwords especially, but consultation is not a shield for incompetence. If they are incapable and do not know how to pass legislation and push it through the process, perhaps consideration should be given to standing aside and letting another member of the executive council take a shot at it. There are Liberal backbenchers who could perhaps do a better job than the government House leader.

I have another proverb: "A trick is clever only once." I have listed all of these patterns of behaviour. Motion No. 6, what Liberals are doing in the Senate, and what they have tried to do at the procedure and House affairs committee are not consultations, not discussions, not nice ways to talk about things. At the committee, the government discussion paper and the motion were moved on a Friday. One only drops bad news on a Friday. That is a general joke made by the media, by members of Parliament, by public servants. It is very common. One does not just drop a discussion paper that needs a thorough discussion. Liberals should not surprise members this way on a Friday, which is exactly what the government House leader has done. Now the Liberals do not even want to sit on Fridays.

Having a conversation is not a replacement for doing something, for going through the motions of passing their agenda, actually following through on what they intend to do. The motion moved by the member for Milton, with amendments by the member for Beauce, is reasonable and logical. It ensures protection of our privileges that protect members of Parliament primarily from the government and the crown. The obstruction of a member or breach of privilege goes beyond simply blocking a member. I am going to refer to page 111 of O'Brien and Bosc, chapter 3, "Privileges and Immunities", which expands on what constitutes a prima facie case of breach of privilege. It also includes damaging a member's reputation, "the usurpation of the title of Member of Parliament, the intimidation of Members and their staff and of witnesses before committees, and the provision of misleading information."

I mention these things because it goes beyond obstructing members from entering the chamber to vote. It includes a whole slew of rights, as the member from the New Democrats just spoke on, going all the way back to the Magna Carta. All of these inheritances we have, these traditions we have picked up from the mother parliament here in Canada are valuable to protecting future members of Parliament. Our role as parliamentarians, both in opposition and on the government side, should be to protect them as best we can. The only way we can do that is to take this matter directly to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Some members of the government have implied that the members for Beauce and Milton have misled, or attributed the breach of privilege against them on the Prime Minister. We are told that MPs are not to imply or say that another member is lying. I am not implying that any member here is lying. I believe every statement made here by a member is truthful, in as far as they believe it to be true. I absolutely believe that. Speakers have brought to order many members who have implied that another member has lied in some way. I am not implying that in any way. I believe the facts as they were said by the member for Beauce. He believes, based on what security said, that it was the Prime Minister's vehicles that were blocking the way.

Parliamentarians make the rules, and we give the Speaker the role of arbitrator, deciding on the rules. We cannot decide the rules and clarify the rights and privileges of a member without this going to the standing committee. That is what we need to remember, and that is where the discussion needs to go. It is fundamental to the chamber that matters of breach of privilege are questions of equality that the members enjoy. We should deal with this expeditiously and send it to committee so it can in a detailed way look at the evidence and call witnesses.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a couple of thoughts come to mind that I would like to share and maybe see if we could get a response.

First and foremost, we have now had a number of members stand up and talk about the legislative agenda. Yes, a legislative agenda is important, but to try to give a false impression in terms of the government not being able to do things is somewhat wrong. Canadians understand and appreciate that this is a government that has accomplished a great deal virtually from day one. We can talk about the legislation that dealt with the biggest tax break to Canada's middle class. We can talk about the budgetary measures, the increase to the GIS. We can talk about the Canada child benefit program. The government has been very successful at bringing forward what we believe Canadians want, and that is special attention to and a focus on Canada's middle class.

In regard to the legislative component in particular, the member spoke a great deal about the privilege itself and the importance of having unfettered access. There is not one Liberal member who is questioning the importance of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. In fact, we have consistently said that we want PROC to deal with this. We entrust PROC, as it has dealt with the issue in the past, to do it again. In fact, we support the subamendment that is being debated right now.

Does the member not share the same confidence in the PROC membership and in PROC being able to do what it has done in the past very effectively in dealing with this issue? Every Liberal member and, I would like to believe and I choose to believe, every member of this House acknowledges and appreciates the importance of having unfettered access. Would he not agree with that?

• (1320)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North is quite good at defending the usually indefensible. He is a member

who stands up quite often in the House and it is a testament that he does defend his government ably. He stands up when no other member wishes to.

On the budget, all budget measures have a fixed timeline for debate. They are almost automatically passed at a fixed time from when the budget is tabled. It is not as if it is a large piece of legislation that is separate, that can be completely debated by all members of the House. There is a fixed timeline.

On the PROC matter, I would feel much more confident in the ability of PROC to render a neutral decision without outside interference if the government House leader did not sometimes show up late at night during those conversations or pull members away or suspend the meetings in order for them to have a conversation on the side somewhere. Of course, I believe that the members of PROC do a reasonable and good job. I believe in the chair's, the member for Yukon's, ability to run the committee in a very efficient manner. I have had absolutely no problems when I have been at PROC with his chairmanship of the committee. He does an exemplary job of it. However, I would feel much better if the government House leader would not get involved in the committee's work.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the issue of access to Parliament Hill first arose under the previous government. The member was not in the 41st Parliament, but we did have problems where Parliament was being used for visiting heads of state and dignitaries instead of the traditional practice of using Rideau Hall. This did create conflicts, where the business of Parliament was up against security concerns for visiting heads of state. I remember this particularly in the case of Netanyahu's visit, but there were others.

Subsequent to that, we had the horrible incident of October 22, 2014. There was a very quick response by the previous administration to change the security rules on the Hill, in my view without adequate consultation with members of Parliament and without adequate public debate, where we have now changed from having the House of Commons security in charge, and the 500 years of tradition that the Speaker protects the rights of MPs and of the place. We should never put that in the hands of a governing party or a prime minister. We have done that now by putting the RCMP in charge of Parliament Hill security because of these issues of access to the place, because of not being able to get here in time to vote which is the question of privilege that is being debated today.

I remain concerned that this change was made without adequate debate. Is my friend at all concerned to have a political party of the day have control over our access to this place, whether by accident or by intention?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, it is a difficult question to answer because I am not a specialist on personal security, especially when it comes to an institution like Parliament. The precinct is quite large and it has enlarged over time to include new offices and new committee rooms, and it keeps on expanding. Site security has been done by the RCMP for quite a while.

I was actually here as a staff member to another member of Parliament about 12 years ago. I remember when there were two different security services. In my eyes back then, it was inadequate. It did not provide the type of oversight that was needed. It was very different on the Senate side from the House of Commons side. I find that the PPS today does an excellent service protecting us. I feel far more comfortable having more officers both inside the building and outside the building protecting members of Parliament.

I will mention one thing that I have found interesting. Far too many vehicles are still allowed access to Parliament Hill. Far too many vehicles are on Parliament Hill. Some are stopped and are idling. Some perhaps are waiting for a minister. There are taxis and trucks. That is a far greater area of concern for me than having a united parliamentary security service provided for members of Parliament.

• (1325)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a quick follow-up on the question from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I rather appreciated it. I think the point of it was after the attacks of October 2014 the rules changed to take the parliamentary protective service away from Parliament and give it to the RCMP and change the chain of command. I think that is a concern for many members. It has come up at PROC many times.

I wonder if the member is aware of that change and what he thinks of it. I think it was a very fair question from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the change because it did make the news when those changes were made after the terrorist attacks on Parliament Hill. On the details of the change and how the change affects security, the differences and different models, I am not a specialist on the security of large buildings such as this, and the types of services. I would defer to the members of PROC to have a better understanding of it and to provide a report to the House to make the final determination on how we should proceed to ensure the security of staff members, members of Parliament, and senators as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the importance of unfettered access.

I have had the opportunity to sit on PROC and we have had some great dialogue from professionals, including the commissioner of the RCMP, who have come forward to tell us what happened, what caused it. There are recommendations or discussions that follow from that committee's hearings.

If we just base it on previous discussions on matters of privilege that are recommending unfettered access, typically they tend to go into the committee in a much more prudent, faster way. I am wondering if the member thinks that we are getting close to seeing this actually go to PROC where PROC can get to work on this very important issue.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, of course I would love to see this go to PROC, once members in this House have fully debated the matter. Any member is free to stand up and contribute to the debate, which then forms part of the transcript that members of PROC can use in their consideration at the committee for the types of expert

witnesses they may want to call or members of Parliament they may want to have there for that further discussion at committee.

I sit on the foreign affairs committee and I have gone back through the *Hansard* transcripts many times to see what other members of Parliament have said. We can ask some for their thoughts on specific matters.

Once members have spoken to this and once no further members wish to rise to debate this issue, I fully expect it to go to PROC.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

We can all agree that the lapel pins we wear are not what makes us the people's elected representatives. This symbol is useful for security purposes. However, it should not have any bearing on a member's privilege to sit in the House. Parliament belongs to the people, and its representatives should always have access to this place, whether they are wearing their lapel pin or not.

That being said, the question of privilege that was raised today is more anecdotal than fundamental. Fundamentally, there are, in the House, members and legislators who cannot fully participate in the legislative process. I am talking about the 10 members of the Bloc Québécois and the member of the Green Party.

Today, we are talking about a question of privilege because we want our democracy to be as fair and effective as possible. As a result, we are talking about how the House works. That is healthy, and it is a good thing to do. First and foremost, we need to ask ourselves whom the House belongs to. It belongs to the people. We are here as representatives of the people. It is the voice of the people that is heard in the House of Commons, or at least that is the spirit of our democracy.

Like the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and the New Democratic Party, the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party are parties that are recognized by Elections Canada. Representatives of these parties were elected as members of the House of Commons. However, at present, only parties with 12 elected members or more have official party status. This standard for recognition is a tradition, but it is not set out in any law.

The only thing in the Parliament of Canada Act about the required number of elected officials is that a threshold of 12 elected members is needed to establish the additional allowances for the representatives of a recognized party. That is not what we are asking for. We are not asking for additional allowances for representatives of our parties. What we are asking is that all members have the same rights in the House. What would that mean? It would mean, for example, that we would be able to sit on standing committees of the House. It would also mean that we would be able to ask questions in oral question period. At this point in time, on some days we can and on others we cannot. We are never sure whether we will be able to speak. It would also mean that we would be able to fully play our role as elected members and members of the opposition. We would have a budget with which to do our work. Parties must have at least 12 members to have a budget.

The real losers in all this are not only the parties with fewer than 12 elected representatives, but the entire population. Nearly a million Quebecers are penalized at the polls because of partisanship. Budgets that enable the parties to do their parliamentary work, be it for party leaders, whips, House leaders, research, support, or IT, are set by the Board of Internal Economy after the general election.

The way we see it, there is nothing preventing the Board of Internal Economy from granting additional funds to parties that are currently unrecognized, funds that would allow them to hire researchers so they can better perform their role and represent their constituents effectively, just like the other MPs in the House of Commons.

This is not just about political will. Unfortunately, there appears to be a clear absence of political will when it comes to parties other than those with at least 12 elected members, and voters are the ones who pay the price.

I would like to talk about how it works in Quebec. The Office of the National Assembly grants research and support budgets to all political parties with elected members. Under section 108 of the Act respecting the National Assembly, all political parties represented in the Assembly receive monies for research and support purposes. That applies to independent members too.

• (1330)

The amount provided will be used to cover operational and research expenses, which includes staff salaries. At present, parties with fewer than 12 members must cut their constituency budgets in order to conduct research. That is why the service is not as good in Ottawa, since some parties have less money than others to provide this service, and not as good in our ridings, since part of the constituency budget has to be cut in order to do research.

The NDP, which currently has 44 elected MPs, has an average supplementary budget of about \$90,000 per member for research. This budget is used by the party leader, whip, and caucus leader, and for everything from translation to IT to coffee during caucus meetings. The Standing Orders discount 8% of the Canadian electorate. In fact, the House of Commons is discounting the 5% of Canadians who voted for the Bloc Québécois and the 3% of Canadians who voted for the Green Party. As a result, the MPs chosen by more than 1.4 million voters do not have the resources needed to fulfill their role. Is that a good thing for democracy? I

hardly think so. Democracy seems to be taking a back seat when it comes to how political parties are recognized in the House.

I would like the other parties to talk about this because generally when we ask the question, they always try to avoid answering it. For so many people to have their elected representative denied the same budget as members of other parties that have more than 12 elected members does not make very much sense to us. It is the voters who determine party recognition because they are the ones who vote for the parties represented in the House. The members of those parties are entitled to the same things as all the others. A two-tier parliamentary system is far from what the public wants.

In November 2015, there were 200 new members in the House. These members will recall that the Prime Minister came to welcome them all at the Sir John A. Macdonald building. At the time, he told them that his role as the member for Papineau took precedence over his role as Prime Minister. We would like him to fully assume that role and understand that the reality of members is as important as that of the Prime Minister and as important as partisanship. Whatever happened to his fine words? We look forward to seeing what comes of this.

It is time to move from rhetoric to action by recognizing that MPs from all political parties need similar tools in order to properly represent their constituents. We share the Prime Minister's desire to put legislative powers and the work of members before partisanship. I would remind everyone that the House belongs to the people, not the parties.

The same goes for committees. We do not sit on committees, other than when we are given a few short minutes to speak when it suits everyone, or just about everyone. However, meaningful democratic reform would allow members of the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party to sit on committees. I am convinced that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands would very much like to sit on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and that she would have many positive things to say that would bring a lot to Parliament and the government.

Our Parliament is the only one in the world that works this way. Every provincial legislature recognizes parties even when they have fewer elected members. That is also the case in London, which was cited as an example by the government. In fact, in London, budgets are allocated when a party has two elected members. The situation in the House of Commons is very unfair and unacceptable and the House must absolutely study this issue because it is not what the people want. The people want the MPs they voted for to be able to speak and to have the means to do their jobs. It is quite simply a question of good faith and democracy.

•(1335)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères knows, I represent the riding of Laurentides—Labelle, which is north of Montreal. It is a large rural riding that was represented by the Bloc Québécois for a long time and then by the NDP for a few years.

Since becoming an MP, I have noticed, when travelling around the riding, that people often say that a federal MP can really get things done. For nearly 20 years, my constituents had MPs who worked very hard to convince them that the federal government was absolutely useless, that it could not help communities, and that it was not there for people. As a result, it makes me a little bit angry to hear the member talk about the need to stand up for voters' interests, when his party worked against those people's interests for decades.

Can my colleague tell us what the purpose of the Bloc Québécois is?

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering what my colleague's question has to do with what I just said, but I will answer him anyway, because he asked me a very good question.

The member was elected in the riding of Laurentides—Labelle, a riding that was held by the Bloc Québécois for a long time and by the NDP for a short time. Voters had every right to vote for this member, and I congratulate him on getting elected. I am very happy to hear that his constituents are pleased with his work.

However, I have no doubt that the people in his riding who voted for a member of the Bloc Québécois for 20 years were also pleased with the work that the member did. In order to respect democracy, we need to respect the vision of all voters and parliamentarians. Members of the Bloc Québécois work in the interests of the people who voted for them. In other words, we are working to make Quebec a country.

The member across the way gave us several examples of how important MPs' work is, but I want to point out that the work of all MPs is important, including Bloc Québécois MPs. We are not happy with some of Ottawa's decisions, such as financing Ontario's auto industry, which might be okay because all industries need financing, and Alberta's oil sands, which we do not support at all.

Why is it that the federal government regularly decides to finance these industries at the same level as the provinces, but when it comes to Quebec companies like those in our aerospace industry, it tosses a few crumbs their way just so it can say that it helped them a little?

The same thing is happening with the softwood lumber crisis. The Government of Quebec did its bit to resolve the crisis, but the federal government just cannot commit to helping the industry. The Americans have slapped a 20% duty on our lumber, but the government says it wants to consult. That is what it always says when it comes to Quebec, but when it comes to the other provinces, it is ready to invest. For example, in the latest budget, a cool \$100 million for Alberta was not long in coming.

Why is the government doing this? When it comes to protecting the French language, the minister says that she will hold consultations. However, when the time comes to take action, the

government does not give Quebec a single penny to protect the French language. That does not work.

That is why we take issue with all this, and this is how we demonstrate our usefulness. We have many more things to say, but I believe that my time is up.

•(1340)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchère.

To me, money is not the biggest problem. The problem is that hon. members are not equal. In theory, all hon. members are meant to be equal, but in reality, we are not. Money is not the root of the problem: power is. The fact that only parties with more than 12 members have any power is not a legislative issue, but a matter of tradition. I would like the hon. member to say a few words about that.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands that money is not the only problem and that there is also the issue of representation and power. For example, the power to sit on a committee allows the member to express his or her opinion, call witnesses and ask them very useful and very relevant questions that introduce other points of view.

This is also about the power to regularly take part in question period in a reasonable order instead of asking the last question of the day. There is also the power to speak to bills introduced in the House without constantly being relegated to the last speaking spot and thereby losing the chance to speak to most bills. This is undemocratic.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before resuming debate, I want to remind hon. members that people are speaking. It is just before question period. I know we have had a break and members have forgotten how it works. It is nice to see everybody getting together and talking, but the rumble gets a little loud, and it is hard to hear the hon. member speaking.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[Translation]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my speech by addressing the issue under debate.

[English]

The question we are actually dealing with is a question of privilege around access to voting here, although the debate has moved to a very important debate on our standing rules. I plan to address most of my comments to that aspect by saying that there were very few people here in our 41st Parliament on a Friday morning when the government of the day moved a measure to remove our security and safety in this place from the hands and power of the Speaker of the House and to the RCMP.

This violated 500 years of precedents in which the Speaker, being neutral and not part of the government of day, provided security. I think our former sergeant-at-arms, Kevin Vickers, would have supported that. With no criticism intended to the RCMP, putting the RCMP in charge was a historic anti-democratic move that received almost no debate.

On that morning, there was only one other MP who was as upset as I was. It was the former member for Ottawa—Vanier, Mauril Bélanger. The two of us were asking how this could happen so quickly. We had not had debate. We had not studied it. To this day, we still have not had a public review of the events of October 22, 2014, to lead us to conclude what would be best in the public interest and best in the interest of democracy. No government, no prime minister, should have control over the security forces that govern access to the place where democracy takes place, which is this House.

Moving from that to the discussion of the Standing Orders, which is the tone of the debate today, I thank the government House leader for making it clear that she has withdrawn many of the controversial parts of the proposals that she made to change our standing rules. I want to start to dissect that development as best I can with the time remaining.

The theory of Parliament, as I have reflected on the question so far this morning and this afternoon, is that all MPs are equal.

We all here represent our constituencies. Each voter in Canada is equal. Each constituency is equal, so all members of Parliament are equal. At least in theory, the prime minister is described as “first among equals”. We are in a Westminster parliamentary democracy. We do not elect the prime minister. A prime minister is chosen from among those who have been elected to this place. The only reason there are very few questions after an election as to who the prime minister will be is the overlay of power of political parties.

I certainly think we need to examine what has happened to Parliament over the decades. This is our 150th year, and as a result of the overlay of political power and control from larger political parties, particularly from their leaders' offices with an eye to the next election, we have seen a steady and continual erosion of the role of the individual member of Parliament representing their constituency.

What we have seen growing over the eras is constant electioneering, which contaminates the work in this place. When the election is over, in theory we should all put down our sabres and clubs and say, “Enough of that. We've been elected by our constituents. It's time to work together and see what we can do for the people of Canada.”

The first large error in changing our democracy by acceding to the power of political parties was in 1970, by accident, when the requirement that the leader of a party must sign the nomination papers of every candidate was implemented. Up until that point, from 1867 to the early 1970s, the ballots in Canada only showed the names of the candidates and not their political party. Adding the political party meant the sign-off occurred.

I should certainly mention to my friend from the Bloc Québécois, whose speech I entirely support, that historically it was in 1963 that the larger parties decided they should have money. In 1963 this place passed a rule that if a party had 12 members or more, it would have

more money. That piece of legislation did not touch on the things that occurred by tradition, without any rule, but it had become increasingly accepted that if someone represented a national party with fewer than 12 seats, that person was somehow a second-class MP. That person would not have access to sitting on committees and would not have as many questions in question period.

This is not something we see in any other Westminster parliamentary democracy. As a matter of fact, in the U.K., with 650 members of Parliament, individual members, and particularly members of parties with two or more, have the same financial support and the same access to questions and committees as any other MP. It is an oddity that is peculiar to Canada.

• (1345)

Therefore, in revisiting our Standing Orders, we are now looking at this question of allocation of power, and not among MPs. We are talking about the power between and among political parties. That is essentially a distortion of Westminster parliamentary democracy from the get-go. Political parties are not mentioned in our Constitution. We could improve democracy in this place tremendously with any steps we can take to reduce the power of political party apparatus over the workings of Parliament.

I suggested many of these things in my proposal in response to the Liberal proposal to change the Standing Orders. I certainly agree with the Liberals that we need to take steps to ensure prorogations are not misused. However, their proposal does not go far enough. We should follow the advice of political scientists like Professor Hugo Cyr and Professor Peter Russell who have said that we should hold a vote before a prorogation to ensure that at least two-thirds of Parliament agrees it is time to prorogue. Then we can prorogue. We do not want to ever again see the egregious abuse of power that the Canadian media and Canadians think just happens. Every now and then we get a prime minister who prorogues. Canadians need to know that within the entire Commonwealth of Westminster parliamentary democracy, only Canada has seen a prime minister use prorogation to escape political difficulty. Sri Lanka tried it once, but the Sri Lankan governor general did not let it happen.

Let us add a formal process, add a vote, move one step further, and look at the possibility of what we could call a constructive confidence motion. This is used in some places and is recommended by Professor Cyr and Professor Russell. We could put forward a motion that we are now prepared to say that the government has lost the confidence of the House but that we believe the leader of the official opposition, working with the third party, has the confidence of the House, or any other formulation, so there would be an opportunity to send the Governor General clear information from Parliament as to how, if a party leader lost the confidence of the House, we could proceed without an election.

Another issue we need to look at is adopting some of the Westminster parliamentary rules. I do not object to the idea of a one-day-a-week prime minister's question period. It does not require changing the parliamentary rules. The Prime Minister can do it any day he chooses, and, in the future, she chooses. However, for the moment we need to look at what the Westminster Parliament actually does.

When Prime Minister Theresa May reported to Parliament on the Brexit letter of exit she had tabled with the European Union, she took questions for two hours and 40 minutes from over 100 MPs, from backbenchers of her own party and from people on opposition benches. In other words, if we think we are adopting something from the U.K., we should be looking at everything the U.K. does. It does not restrict questions and answers to 30 seconds. There is more time for exchange. There is also a practice in the British Parliament of a member who is speaking yielding the floor on his or her own, without direction from the Speaker, to have a more animated debate. The Westminster parliamentary systems and the Palace of Westminster do not operate under Canadian rules now. If we are to look at one rule, then let us look at all of them and have a proper discussion.

There are many things that need to be addressed in the Canadian Parliament to ensure that while we take a moment to look at it, we fix some loopholes. One is that there is no requirement after an election for a prime minister to convene Parliament. The larger the Prime Minister's Office gets, the more executive powers are used, the more critical it is that there be a requirement that Parliament resume. Earlier today I gave credit to the current Prime Minister for stepping back from an all powerful PMO that controlled everything. However, we need to do more, and we need to lock it in for future governments. One way to do that is to ensure there be a mandatory calling of Parliament within a set period after an election.

With my remaining time, I want to make a plea that in this era, when the government claims it cares about climate change, that it think about the carbon footprint of this place. Let us work Monday to Friday and a half day Saturday, do it in a concentrated way for three to four weeks, and then be in our ridings for three to four weeks. This would cut the costs to the taxpayers of flying us home every weekend, it would significantly reduce our greenhouse gas footprint, and I believe it would make our lives easier. Although working six days a week might sound rigorous, since most of us work seven days a week anyway, it would actually provide a day of rest on Sunday.

I urge that this opportunity be one achieved by consensus and not by majority rule.

•(1350)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the leader of the Green Party has said and I will provide a comment with a question at the end.

We have a Prime Minister who has made a commitment, and there is a desire by the government, to modernize Parliament. A couple of initiatives are very important and we we have suggested that they be a part of that modernization.

However, I want to pick up on the point that the leader of the Green Party indirectly talked about, and that was having Standing

Orders that are somewhat dated. The member makes reference to the importance of looking at what other Parliaments are doing, particularly Westminster.

Could the member provide some further comment in regard to why modernization is important and that while we do that modernization, we could look at different ways to make the House function more efficiently, such as having more members possibly debating, having a better way of voting? Could the member share with the House a few of her thoughts on specific changes she would like to see on which she has not already commented?

•(1355)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, one thing we need to examine is the meaning of the word “modernize” and what kind of mandate there is for modernization.

I noted in the paper I presented in response to the government's suggestions on the Standing Orders that when we looked at the Vox Populi poll the government did in the month of December, 70% of respondents, and there were many respondents, said they would rather see more parties working together, co-operatively, than one large party making all the decisions, even if it took more time.

I do not think there is a mandate for fast decision-making. Sometimes the word “modernization” is used as a proxy for that fast decision-making. We need to uncouple and unpack what is happening in this place over time, where political parties are using Parliament as a proxy war when they are going to go out on the hustings later. Anything we can do to break that down would help.

It is true that in the U.K. Parliament, some of it is so antiquated we can hardly believe it. For instance, when the members vote, they are not in their seats because they have no seats. I asked my colleague, Caroline Lucas, leader of the Green Party in the U.K. how they voted. The U.K. Parliament does not have lobbies. One corridor is the yeas and the other corridor is the nays. The members have eight minute bells, and they literally race. If they get there, they are flagged. The table officers there are now using iPads and marking down if they have seen their faces and know the members are voting nay if they are in one corridor and are voting yea if they are in the other corridor. It is hardly modernized. It is just weirder than us, but they are used to it.

It is important for us to stand at our place. Maybe we could modernize by standing and simultaneously pushing a button for yea, or nay or abstain. It is important for us to register with our constituents when we think a bill being brought forward is so ludicrous that we cannot bring ourselves to vote yea or nay.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems as if the Liberal government is pretending that the issue is that nobody wants to modernize or that people are resistant to modernizing.

I was here when we had the debate on the Standing Orders and heard all kinds of ideas, good ideas, on how we might change things. Would the member agree that the real issue is that the government wants to make a unilateral decision on its own without the unanimous consent of the parties, and that this is why we are having the discussion today?

Statements by Members

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, certainly the conflict that erupted in this place in the weeks before our Easter break was entirely about the decision-making process.

Any changes to how we operate in this place should reflect at least a large degree of consensus, perhaps not unanimity, because it is fundamental that we all agree on the best and fairest ways for us to do our work. Our work is to represent our constituents and to do it well.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

KNAR BOHJELIAN YEMENIDJIAN

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last survivor of the Armenian genocide in Canada, Knar Bohjalian Yemenidjian, passed away in January in Montreal at the age of 107, just shy of her 108th birthday. Knar was a living example of resilience and strength whose life story serves as a reminder to stand vigilant against violence and injustice.

I had the privilege of meeting her at the 100th commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Ottawa, and last week, I had the honour of reading the Prime Minister's letter at the 102nd commemoration in Laval.

[Translation]

Her story and the fate of thousands of others like her who were not as fortunate are a constant reminder that we, as legislators and community leaders, still have a tremendous amount of work to do.

We cannot rest until we have rid the world of injustice, intolerance, and violence.

Rest in peace, Knar.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

ALBERTA JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to fulfill a wager that I made with my colleague from Bow River. Our local hockey teams, the Whitecourt Wolverines and the Brooks Bandits, were facing each other in the Alberta Junior Hockey League finals.

My hometown Whitecourt Wolverines were the northern champions and the Brooks Bandits were the southern champions. They met in a spirited and well-played best-of-seven series, but ultimately the Brooks Bandits swept to victory.

I want to congratulate the Brooks Bandits on their win over the Whitecourt Wolverines and wish them all the best as they represent Albertans in the Western Canadian Cup.

On behalf of Peace River—Westlock, I would like to thank the players, the coaches, the thousands of fans who participated. Both teams and communities are supported by simply the best fans anywhere.

Finally, I want to assure the member for Bow River that he can look forward to toasting his team's victory with some of Slave Lake's Dog Island Brewing's finest craft beer.

* * *

THE FAMILY

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to talk about the importance of family today. Our family is the people who surround us every day. They teach us our values and beliefs. They provide a sense of support and love. They celebrate and grieve with us. They nourish and cherish us. They grow and strengthen us.

We form strong relationships with our family. We work together, live together, and play together. We share meals and prayers with one another and we recognize and accept diversity. They set down roots and they anchor us to what is important.

Our family is all around us because our family is our community. I am truly blessed to have such a great family and am thankful for the sense of community that was instilled in me.

I also rise today to honour the memory and dedicate this statement to my grandmother, Jeanne Brennan, or Grammie Jeanne, who passed away several weeks ago. She raised 14 children and helped shape the lives of 36 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. First and foremost a guiding light to her family and many in her community, she received an honorary doctorate of laws from Mount Allison University in 1994, the International Year of the Family. She was a shining example of a strong family and a strong community and how they go hand in hand. I miss Grammie Jeanne.

* * *

[Translation]

VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker,

[Member spoke in Vietnamese]

[Translation]

I am very honoured and proud to recognize that today, April 30, commemorates the arrival of Vietnamese refugees in Canada. It is also a historic day, because the freedom flag has been raised for the first time on Parliament Hill.

[English]

I am the daughter and sister of boat people who fled their country after the war. Today, we remember their journey and difficulties that they endured to come to live in this country.

[Translation]

My family fled Vietnam, and then spent 18 months in a refugee camp in Indonesia before coming to Quebec. For the past 30 years, my parents have made many sacrifices so that my brothers and sisters and I would have the freedom to realize our full potential.

Statements by Members

The boat people faced enormous struggles to get here, but Quebeckers and Canadians accepted my parents, my family, and my community. I am proud of the values of freedom and solidarity, which are the pillars of our community. In solidarity, I will continue to stand up for those values and human rights, both here and in Vietnam.

[English]

I hope that my generation and the next will continue to welcome refugees, to accept them, and support them. We are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlottetown.

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FAREWELL TO BRUCE AND BOOMER

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is frequently stated that 80% of all televisions that are turned on in P.E.I. at 6 p.m. on a weeknight are tuned in to *Compass*, the supertime newscast. Friday was the end of an era for that program.

For the last 31 years the weatherman on the show has been Kevin “Boomer” Gallant, a former harness racing track announcer, in his trademark Red Sox ball hat, colourful Hawaiian shirt, and shorts. For the last 13 years the news anchor has been Bruce Rainnie, who has an encyclopaedic knowledge of sports and a lightning-quick wit. Together they are magic. Close friends on and off the set, their on-air banter has entertained and endeared Islanders to these wonderful personalities.

Bruce recently announced that he was leaving the show to lead the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame. Boomer almost immediately announced his retirement, effective the same day. His reason? “You can't have Abbott without Costello.”

I thank Bruce and Boomer for the memories. Those guys will be missed.

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MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to recognize my riding's post-secondary education institution, Medicine Hat College. This degree-granting college is led by Dr. Denise Henning, Canada's only indigenous post-secondary president and CEO. The college is known for its philosophy of support and personalized service. Staff pride themselves on providing excellent service and experiences to students.

Medicine Hat College also has a strong commitment to sustainable energy, supporting this emerging industry in southeastern Alberta. The college's initial project is the design, construction, and deployment of a functioning micro-grid on campus in Medicine Hat, working in partnership with community and industry. The community renewable energy micro-grid demonstration project will enable learning opportunities relevant to many students and provide a test and demonstration environment for entrepreneurs and their emerging technologies.

I am pleased to support the many endeavours of Medicine Hat College. Sue and I are honoured to host the college president and board of directors on Parliament Hill this week.

● (1405)

SUNSHINE DREAMLIFT

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, May 2, the Sunshine Foundation of Canada will take 79 children living with severe physical disabilities or life-threatening illnesses on a magical journey to Walt Disney World in just one day, thanks to the 62nd Sunshine DreamLift.

Established in London, Ontario, Sunshine is a national charitable organization that positively impacts the lives of children across Canada living with severe physical disabilities by making their most cherished dreams come true. I wish to personally thank DreamLift volunteers from McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton, CNIB, KidsAbility, and Brantford firefighters for their commitment to making this year's dream a reality. Next year, the Sunshine Foundation will be celebrating 30 years of making dreams come true and will be taking off from London to commemorate this milestone.

We thank businesses, individuals, and community groups across Canada for their donations that help share the message of possibility and hope. I want to wish the children who will take off tomorrow morning a safe journey to a—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Orléans.

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ARTHUR “HARKY” SMITH

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great regret that I rise today to mark the passing of Colonel Arthur “Harky” Smith, an honoured veteran and a Canadian military legend.

Born to a military family, Colonel Smith followed in his father's footsteps by serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, both in the navy and in my father's artillery unit, until he found his calling as an administrative officer. This passion led him to reach the pinnacle of his branch by becoming the commandant of the Canadian Forces School of Administration and Logistics. After his military retirement, Harky continued to work as a civil servant in DND, accumulating over 60 years of service to the people of Canada within the defence department. Like hundreds of others, I remember Harky as a friend and mentor who took pride in taking others under his wing.

I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife Mary Lee and son Christopher, as well as the Canadian Armed Forces logistics, artillery, and naval branches for their great loss.

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HONOUR HOUSE SOCIETY

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak about Honour House Society and its founder, honorary lieutenant-colonel of the 15th Field Artillery Regiment Allan De Genova.

Statements by Members

Honour House provides accommodations for our brave men and women who serve our community and our country. It is a refuge, a home away from home for our warriors and their families while they are receiving treatment for injury and illness. Allan started Honour House after watching a documentary that told the unsettling story of Captain Trevor Greene of the Seaforth Highlanders, who was viciously attacked and severely injured while serving in Afghanistan.

The first Honour House opened in New Westminster in 2011 and since that time has served over 5,000 room nights. Honour House Society works tirelessly to ensure our warriors can focus on becoming healthy without the added financial stress. Honour House will soon open Honour Ranch in Kamloops, B.C., and Honour House right here in Ottawa.

We thank Allan and Honour House Society for all they do in helping people to heal. It is individuals like Allan and organizations like Honour House Society that make our country such a great one in which to live.

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VIETNAMESE CANADIANS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Vietnamese conflict, at its core, was a struggle for democracy. A significant number of Vietnamese chose to make this great country of ours their new home, and now Canada is home to a vibrant community of close to 300,000 Vietnamese Canadians, many of whom reside in my riding of Humber River—Black Creek.

The Vietnamese Canadian community has made a substantial contribution to our cultural, religious, political, and business life. I am tremendously proud to know many as friends, colleagues, and supporters. Today, for the very first time, the Vietnamese heritage and freedom flag has been raised alongside the Canadian flag on Parliament Hill. I am delighted to wish the Vietnamese community great success for all who mark this occasion.

* * *

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 29, workers from across the country marked the National Day of Mourning, which remembers workers who have lost their lives or suffered injury or illness on the job. This day is always a reminder of why more can and must be done by governments to protect workers by not only enacting but effectively enforcing laws that prevent workplace injury, illness, or death.

This year is especially significant, being the 25th anniversary of the Westray mine disaster that left 26 miners dead after an underground explosion in Plymouth, Nova Scotia, on May 9, 1992. This tragedy led Parliament to enact the Westray provision in the Criminal Code in 2003. Honouring this anniversary, our government is committing to do more to ensure the Westray provision is being applied effectively to hold people to account who are criminally negligent in workplace death and serious injury.

This year, we not only remember those who have lost their lives or have been injured at work, but we reaffirm our government's commitment to ensuring healthy and safe workplaces for all Canadian workers.

● (1410)

CHEF JONATHAN SOBOL MEMORIAL AWARD

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 24, family and friends of Calgary chef Jonathan Sobol came together at a gala dinner to honour Jonathan, who was tragically killed in a car crash last year. Over \$100,000 was raised toward the Chef Jonathan Sobol Memorial Award. It will be given each year to support students at the same institute where Jonathan earned his journeyman's certification of culinary excellence and culinary Red Seal. In his honour, a new scholarship for students enrolled in SAIT's professional cooking and cook apprentice programs has been created. It allows those who share Jonathan's passion for mentoring and supporting children and youth in culinary education to follow in his footsteps.

Jonathan was an executive chef at Starbelly restaurant in my riding, and was a passionate advocate for local farmers and producers. This award will encourage and support aspiring chefs to continue his legacy of educating communities in true farm-to-table cooking.

I offer my gratitude to Jonathan's friends and family, and especially to his parents Bob and Gina and partner Katelin, who through this tragedy have worked to build a legacy in honour of Jonathan.

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BOBBY DYNEROWICZ

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to our nation's son, a dedicated soldier, a proud dragoon, Sergeant Bobby Dyerowicz. On Tuesday, April 25, Sergeant Dyerowicz was tragically killed in a training incident at CFB Wainwright in my home province of Alberta.

Bobby was a natural leader. He proudly served two tours in Afghanistan in our fight for a better world, and inspired the soldiers he led. We mourn the loss of one of our best.

Bobby's tragic death is a stark reminder of the sacrifice and danger all members of our Canadian Forces face when they put on the uniform. All members of this House stand in unwavering support of those who exude the qualities of service, sacrifice, and honour, and who in the course of their service lay down their lives on our behalf.

We will never forget Sergeant Dyerowicz. May he rest easy; his watch is done.

*Oral Questions***WORKPLACE SAFETY**

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this May Day to honour the memory of 26 miners who lost their lives on May 9, 1992, at the Westray mine in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

Even as we celebrate workers around the world today, we should never forget those injured or killed on the job. Approximately 1,000 workers are killed on the job every year, and thousands more are injured. My home province of Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of workplace injuries and deaths. On April 28, the National Day of Mourning, Canadians from coast to coast to coast remembered and paid tribute to those workers.

Twenty-five years after the Westray disaster, all governments must ensure the Westray law is enforced. Workplace deaths must be properly investigated, because Canadian workers deserve protection on the job and their loved ones deserve justice.

* * *

VIETNAMESE CANADIANS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 30, Canada's Vietnamese community marked the third annual Journey to Freedom Day. Enacted under our previous Conservative government, it is a national day of the commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees from their war-torn country and their acceptance into Canada after the fall of Saigon to the Communists on April 30, 1975. Millions of refugees, known as "boat people", fled their homeland to make the perilous journey to freedom. Many thousands perished at sea. However, for over 60,000 refugees, Canada proved to be a safe haven.

In the spirit of Canada's 150th anniversary and marking this year's Journey to Freedom Day, I am proud to again wear the colours of freedom and to recognize the contributions of Vietnamese Canadians and of all "boat people" refugees and their descendants. The Vietnamese refugees came to Canada in search of hope, opportunity, and freedom.

* * *

• (1415)

[*Translation*]

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Mental Health Week in Canada. We all have friends, family members, or colleagues with mental health issues.

This week let us get the word out about mental health and take concrete action to stop the stigma.

I encourage all Canadians to #GetLoud or #Parlerhautetfort and join the online conversation.

[*English*]

Canadians are raising their voices. They want to receive the mental health services they need, when they need them.

Our government will provide \$5 billion over the next 10 years to provinces and territories to support mental health initiatives, with a

particular focus on youth and young adults. This will help as many as 500,000 young Canadians.

Budget 2017 also pledges over \$200 million over the next five years to increase support for mental health services for first nations and Inuit.

Together, we can make sure that all Canadians have the care and the support they need to live full and healthy lives, because there is no health without mental health.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been revealed that the Minister of National Defence misled Canadians once again.

Not only did he embarrass himself and the Prime Minister, but he also breached the code of honour and ethics of the men and women in uniform with whom he served. He disgraced himself and dishonoured them.

Does the Prime Minister still have confidence in his Minister of National Defence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister made a mistake. He acknowledged his responsibility and apologized for it. That is what Canadians expect when one makes a mistake. We own up to our mistake; we apologize for it. That is what Canadians expect from one another.

The minister has served his country in many capacities, as a police officer, as a soldier, and now as minister. He continues to have my full confidence.

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has come to light that the Minister of National Defence has misled Canadians once again, and this time it is a big one. He has not just embarrassed himself and the Prime Minister: he has violated a code of honour and ethics with the men and women in uniform he once served with. He has dishonoured himself, and in doing that, he has dishonoured them.

Does the Prime Minister still have confidence in his Minister of National Defence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister made a mistake. He acknowledged his responsibility and apologized for it. That is what Canadians expect when one makes a mistake. We own up to our mistake and we apologize for it. That is exactly what he did. This minister has served his country in many capacities as a police officer, as a soldier, and now as a minister, and he has my full confidence.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is beyond an apology at this point.

*Oral Questions***DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

No one has questioned the defence minister's bravery as a soldier. This problem happened when the defence minister himself intentionally misled Canadians about his own service record as a soldier, not once but twice, in 2015 and again two weeks ago.

He is a senior member of the government and of cabinet. How can the Prime Minister allow him to remain as Minister of National Defence when he continually misstates the facts?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when someone makes a mistake, Canadians expect that they admit it and that they apologize for it. That is exactly what the minister did in this case. This minister continues to serve his country, as he has throughout his career, whether as a police officer, as a soldier, or now as Minister of National Defence, with an extraordinary capacity.

This minister has, and will continue to have, my full confidence.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. The Minister of National Defence said that our allies were okay with pulling our jets out of the fight against ISIS, and that was not true. He said our air force does not have enough planes to do its job, but the air force commander said that was not true. Also, he misrepresented his military service. He took full credit and named himself the architect of the largest NATO operation since the Korean War, and that was not true.

How much more does the Prime Minister need to hear before he understands why our men and women in uniform have lost confidence in the—

• (1420)

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister made a mistake. He has admitted it and he has apologized for it. That is what Canadians expect from their leaders. It is what we expect from each other. That is exactly why I continue to have confidence in this minister, who has served this country in exemplary fashions as a police officer, as a soldier, and now as our Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one will ever take away from the Minister of National Defence's actual service record, but people in the military have a name for what he did. It is called "stolen valour" when someone takes credit for the brave actions of another.

What he did was wrong. Now he has lost the confidence of our men and women in uniform. They need to have confidence in their leaders, especially when they are putting their lives on the line.

Will the Prime Minister remove the Minister of National Defence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we make a mistake, Canadians expect us to apologize and to acknowledge that mistake. That is exactly what we did. That is why the Minister of National Defence continues to have my full confidence.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for weeks the Prime Minister has claimed that the proposed changes to help Parliament work were just part of a discussion.

The Liberals have just announced, as we predicted, that they will be unilaterally forcing through changes in order to help themselves. So much for discussion. The Prime Minister will try to defend this unprecedented, self-serving scheme by saying that they had no choice because it was in their electoral platform.

On that basis, will 2015 be the last election under first past the post?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we got elected on an ambitious platform to bring real change forward to Canadians. It included respecting Parliament and improving the way our institutions function.

That is exactly what we are working hard to do by offering to take more questions every week as Prime Minister or by improving the accountability of this House by ensuring that we are lessening the use of prorogation and omnibus bills. We are making sure that nobody can do what Stephen Harper tried to do to Canadians for 10 years.

The fact is that we are improving this democracy and we are glad to accept recommendations and suggestions from all members in this House.

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STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Was that about admitting and apologizing when an individual breaks a promise and they do not tell the truth, Mr. Speaker?

[*Translation*]

In reality, the Prime Minister can answer all the questions he wants, when he wants, even though what he really wants is to have an excuse for being absent from the House of Commons. He is going to change the fundamental rules of Parliament just so he can have that excuse. How incredibly arrogant. It is contemptuous.

Does the Prime Minister realize that, when he uses his majority to unilaterally impose changes to help himself, he is just Stephen Harper with a smile?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is improving the way the House works. I am very pleased that all members of the House are participating in this discussion. We know that there are different ways of doing things to better serve Canadians and to better represent our constituents and the interests of Canadians across the country. That is why we are so happy to initiate and continue this discussion and to put forward practical measures that will improve the way the House works.

Oral Questions

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in heavy-handed tactics, last week President Trump signed an executive order imposing a massive, illegal, punitive tariff on Canadian softwood lumber.

This action seemed to take the government and the Prime Minister completely by surprise, but if they were properly conducting diplomatic relations, they could have and should have seen this coming.

My question for the Prime Minister is very specific. Did he personally raise this specific issue of softwood lumber when he met with Trump in Washington in February, yes or no? Did he talk about softwood?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every time I have sat down with the American president, whether this one or the previous one, I would bring up the issues that matter to Canadians, including softwood lumber.

This is an issue that has been going on for many decades, and we work very hard to ensure that we can come to an agreement that will help both workers and Canadians right across the country and our trade relationship with the United States and the world.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister dragged his feet on the softwood lumber file, which affects 200,000 families in our communities. He has no plan to compensate people for job losses. He has no plan to make Donald Trump back down. Instead, he has been trying to butter him up.

Here is my question for the Prime Minister. Now that he has paid court to the U.S. president instead of standing up to him, does he think his approach to dealing with Donald Trump worked?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect two things from their Prime Minister. They expect him to stand up for the interests of Canadians, which I am doing, and for Canada's industry, workers, and economy. They also expect their Prime Minister to maintain a good working relationship with our neighbours to the south. That is exactly what I am doing. I spoke directly to the president several times last week about the importance of a positive relationship between our two countries and what we can do to make things better for the middle class and workers in both of our countries in the years to come.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since becoming a politician, the Minister of National Defence has been misleading the House and resorting to "alternative facts". He quickly became like one of those fake soldiers who puts on a uniform and pretends to be a soldier.

His most recent feat was to take credit for being the brains behind Operation Medusa, when in fact he merely carried out orders. For this kind of offence, he would be guilty of violating section 129 of the Code of Service Discipline.

When will he do the honourable thing and just tell the truth?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to apologize for my mistake in describing my role. I retract that description and I am truly sorry for it.

I in no way intended to diminish the great work that our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces have done, and their superiors, and I am truly sorry for it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister made a very important statement. He said he was the creator, the architect, of Operation Medusa, the largest military operation since the Korean War.

Is the Prime Minister comfortable having a defence minister who uses such elastic ethics to enhance his own prestige? If he keeps him in cabinet, we will know the answer is yes.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to make any excuses. I intend to own my mistake, apologize for it, learn from it, and continue to serve.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister was caught claiming to be the architect of Operation Medusa. It was not a slip-up. It was intentional, because he got caught repeating the story.

Canadians deserve to know. Why did the minister concoct this story, and how are Canadians supposed to trust this minister?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, I am not here standing up to make any excuses for it. I am here to be able to acknowledge my mistake, to be able to apologize for it, and to be able to learn from it so I can continue to serve the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has admitted to concocting stories about his service record. Now he says he is sorry, but only after he got caught.

When did the minister decide it was acceptable to start making up stories about his service record? Why did he think it was acceptable to take credit for the work of others, and how are the military and Canadians supposed to have confidence in anything this minister says?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to talk about my service record. I am here to apologize for my mistake and to be able to learn from it. As I also stated earlier, I in no way intended to diminish the great work of my former superiors and our soldiers.

I want to be able to learn from my mistake and to continue to serve, as I have always done and will continue to do every day as long as I am the minister of defence.

• (1430)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of National Defence uses the word "honesty" at least eight times. Within the letter, it reads:

Canadians expect us, in our work, to reflect the values we all embrace... honesty....

...Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty....

We have committed to an...honest government that is accountable to Canadians....

...you must uphold the highest standards of honesty....

...it is important that your behaviour and decisions meet Canadians' well-founded expectations....

Will the Prime Minister admit that the Minister of National Defence has not lived up to the well-founded expectations of Canadians and remove him from office?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, I have acknowledged my mistake. I am not here to make any excuses for it. I am owning it. I am learning from it. I will continue to work, learn from those lessons, and continue to work and serve the Canadian Armed Forces, the men and women who serve us.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the military who find the Minister of National Defence's yarn about his fictional role in Afghanistan to be an embarrassment.

We all know that the Liberals like to reference social media as a way to consult with Canadians. Well, Twitter was in a flurry over the weekend with the #[Minister of National Defence] Battles, mocking him relentlessly on his personal involvement in everything from the War of 1812 right up to the destruction of the Death Star.

After hearing this kind of feedback from Canadians, would the Prime Minister not agree that the minister has lost all credibility?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my focus is always going to be to continue to serve the Canadian Armed Forces, the men and women who serve. I will always do that.

I acknowledge my mistake. I will be learning from it. As I stated, I in no way intended to diminish the great work of our Canadian Armed Forces members who served during that time.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence concocted a tall tale. He fancies himself the architect of one of the most important battles of the entire war in Afghanistan. The quandary for the Liberal government is that the minister played no such role.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he has called on his minister to explain this trumped up story? We want to know whether the Prime Minister has talked to him about this.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will answer the opposition member in the same manner.

Oral Questions

I am not here to make excuses. I am here to acknowledge my mistake, to be able to learn from it so I can continue to serve.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is well noted that the Prime Minister is refusing to respond to a party leader. This is a breach of parliamentary protocol and tradition. It is what happens when there is no possible answer to a Minister of National Defence who has told a whopper about his record. That is not something one would apologize for. It is something one has to step down for.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to talk about my service record. I am here to be able to own up to my mistake, to learn from it, and to be able to continue to serve.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister told a group of young Canadians that his father had used his connections to ensure that possession charges against his brother would "go away". Now that the Prime Minister has had a chance to ensure that the arrests and criminal records stop for all families, he refuses to do so.

The Prime Minister himself has admitted to smoking pot while he was a member of Parliament, so why the double standard? Why is there one set of rules for the Trudeau family and another for thousands of young and racialized Canadians who are still receiving criminal records for pot possession in Canada?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the current approach to cannabis is simply not working. We are moving forward to ensure that we keep the profits out of the hands of criminals and cannabis out of the hands of young people. That is why we have moved forward and introduced Bill C-45 to legalize cannabis and strictly regulate and restrict access. We have had the benefit of speaking to many people in this regard, including the task force.

We look forward to moving this piece of legislation forward. Simply decriminalizing will not achieve these objectives.

* * *

• (1435)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister knows that there are consequences for being dishonest and untrustworthy under the military's code of conduct and ethics, and the defence minister understands that as a veteran.

Oral Questions

The minister's apology does not repair the damage he created. Canadians do not believe him. Our military does not trust him. How can the Prime Minister have any confidence in the minister?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am owning up to my mistake to be able to continue to learn from it. I did retract that description. I in no way intended to diminish the great work our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces have done. I hope to learn from that mistake so I can continue to serve the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how many times has the minister said that fib over the last two years?

Veterans are disgusted that the minister took credit for his role in the battlefield that involved hundreds of soldiers. That is valour stolen. The defence minister is now a laughingstock. His reputation is damaged beyond repair. Canadians do not believe him. The military does not trust him, and our allies are not going to take him seriously.

How can the Prime Minister still have confidence in the defence minister?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to make excuses or to give reasons. I am here to acknowledge my mistake, to be able to own it directly, to be able to learn from it and carry on and continue to serve the Canadian Armed Forces.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the defence minister's defence of this is that it was a mistake, except that does not hold water, and the reason why it does not hold water is because he repeated it more than once. That is not a mistake. That is a fabrication. Now he refuses to accept the accountability and the consequences of the fabrication he told.

How can Canadians, how can the military, how can the Prime Minister trust the defence minister? If he is going to mislead on something this important, what else is he going to be misleading—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I made a mistake in describing my role. I wish to be able to retract that. In no way did I intend to diminish the great work of the Canadian Armed Forces during Operation Medusa or any other operation. I am owning that mistake. I will be learning from it so I can continue to serve.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our men and women in uniform deserve a leader who does not waver from telling the truth, whose word is his bond. They deserve a leader who can be trusted every time, always. The minister has failed, so I ask him: does he really believe that our men and women in uniform deserve a defence minister who is willing to fabricate the truth in order to bolster his own record?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have apologized for my mistake. I will be learning from this, owning the mistake, and not making any excuses for the mistake.

JUSTICE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, most people learn that it is important to tell the truth before they turn 50.

[*Translation*]

I am sure that many parents would like to wipe out their children's criminal record, like the Trudeau family did. However, most Canadians are not as well-heeled or connected as the Trudeau family.

The Prime Minister could have offered pardons in his bill, but he did not. He could have decriminalized marijuana, but he refused. Why the double standard? Why is there one system for rich, well-heeled, well-connected families, and another for regular families?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has embarked on a major transformational change in the law that will do a far better job than the old law in protecting our kids and keeping the proceeds of crime out of the hands of organized crime. That is a major undertaking. It is a process that will take time.

We intend to reach that objective by the summer of next year. In the meantime, it is important for Canadians to respect the existing law, and we will examine every possible way to ensure that this transition is fair.

* * *

● (1440)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the U.S. enjoy the closest energy relationship in the world and the largest trading partnership of any two countries. Canada's Minister of Natural Resources participated in Bloomberg's Future of Energy Summit in New York recently and met with key U.S. representatives, industry and business leaders, and officials from leading American investment firms to promote Canada's energy sector. Could the minister please update the House on the outcome of that visit?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud of Canada's energy industry, and we will promote its successes at every opportunity around the world. I was pleased to represent our government at the Bloomberg Future of Energy Summit in New York to reiterate the importance of energy trade, investment, and infrastructure between Canada and the United States.

Our government supports greener ways to develop traditional sources of energy while at the same time increasing investments in clean technology. Our country will lead the energy conversation in the world now and in the years to come.

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

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Manitoba has started to use a facility that is supposed to hold Canadian seniors as an emergency measure to deal with the huge influx of illegal border crossers. The community of Gretna, and the entire province, is furious, because the Liberal government is doing nothing to stop this problem.

Given that the Manitoba government is now requesting millions of tax dollars to deal with this situation, will the Prime Minister close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, stop this problem, and ensure that asylum seekers enter Canada through legal means?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's refugee system has been lauded around the world for being one of the most compassionate and efficient. We laud the generosity of Canadians in border communities as they assist these asylum seekers.

We have an independent board, the Immigration and Refugee Board, that assesses each and every case on its merits, and if those people do not have a good case, they will be removed, as per the law. We are committed to our international obligation to give each and every one who claims asylum due process and a fair hearing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister makes it sound like Canadians are not generous if they simply stand up for their right to have our border integrity secured.

Recent media reports have said that over half the illegal border crossers have serious criminal records. This puts the safety of the CBSA, RCMP, and community members in the area at risk.

My question is very clear. There is a way we can stop this, and it is by closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement. Why has the minister failed to act?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have quoted from the agreement numerous times, but I will now quote the head of the UNHCR in Canada, who said, "I really think that the conditions which prevailed at the time of the drafting and adoption of the safe third country agreement in 2004 are the same as [they are today], and...it will be difficult to change the policy...[that is] seen as a good co-operation, a good responsibility-sharing between two...systems [that have] the same values and the same procedural guarantees." [...]

"As far as the asylum system is concerned in the United States, legally speaking, we have not seen a change."

That is the UNHCR representative in Canada.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations' well-tarnished reputation has been sullied yet again by the election of Saudi Arabia to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Gender segregation forces Saudi women to submit to male guardianship for their entire lives. Women are banned from driving. Those who defy Saudi Arabia's second-class laws go to prison. Women can be stoned to death for adultery. There have been expressions of disgust and protest around the world, but Canada's

self-proclaimed feminist Prime Minister has not uttered a peep. Might he be willing to explain why today?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me clarify UN procedure. The United Nations Economic and Social Council chooses the members of its Commission on the Status of Women. Canada is presently not a member of this council and could not vote in this election. Saudi Arabia's regional candidacy was uncontested. Our government's position is clear. We will never hesitate to defend human rights, very much including women's rights.

• (1445)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's reluctance to demand better of the United Nations is unacceptable. Whether funding terror incitement in UNRWA schools, concealing votes for human rights abusers to the Human Rights Council, ignoring the anti-Semitic denial of Jerusalem's history by UNESCO, or now downplaying the election of Saudi Arabia to the status of women, all of this makes Canada complicit in the UN's dysfunction. Is there no end to the Prime Minister's willingness to pander to rights abusers in his indecent pursuit of a Security Council seat?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Thornhill has asked what it means for our government to be a feminist government and have a feminist foreign policy. Let me say what it means. I was so proud of the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Development on March 8, International Women's Day, when we announced \$650 million for women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health, including access to safe abortions. That is feminism in the world.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how about the selling of those arms to Saudi Arabia? How is that helping women?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The Prime Minister made a personal commitment to fix the Phoenix pay system fiasco. Tens of thousands of people are still waiting, and he is responsible for this file. There are mothers who have been waiting for their maternity benefits for months. Retirees are facing inhumane delays. Many people are receiving only a portion of their salaries. It is shameful.

The Prime Minister said he would personally take care of it. Why is he refusing to take action?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister took decisive action. The Prime Minister took decisive action in creating a committee of ministers to resolve the situation. We took decisive action by allocating the resources required to solve this thorny problem. It is unacceptable that public servants are going through this. We are going to fix the problem.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): A committee? Well, the problem must be solved, Mr. Speaker.

It is interesting that the longer the Phoenix fiasco drags on, the fewer answers the government can give about when it is supposed to be resolved. Maybe that is because this broken system is actually making new victims every day. If the Prime Minister cannot tell us when all the current cases will be resolved, can the Prime Minister at least tell us when it will stop creating new ones?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is without ambiguity that this government is committed, via the measures announced by the Prime Minister, via the creation of a ministerial working group, and via the deployment of all of the resources necessary and required to correct this very important problem, a problem that remains unacceptable for our public servants. What we will not do, like the previous government, is book \$70 million in savings and fire 700 people to get a phony surplus for Canadians.

* * *

STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals announced that they will use a government order to ram through changes to the Standing Orders by the end of June. According to the House leader, these Standing Order changes will “make the House of Commons more efficient”. I think I am stating the obvious when I say that pushing the changes through the House of Commons in June will not help to make the House of Commons more efficient during the three-month summer break.

Therefore, why not send the proposals to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the summer, let it look at these things, and return to the House in the autumn for a vote here then?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, during the election campaign we made commitments to Canadians. We made a commitment to modernize the way that this place works and to bring it into the 21st century. The discussion paper that I released

was exactly that, a desire to have a discussion, a conversation, as to how we can make—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton West is having trouble restraining himself. I would ask him and others to remember that they are not allowed to interrupt. I know he seems to be blaming his colleague next to him from Calgary Signal Hill. He would not want to be blaming somebody else for that, of course. The hon. government House leader still has the floor, and I know that he and others all want to hear her finish her answer.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the discussion paper that was offered to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to broaden the scope of this study was exactly that, to hear ideas and really bring this place into the 21st century. During the election campaign, we made commitments to Canadians. We are committed to delivering on those commitments. We will ensure that we modernize this place.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government is demonstrating an arrogance that has never before been seen in this House.

For the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, discussing means imposing. Discussing means crushing the opposition. In order to show that the Liberals are all-powerful and allow the Prime Minister to show up in the House only once a week, she is once again proposing to unilaterally impose new rules.

Is it because she herself no longer has any confidence in her own government that the leader wants to change rules that should not be changed without the unanimous consent of all members of the House?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election, we promised to bring real change to Parliament, and our objective has always been to make Parliament more effective, open, and transparent.

We made specific commitments regarding the use of prorogation, the inappropriate use of omnibus bills, the strengthening of committees, the improvement of financial oversight, and greater accountability during question period. We are going to implement the promises that we made to Canadians. I encourage all members to take part in the conversation—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

[English]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals say they wanted to have a supposed discussion on the Standing Orders, but it turns out that it was just a Trojan Horse for what they really wanted, for the Prime Minister to only have to show up once a week. Now they are trying to ram through changes to the House that they could make without amending the Standing Orders. Even the Liberal member for Malpeque said, “I strongly believe that you have to have at least consensus from the main parties to change the rules of the House.”

Oral Questions

If the Prime Minister will not listen to common sense on this side of the House, will he at least listen to reason from one of his own Liberal MPs?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House and correct the record, because when it comes to the ideas that we have shared with Canadians, when it comes to a prime minister's question period, that day would be in addition to the other days that the Prime Minister is in the House. This would hold the government to greater account. It would allow not just leaders of the opposition, but for private members to ask the Prime Minister questions directly. We have shown that this can work. It is not just about holding this government to account, it is about holding future governments to account. Let us be more open and more transparent, just like we committed to Canadians.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to know how political parties are funded. The Minister of Democratic Institutions is leading our government's efforts to bring a new level of openness and transparency to political fundraising. Could the Minister of Democratic Institutions update the House on the efforts to shed light on political funding?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve more open and transparent information about political fundraising. We will be bringing forward legislation to give Canadians information about fundraisers involving cabinet ministers, party leaders, and leadership contestants. Canadians will know about the events in advance, where they are being held, the cost to attend, and they will know who attended them.

I note that the Liberal Party of Canada chose on its own to bring in open, transparent fundraising rules. I encourage all parties to be open and transparent when it comes to political fundraisers.

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FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week was a dark week for the over one million Canadians who are supported by Canada's forestry industry. The minister said that the U.S. trade action did not come as a surprise and that job losses are to be expected. Stories of work curtailment and mill closures are being heard right across our country. One small mill owner in my riding today is writing a cheque in the millions. He is not sure how much longer he can keep the doors open.

The minister did not have answers last week, so I am asking the Prime Minister. Will he stand today and tell the hard-working forestry families what his plan is now that they are facing uncertain times?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government disagrees strongly with the punitive measures that were taken by the American government last week, and we understand that our first responsibility is to protect the workers and the producers and the communities that will be affected.

We are having conversations with our provincial counterparts from every region of this country, to make sure that all governments work together to ensure that those who need protection will get it from us and our provincial counterparts.

* * *

• (1455)

STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is today in this House breaching parliamentary tradition by refusing to answer questions. Stephen Harper took all questions every day during the Senate scandal. The Prime Minister wants to change the fundamental rules of Parliament in order to help himself. Why all of this? Well, because he says he values question period and accountability. That is why he wants to scrap it.

If that is true, why does he not stand and start asking Canadians to listen to answers to some of our questions for once, instead of his usual platitudes or non-answers?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign, we committed to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. government House leader has the floor. One at a time.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, we committed to bringing real change to the way that this government will govern. This government committed to Canadians to listen and to engage them in the very real challenges they are facing. We will continue to do that. What is clear is that this place needs modernization. We can improve the way that we work together in the House of Commons. We know that is exactly what Canadians expect. I encourage all members to be part of that conversation and to really bring this place into the 21st century.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada committed to developing a Canadian poverty reduction strategy. A consultation process was launched in February to give people the opportunity to discuss key poverty-related issues online and in person. My colleagues from Laval and I will be holding a public consultation to hear what our constituents have to say.

Would the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development tell us what the deadline is for holding consultations?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for the leadership he has shown in his community and for his work with the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

National consultations will inform our country's first-ever poverty reduction strategy and help us build a fairer and more inclusive society. I encourage all members to contribute to creating our first poverty reduction strategy by holding consultations between now and June 30 so we can give all Canadians a real and fair chance to achieve their potential.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. government just announced new tariffs to the tune of 20% on Canadian softwood lumber imports. The Prime Minister promised on March 10, 2016, that a new agreement would replace the one reached by the Harper government and that it would be concluded within 100 days. It has now been more than 400 days.

The Liberals still do not have an agreement, jeopardizing the 370,000 direct and indirect jobs in Canada's forestry sector.

Why is the government waiting and why did it wait to do something about this?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was the former Conservative government that allowed the agreement to expire. We are now dealing with the fifth softwood lumber dispute. Our workers and producers have never been found guilty. We strongly oppose the decision by the U.S. Department of Commerce to impose an unfair and punitive tax. The charges are unfounded. We will continue to raise this issue with the United States. I want to point out that we want a good agreement for Canada, not just any agreement.

* * *

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yes, we will have to agree to wait.

I wanted to ask the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development if he planned to evaluate the sale of Canam to American Industrial Partners, but I already got my answer. In fact, he will not be able to evaluate it, because the government changed the law.

Basically, because the Liberals were sick of being harassed about the sale of leading Quebec companies, they decided to change the law, so there is no longer any problem; it is settled.

Now we are stuck with the Canadian government's laissez-faire economic policies, which are dangerous for our economy.

How many more flagship companies do we have to lose before the minister will admit that he made a big mistake by increasing the threshold—

● (1500)

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

We are obviously aware of the situation involving Canam, and we are watching it closely. What I can say is that we are creating a positive environment for investment and economic growth in Quebec and across Canada, in order to create good jobs. We will continue to do everything we can to improve the Canadian economy.

* * *

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Amidst all this talk of growth and improvement, Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with yet another softwood lumber crisis, the fifth in 35 years.

This is going to be really devastating for Quebec, our regions, our families, and our communities. Forestry workers know that they cannot count on the 40 Liberal MPs from Quebec, who have said nothing. How many sawmills will have to close their doors before the government wakes up?

For the fifth time, is Ottawa going to abandon Quebec's forestry sector, or will it at the very least provide loan guarantees to help it get through this crisis?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada disagrees with the decision by the U.S. Department of Commerce to impose unfair and punitive tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber.

Earlier this year, I created a federal-provincial working group to support the forestry industry in this difficult period. We will continue to work with producers, workers, their families, and the provinces. Canadian workers can count on us.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we already know that the United States has decided to slap a new 20% countervailing duty on softwood lumber.

On day 1, Quebec announced that it will provide loan guarantees to the companies affected. However, Ottawa is still refusing to support our forestry industry, which means that it is knowingly putting the industry at risk.

Besides trying to develop a market in China and announcing programs that already exist, is Ottawa coming up with more appropriate solutions, such as providing loan guarantees, as Quebec has unanimously requested?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in close collaboration with all of our provincial counterparts, including the Government of Quebec.

We understand together that our first responsibility is to do what we can for the producers, for the workers, and for the communities affected by these punitive and unconscionable tariffs.

We will continue to work co-operatively, because we believe that together we will come up with the solution that is in the best interests of workers, communities, and producers.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 38 petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 29th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move for concurrence in this 29th report later this day.

[*English*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled "Safeguarding Canada's National Security While Protecting Canadians' Privacy Rights: Review of the Security of Canada Information Sharing Act (SCISA)".

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

[*Translation*]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with leave of the House, I move that the 29th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

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

Routine Proceedings

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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PETITIONS

LABELLING OF FOOD

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again table a petition about ten pages long regarding an extremely important issue in Drummond. People have been talking to me about this for nearly a year now, Canada being the only country to have authorized the marketing of genetically modified salmon.

Fortunately, genetically modified salmon has not yet made its way to our grocery store shelves, but people want to know what they are eating. They want mandatory labelling of GMOs. In that regard, I would like to congratulate and thank my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke for all of the work he has done over the past year or so to call for the mandatory labelling of GMOs.

Hundreds of people have signed this petition. In fact, it has now been signed by two or three thousand people. I am therefore once again tabling this petition calling for the mandatory labelling of GMOs. That is what the people of Drummond want.

[*English*]

HOME CARE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am standing up to table an e-petition. I want to compliment my colleague, who put the e-petition process in place through a private member's bill.

This particular group believes that health care should include home care. They feel that as our needs change over the years, we need to reflect in terms of what we do and how we do it. I am pleased to present this petition on their behalf.

• (1510)

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition today.

The petition is sponsored by World Animal Protection. The petitioners are asking for the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie and others to consider that in the event of national disasters, the rescue of animals is essential for the recovery in the wake of a disaster. It deals with animals for livestock, and in events such as the Fort McMurray fire, people rescued pets.

Looking at international disasters and recognizing that animal protection is part of that disaster response is what the petitioners are asking the government to take into consideration.

Routine Proceedings

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Canadians on an issue that we wished was solved by now. It is to remove flavours and other ways of targeting youth in the tobacco industry.

These petitioners, primarily from the Thunder Bay area, are asking the government to remove all favouring from all tobacco products.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Questions Nos. 896, 897, 899, 902, 907, 910, and 913.

[Text]

Question No. 896—**Mr. Romeo Saganash:**

With regard to the promised national reconciliation framework with Indigenous peoples: (a) what is the government's engagement strategy for developing the framework; (b) what is the timeframe and schedule of the development and implementation of the framework; (c) how have Indigenous peoples identified grievances associated with existing historical treaties, including (i) Treaty Land Entitlement, (ii) Additions to Reserves, (iii) Specific Claims, (iv) all other formal and informal means of dispute resolution, and how are these grievances included in the framework; (d) what mechanisms for resolution have Indigenous peoples chosen; (e) which Indigenous experts, communities, leaders, and knowledge keepers have guided the development process and set the criteria and outcomes; (f) what are the criteria and outcomes of the national reconciliation framework; and (g) what are the terms of the effective consultation processes within the context of the Federal Reconciliation Framework?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada's overarching goal is to advance reconciliation and self-determination by renewing the relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

To achieve this goal, the Government of Canada is implementing a national reconciliation framework in collaboration with first nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation. Key elements of the framework are already under way, and it will continue to advance and evolve over time.

The first important milestone of the framework is the establishment of permanent bilateral mechanisms to co-develop policy on shared priorities and monitor progress as we move forward. Following the Prime Minister's announcement on December 15, 2016, two of the three distinctions-based permanent bilateral mechanisms have been established. The Inuit Nunangat Declaration on Inuit-Crown Partnership was signed on February 9, 2017. It committed the federal government and Inuit leadership to work in partnership on shared priorities. Similarly, on April 13, 2017, the Prime Minister, the president of the Métis National Council, and its governing members of the council signed the Canada-Métis Nation accord during the first Métis Nation-Crown Summit in Ottawa, Ontario. The accord outlines the ways in which the Government of Canada and the Métis National Council and its governing members will work together to set priorities and develop policy in areas of shared interest. A third permanent bilateral mechanism with First Nations will be established in the near future. These permanent,

distinctions-based bilateral mechanisms provide a foundation to reset the relationship and advance towards true nation-to-nation, crown-to-Inuit, and government-to-government relationships. These new processes demonstrate a substantive and significant change in how the Government of Canada is working together with indigenous peoples to co-develop policy and achieve results.

Another important component of the framework involves the establishment of the working group of ministers on the review of laws and policies related to indigenous peoples, which was announced by the Prime Minister in February 2017. The working group of ministers has the mandate to review existing federal laws, policies, and operational practices to help ensure the crown is meeting its constitutional obligations with respect to aboriginal and treaty rights and is adhering to international human rights standards, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The third key component of the framework includes the Government of Canada's commitment to work in partnership with indigenous communities, the provinces and territories, and other partners to fully implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action. To date, progress has been made on 49 of 70 of the calls to action under federal or shared responsibility. In 2016, Canada became a full supporter, without qualification, of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The government is committed to fully implementing the declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution and is working in full partnership with indigenous peoples on the path forward. The government has also made unprecedented investments in both budget 2016 and budget 2017 towards safe housing, clean water, high-quality education, child and family service reform, and the revitalization of indigenous language and culture to help close the socio-economic gaps and address the priorities of communities from coast to coast to coast.

The government is also working with first nations, Inuit, and the Métis Nation to advance new fiscal relationships, including changes to funding approaches and financial transfer mechanisms that support renewed nation-to-nation, crown-to-Inuit, and government-to-government relationships. In July 2016, Canada signed a memorandum of understanding on a new fiscal relationship with the Assembly of First Nations and has been engaged with self-governing first nations on the structure of a new fiscal relationship with these communities. Budget 2017 also provides \$84.9 million over the next five years in key long-term stable funding to support the Métis Nation as it continues to develop and grow governance capacity that will support its future endeavors, including section 35 self-determination and reconciliation discussions. This is on top of existing funding currently being provided to the Métis Nation and under previous Powley funding.

Reconciliation and the implementation of the framework is being implemented through a whole-of-government approach. A large number of federal departments, as mandated by the Prime Minister's mandate letter to each respective federal minister, are directly engaging with indigenous peoples across Canada on implementing policies and programs related to a broad range of issues.

Routine Proceedings

This approach and framework for reconciliation is evergreen and will continue to evolve as the government renews and strengthens the relationship with indigenous peoples.

Question No. 897—Mr. Romeo Saganash:

With regard to the announced Indigenous Languages Act: (a) which Indigenous experts, communities, leaders, and knowledge keepers have guided the drafting process and set the criteria and outcomes; (b) what is the timeframe and schedule of the drafting of the proposed legislation; (c) what criteria does the government anticipate will be used to determine appropriate funding levels; (d) does the government anticipate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action No. 15 for a Language Commissioner will be included in the proposed legislation; and (e) does the government anticipate Indigenous languages will be recognized as official languages as part of the proposed legislation?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), this legislation will be developed jointly with indigenous peoples. Specialists, communities, and indigenous representatives will be involved in the discussions to guide and conceptualize the framework that will lead to an indigenous languages act.

With regard to (b), the proposed legislation would be introduced prior to the end of the current parliament.

With regard to (c), as announced in the 2017 budget, the government will invest \$89.9 million over the next three years to support indigenous languages and cultures.

With regard to (d), all calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission regarding indigenous languages, including the delegation of a language commissioner, will be considered in the development of the proposed legislation.

With regard to (e), the protection and support provided by the legislation will be determined through a co-development process with indigenous peoples.

Question No. 899—Hon. Peter Kent:

With regard to the statement made by the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in the House of Commons on February 23, 2017, that "Cedar Tree will now be owned and operated by Canadians going forward": (a) does the government consider this statement to be accurate; and (b) what evidence or guarantees does the government have to ensure that Cedar Tree Investment Canada is not a subsidiary of Anbang Insurance?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), on March 6, 2017, during the House of Commons debates, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development clarified his earlier statement:

On February 23, during question period, in response to a question from the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo on the Investment Canada Act, I inadvertently stated that Cedar Tree will now be owned and operated by Canadians going forward. What I meant to say is that Retirement Concepts will continue to be managed and operated by Canadians under its new ownership....

With regard to (b), under the Investment Canada Act, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development carefully considers each reviewable investment on a case-by-case basis and approves foreign investments to acquire control of a Canadian business only if they are likely to be of net benefit to Canada. The act

contains strict confidentiality provisions in regard to information obtained through its administration. Section 36 of the act states that:

that "...all information obtained in respect to a Canadian, a non-Canadian, a business or an entity referred to in paragraph 25.1(c) by the Minister or an officer or employee of Her Majesty in the course of the administration or enforcement of this Act is privileged and no one shall knowingly communicate or allow to be communicated any such information or allow anyone to inspect or to have access to any such information."

As a result of section 36, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada is unable to disclose any information obtained under the Investment Canada Act to respond to this question.

Question No. 902—Mr. Fin Donnelly:

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' public commitment to implement a mandatory fins-attached management measure for all pelagic shark landings across Canada by March 2018: (a) what is the Department's timeline for proceeding with stakeholder consultations; (b) does the government anticipate it will be balancing these domestic measures with regulations to limit the trade of shark fins only to other countries with similar requirements; and (c) does the government anticipate these protections against shark finning will extend to preventing the de-winging of skates and rays by requiring that those animals be landed whole as well?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while there are no directed shark fisheries in Canada, under the new measures announced by the government late last year, harvesters that retain bycatches of sharks will be required to land any pelagic sharks with all fins at least partially attached to the carcass as a measure to strengthen shark finning prevention.

Most fisheries in Canada are already meeting the requirement to keep fins at least partially attached to the carcass until after landing. Consultations on full implementation of this measure are ongoing with the one remaining fleet that has not yet fully implemented the fins-attached requirement. This measure will be fully implemented for all fisheries no later than March 2018.

While there are currently no regulations being considered to limit the trade of fins to countries that have implemented a fins-attached approach, Canada restricts or bans the trade, possession, or sale of shark products from species that are protected under either the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, CITES, or the Species At Risk Act, or those that would present human health or food safety concerns. As a member of the CITES, Canada aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten a species' long-term survival. The porbeagle shark, the oceanic whitetip shark, the hammerhead, the great white shark, the whale shark and the basking shark are all listed on appendix II of the Convention. Countries exporting any of these species must prove the sustainability of their country's harvest and issue export permits for international trade. Canada takes seriously its legal obligation to prevent the import of products from these shark species.

Routine Proceedings

In fisheries where harvesters are permitted to retain skates or rays, de-winging is permitted as a form of processing at sea and a conversion factor is applied to the weight of the wings landed to ensure that the overall established total allowable catch for the stock in question is not exceeded. In most of these fisheries there is 100% dockside monitoring, and in some cases there is 100% observer coverage. As de-winging and accounting for the harvests of skates and rays is not currently a conservation issue, there are no plans to implement any measures to prohibit the removal of skate and ray wings at sea.

Question No. 907—Hon. Candice Bergen:

With regard to the Prime Minister's comments on March 2, 2017, that "We have reallocated resources to make sure that we are able to meet the incoming asylum seekers": (a) what specific resources have been reallocated; (b) where were the resources reallocated from; and (c) what measures has the government taken to ensure that other government services are not affected by this reallocation of resources?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

With regard to (a), the CBSA is working with partners such as Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, to redistribute workloads to meet the needs of certain impacted locations. Although processing asylum seekers is a significant part of normal CBSA activities, in response to the recent increases in asylum seekers in Quebec, Manitoba, and Ontario, the CBSA has already taken steps in adjusting staff schedules and deploying temporary infrastructure in Emerson to meet the current influx.

With regard to (b), border services officers have been and will continue to be regionally relocated as required to assist the CBSA's front line.

With regard to (c), the CBSA is working with IRCC to further prioritize refugee processing within the two departments with a view to further enhancing claimant processing capacity while limiting the impact on other services provided by both departments. In addition, the two departments are working in collaboration with the RCMP and other departments to develop planning options to respond to a wide range of contingencies in both the near and medium term. Federal officials have engaged with provincial and American colleagues at multiple levels over the past several weeks, and this will continue to grow as contingency and response planning advances.

As for the RCMP's response:

With regard to (a), the RCMP has been temporarily reallocating personnel to the areas most affected by the recent increase of asylum seekers entering Canada between ports of entry, including near Emerson, Manitoba, and St-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Quebec.

With regard to (b), temporary deployments have primarily occurred from within the implicated divisions through a combination of member overtime and/or relief shifts. Resources from other divisions are also being deployed as required.

With regard to (c), the RCMP adjusts enforcement efforts and resources in accordance with emerging events in the operating environment. The RCMP will continue to monitor the situation and will reassess resource requirements as necessary.

Question No. 910—Mr. Matt Jeneroux:

With regard to the letter sent by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada to the Council of the Federation regarding Bill S-201, Genetic Non-Discrimination Act, on March 1, 2017: (a) which provinces responded to the request for feedback; (b) which provinces are supportive of Bill S-201; (c) what was the contents of the feedback, broken down by province; and (d) on what date was the feedback received?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, preventing discrimination and other forms of misuse of genetic information is a duty of all governments.

As part of our efforts to secure pan-Canadian protection against genetic discrimination, the Senate public bill was brought to the attention of the provinces, and we invited their analysis.

Four provinces—Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan—have written formal letters to the government to indicate their opposition to the bill, as it reaches into provincial jurisdiction. The letter from Quebec was received on January 3, 2017; the letter from Manitoba was received on January 5, 2017; the letter from British Columbia was received on February 10, 2017; and the letter from Saskatchewan was received on March 23, 2017.

Premier Silver of the Yukon, chair of the Council of the Federation, responded to the letter on March 16, 2017, and notes that a number of provinces have already shared their views on this matter and that other provincial and territorial governments will communicate directly with the federal government on this issue when they deem it appropriate.

The government recognizes and respects the will of the House in adopting Bill S-201.

Question No. 913—Mr. Todd Doherty:

With regard to the trip taken by the Minister of International Trade in early March 2017 to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and India: (a) what are the contents of the Minister's itinerary; (b) who were the members of the delegation; (c) how were the members of the delegation chosen; (d) what agreements were signed during the trip; (e) what are the contents or website locations of the agreements referred to in (d); and (f) based on receipts and invoices received so far, what is the total amount spent on the trip, broken down by item?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), for information related to the minister's trip to the UAE, Qatar, and India, members may refer to these documents: a news release entitled "Minister Champagne wraps up first visit to Middle East and India to advance economic partnerships", found at https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/03/minister_champagne-wrapsupfirstvisittomiddleeastandindiaadvance.html, and "Minister Champagne to travel to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and India", found at https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/02/minister_champagnetotraveltounitedarabemiratesqatarandindia.html.

Routine Proceedings

With regard to (b), the members of the delegation were Mr. François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of International Trade; Mr. Julian Owens, chief of staff to the Minister of International Trade; Ms. Chantal Gagnon, press attaché to the Minister of International Trade; Mr. Frédéric Huot-Bolduc, visits officer—office of protocol, Global Affairs Canada; and Ms. Maria Lo, deputy director for trade, Maghreb and regional trade division, Global Affairs Canada, for the UAE and Qatar portions.

With regard to (c), departmental officials were selected to ensure coordinated support during the minister's official travel abroad.

With regard to (d) and (e), no agreements were signed during the visit to the UAE, Qatar, and India.

With regard to (f), the preparation of an accurate and comprehensive summary of expenses for the Minister of International Trade's trip to the UAE, Qatar, and India in early March 2017 was a significant undertaking requiring consultation with Canadian missions and the receipt of invoices from multiple contractors and companies. Related invoices and claims are currently being processed, and attempting to address this inquiry within the allotted time frame could lead to the disclosure of incomplete or misleading information.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 898, 900, 901, 903 to 906, 908, 909, 911, 912, and 914 to 918 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 898—**Mr. Dan Albas:**

With regard to the comments made by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development in the House of Commons on February 22, 2017, concerning the takeover of Retirement Concepts by Anbang Insurance: (a) how is the takeover in Canada's best interests; (b) what precise benefits does the government anticipate Canadians will receive as a result of the takeover; and (c) what is the net total of new Canadian jobs which the government anticipates will be created as a result of the takeover?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 900—**Mr. Pat Kelly:**

With regard to the President of the Treasury Board's mandate letter, specifically the instruction to "work with the Minister of Finance and your colleagues to conduct a review of tax expenditures and other spending to reduce poorly targeted and inefficient measures, wasteful spending, and government initiatives that are ineffective or have outlived their purpose": (a) what consultations with his colleagues in the Official Opposition and other parties has the President of the Treasury Board undertaken to review tax expenditures; (b) what consultations with non-government stakeholders has the President of the Treasury Board undertaken as part of a review of tax expenditures; (c) what consultations have the President of the Treasury Board, any of his officials, any other Minister, or any of their officials undertaken with stakeholders with links to political parties to review tax expenditures; (d) what were the results of the consultations in (a), (b), and (c); (e) on what evidence was the decision to conduct a review of tax expenditures based; (f) what criteria does the government anticipate will be used to judge the efficacy of

given tax expenditures under review; (g) what specific goals or deliverables have the President of the Treasury Board and any other Minister determined for the reduction of tax expenditures through pruning of ineffective measures and wasteful spending; and (h) when does the government anticipate the President of the Treasury Board or any other Minister will report to Parliament on the findings of the tax measure review?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 901—**Mr. Pat Kelly:**

With regard to the President of the Treasury Board's mandate letter, specifically the instruction to "work with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to improve reporting to Parliament": (a) on what evidence is the assessment that reporting to Parliament needs to be improved based; (b) what steps do the President of the Treasury Board and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons plan to take to improve reporting to Parliament; (c) on what criteria does the government anticipate success or failure of attempts to improve reporting to Parliament will be judged; (d) what consultations with the Official Opposition and other parties have the President of the Treasury Board and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons undertaken or plan to undertake regarding improving reporting to Parliament; (e) at what intervals does the government anticipate the President of the Treasury Board will report to Parliament on efforts to improve reporting to Parliament; (f) what specific goals or deliverables has the President of the Treasury Board determined for the state of reporting to Parliament; and (g) if the President of the Treasury Board has not yet determined the specific goals or deliverables in (f), when does he anticipate he will do so and inform Parliament as to their nature or content?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 903—**Mr. Guy Caron:**

With regard to the Canada 150 Community Infrastructure Program, between its launch on January 1, 2015, and February 22, 2017, and the constituency of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques: (a) which projects have been submitted from the constituency; and (b) which projects submitted from the constituency have been approved?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 904—**Ms. Christine Moore:**

With regard to the government policy on workplace day care centres: (a) what is the full list of departments or other public service entities in part 1, schedule 1 to the Public Service Labour Relations Act; (b) who is the designated officer within the department or entity that submits questions to the human resources branch of the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada; (c) how many day care centres, broken down by department and city, should be planned so that the actual or proposed number of day care centres does not exceed one centre per 4,000 employees in the municipality or census subdivision as set out in the Geographic Location Master File; (d) what are the results of the surveys of federal public servants, broken down by department; and (e) what cumulative data is required, broken down by department and year, to assess the policy for each department since this policy was implemented?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 905—**Mr. John Nater:**

With regard to the Access to Information Act, since November 4, 2015: (a) how many times has the Privy Council Office, the Office of the Prime Minister, or the Treasury Board Secretariat provided guidance, including directives, advices, memorandums, clarifications, and interpretations regarding Access to Information requests or the implementation of the Act; and (b) for each instance in (a), what are the details, including (i) date, (ii) title, (iii) contents, (iv) departments that received the guidance, (v) individuals who provided the guidance, (vi) relevant file numbers, if applicable?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 906—Ms. Rachael Harder:**

With regard to the Prime Minister's trip to Calgary on or around March 1, 2017: (a) what are the amounts and details of all expenses related to the trip; (b) what are the details of all official government business conducted on the trip; (c) what amount has been received by the Receiver General from the (i) Liberal Party of Canada, (ii) Official Agent for the Liberal Party of Canada by-election campaign in Calgary Midnapore, (iii) Official Agent for the Liberal Party of Canada by-election campaign in Calgary Heritage for re-imbursment related to the Prime Minister's trip; and (d) what are the details of any payment received in (c), including (i) date, (ii) amount, (iii) description of expenses for which taxpayers were reimbursed, (iv) sender?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 908—Hon. Candice Bergen:

With regard to individuals who have sought asylum in Canada since January 1, 2017: (a) how many individuals have sought asylum; (b) what is the breakdown of asylum seekers by country of citizenship; (c) how many individuals have sought asylum at locations other than border crossings; (d) what is the breakdown in (c) by country of citizenship; and (e) in (a) and (c), how many asylum claims were (i) accepted, (ii) rejected?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 909—Mr. Murray Rankin:

With regard to the regulatory requirements under sections 141 and 142 of the Health of Animals Regulations that "each animal is able to stand in its natural position without coming into contact with a deck or roof" and that "every equine over 14 hands in height shall be segregated from all other animals during transport by air": (a) will the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) verify that horses being exported overseas are currently meeting these requirements; (b) can the CFIA verify that inspectors are enforcing these regulations on a consistent basis; (c) who has the authority to declare that the requirements under section 141 do not apply; (d) is the CFIA's professional judgement and previous experience on this matter based on any scientific evidence that they can cite; (e) do the exporters receive a veterinary certificate from a CFIA veterinary inspector or otherwise accredited veterinarian at the quarantine feedlot that certifies that there is no disease or injury present and that it is permissible to export the horses; (f) who transports the horses and crates them at the airport; (g) is there a second veterinary inspection at the airport and, if so, is a second certificate provided to the airport and the aircraft carrier; (h) at what point are the horses examined at the airport; (i) since Canada is a World Organisation for Animal Health member country, is there also a document signed by the port veterinary stating that the shipment meets International Air Transport Association requirements; (j) with what method are the horses individually identified for the purposes of being crated together, so that compatibility is ensured; (k) how was incompatibility determined with regard to the incident filled out on March 10, 2015, non-compliance document Humane Transportation of Animals HT-2015-083416 and what specifically made that incident non-compliant; (l) how many incidents of incompatibility and non-compliance occurred in 2015; and (m) what are the details of all documents and certificates required for the air transport of live horses from Canada to Japan?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 911—Mr. Matt Jeneroux:

With regard to expenditures for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, both in the Departmental Office at 284 Wellington Street and the Minister's Office in Centre Block, broken down by building, since April 12, 2016: (a) what is the total amount spent on renovations and furniture; (b) what is the amount spent on purchasing new furniture, broken down by item and cost; (c) what is the amount spent on reupholstering pre-existing furniture, broken down by item and cost; and (d) what other expenditures have been made with regard to renovations and furniture, broken down by item and cost?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 912—Mr. Todd Doherty:

With regard to government travel by employees of the Privy Council Office (PCO) to the Bahamas during December 2016 and January 2017: (a) how many PCO employees travelled to the Bahamas; (b) what were the titles of the PCO employees referred to in (a); (c) what were the dates of each trip, broken down by employee; and (d) what locations were visited on each trip?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 914—Mr. Charlie Angus:

With regard to the procurement of temporary personnel services, broken down by department, agency and crown corporation, by region and by year for every year from 2011-2012 to 2016-2017: (a) what are the total expenditures for such services, broken down by fiscal year; (b) what amount is spent by each department or government institution, broken down by fiscal year; (c) which companies received contracts to provide temporary personnel services; (d) what is the combined annual total of all contracts awarded to each company in (c); (e) which companies received sole sourced contracts, broken down by dates and amounts; (f) why were their contracts not competitively sourced; (g) how many people were hired by temporary employment agencies to work for federal department and government institutions across Canada, broken down by fiscal year; (h) how many employees were hired, broken down by fiscal year and by department and government institution; (i) what is the average length of time an employee remains on contract; (j) how many workers, in number and percentage of overall hires, begin on contract and are eventually offered full time positions within the federal civil service; (k) what is the business case for using temporary workers instead of permanent members of the civil service; (l) what savings does the government make in salary, pension and benefits by using temporary workers rather than permanent workers, as a total amount and on an average per worker basis; and (m) what is the average hourly amount a temporary agency receives based on the hourly wage a temporary worker is paid for their labour?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 915—Hon. Ed Fast:

With regard to federal spending within the electoral district of Abbotsford during the fiscal year 2016-2017: what is the list of grants, loans, contributions and contracts awarded by the government, broken down by (i) department and agency, (ii) municipality, (iii) name of recipient, (iv) amount received, (v) program under which the spending was made, (vi) date?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 916—Hon. Ed Fast:

With regard to federal spending within the electoral district of Mission Matsqui Fraser Canyon during the fiscal year 2016-2017: what is the list of grants, loans, contributions and contracts awarded by the government, broken down by (i) department and agency, (ii) municipality, (iii) name of recipient, (iv) amount received, (v) program under which the spending was made, (vi) date?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 917—Mr. David Sweet:

With regard to the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, which ended in June 2016: (a) what rationale was used in the decision to not extend the plan; (b) was there a formal review of the plan prior to its cancellation; (c) if the answer to (b) is affirmative, what were the findings of this review; (d) which groups, organizations or individuals received funding under the plan; (e) which groups identified in (d) (i) continue to receive funding from the government, (ii) do not continue to receive funding and for what reasons; and (f) what actions outside of the plan are being taken to combat human trafficking both (i) domestically, (ii) internationally?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 918—Mr. Chris Warkentin:

With regard to meetings between the Prime Minister and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, since November 4, 2015: what are the dates and times of all such meetings?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Privilege

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it truly is an honour to stand in this very important debate about privilege. For people who are listening or who are in the House, the reason this debate is continuing so long is a bit of a concern and is certainly of the government's own making.

We have spent the last two weeks back in our ridings and we have heard what is important to the people we represent. My constituents are very concerned about the lack of judges and some of the decisions coming down, Jordan's for one, where people are getting off because of the lack of judges. I heard people, especially in the riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, talk about softwood lumber. They are very concerned about the lack of a softwood lumber agreement. They have questions about the proposed marijuana legislation, which was tabled right before we rose. People know that a budget bill has been tabled. Lawyers and some professionals said that the bill would have some important impacts for their businesses, and that these things needed to be heard. There was concern about NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and what was going to happen with it. I had a number people come to my office. They are now waiting six or eight months to get their old age security. However, things like the privilege debate and what was happening at PROC did not come up once.

It is of note that the people in the ridings know that things are sort of muddied right now and that we are not talking about the important things we should be talking about, but they really do not understand why. Therefore, I should take a bit of time and talk about what is happening, why it is happening, and unfortunately why we are continuing to debate something when we should be moving on to other issues. If the Liberals had any respect for Parliament, they would be doing what they said they would do and make Parliament work for all.

Today, we are talking about the fundamental privilege of a member of Parliament. There are 118,618 individuals in my riding and one of the most important responsibilities I have is to vote on their behalf. A few years ago we looked at the voting record of different members of Parliament. I was absolutely pleased to see I was one of five members who had a 100% voting record, which meant that throughout the year I never missed a vote. It was not always easy. I remember when we were going until midnight every night. At 10 o'clock I thought it was safe to go home and at 11 o'clock the bells would ring. In order to exercise my privilege of voting, I had to quickly get ready to come to the House, and would run from my apartment. It took extraordinary effort but an important effort to be here to vote on behalf of the citizens of my riding.

We have talked about the importance of voting. Not all votes are created equal. Obviously, some votes around "The member shall now be heard" versus voting on a bill about medical assistance in

dying perhaps have different levels of importance, but there is a general concept that being able to get there, unimpeded, to exercise our right to vote is important.

The privilege motion is that two months ago two members of Parliament were denied their right to vote by being denied access to the parliamentary precinct. That means the constituents of Milton and of Beauce were prevented from having their votes cast, and this is a serious violation.

● (1515)

When we talk about having to run up to the House and then being stopped for nine minutes, thereby missing the 30-minute bells, it is something that all parties have now agreed was wrong and should not happen. We need to spend some time asking why it happened, so we have systems and structures in place that will not impede members of Parliament from exercising that right to vote in the future. Members should never be held up when they are coming to the House for a vote.

Members were held up and the Speaker, in his wisdom, agreed that there was an unacceptable delay on the buses due to motorcade security and a media bus, and that the delay experienced by these members and the subsequent missing of the vote was a violation of their privileges.

A motion was then moved to refer this question of privilege to the procedure and House affairs committee. This is a normal process.

However, this is where things get a little muddied. There is a whole lot of reasons it gets muddied. Again, I am going to show clearly that it is through the government's arrogance. Perhaps it is because there are so many new members and they are inexperienced, so many members do not really understand what privilege is and how important it is.

The Liberals moved a motion to proceed to orders of the day, which meant that it shut down the debate on the question of privilege without even a vote. That is absolutely extraordinary. Why did the Liberals do this?

The Liberals had some stuff going on in committee that they thought was more important, and I will talk about that in a bit. They said that we should skip this, not even vote on it or take the issue seriously. Again, I will call attention to the Speaker's ruling which called these actions unprecedented. Those in the opposition thank the Speaker for protecting the rights of all parliamentarians on this issue.

For the government not to allow debate before a vote is appalling, and it took away our rights as members of Parliament. We have to be very clear about that. It was a very bad decision on the part of the government.

From that, we then had the member for Battle River—Crowfoot raise a question of privilege on the fact that the original question of privilege was not voted on. Here we have privilege of privilege of something that should not have happened.

Privilege

Meanwhile, the people in my riding are saying that we should be debating the budget implementation act and softwood lumber. We have a government that is not willing to do the few things it should have done so we could have proceeded in a timely way on the things that mattered to Canadians. For that, the Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

We then have a member's motion calling for the matter to be studied at the procedure and House affairs and that it should take priority over all other matters at the committee. It is basic common sense that it should have been voted on, it should have been sent to the committee, and we would not be talking about it in the House right now. However, the government is still not giving any signals that it is willing to do what it should do to respect Parliament.

Why is the government doing this? There is some confusion. Why would the government not take something that we all agree was wrong and that we need to look at what happened in a violation of privilege and fix those issues so it does not happen again? It is pretty straightforward. It goes to committee and it takes priority at committee because it is a matter of privilege. The committee could look at the situation. It probably would not take all that long to figure it out and make suggestions to ensure this did not happen again.

However, the government did not want to send it to the committee. People might ask why. It was because it had already created a mess in the procedure and House affairs committee, or PROC, where Liberals had tabled a so-called paper outlining modernizing the way Parliament works.

Again, it is important for everyone to remember that Parliament can always look at some internal reviews, how we do things, and how we should them differently. That is not a bad discussion to have. However, the government did not do that. The precedent since Confederation, with very rare exceptions, has been to have consensus.

• (1520)

This is the House of the people. This is not the audience for the government. We are the opposition for the government. It is the House of the people. When we are talking about the rules of the House, it is not just the government that should get to decide how they are changed. It should be, and has been throughout Canada's history, done by consensus and moving forward.

The Liberals created a mess in this committee. They were not all bad suggestions. Their discussion paper is basically creating an audience as opposed to an opposition. It is really about creating convenience for themselves, that they want to make these rule changes. The majority of the things in the discussion paper are not about making things better.

They have number of themes.

The first is the management of the House. Under management of the House is sittings. They do not want to work Fridays. Constituents in the riding I represent ask how often I am in Ottawa. I tell them I am here 26 weeks a year. Twenty-six weeks a year is really half a year. We have a lot of time in 26 weeks to do other things in our constituencies.

Yes, we need to have a balance between what we do in Parliament and what we do in our constituency, but right now when we are in Ottawa half the time, plus we can go home on weekends, if we choose, and at home half the time, we have created what is a reasonable balance. When people hear we do not want to work Fridays and we are only there 26 weeks a year, they want to know what this is all about. Being from the west coast, it costs a lot of money for me to fly here for the week. People might ask why I should only work a four-day week rather than a five-day week when the government spends thousands of dollars to fly me to this place to work.

Electronic voting is another theme. We could have a debate about it, and perhaps PROC should have a debate as well, but we might lose something if we do not stand to be counted. Yes, we could say electronic voting would be more efficient, but is efficiency everything? Is that all that matters? Because we are here for thoughtful deliberation, voting. It does take a long time sometimes, when we have seven or 10 votes in a row. However, when we have to stand to be counted, when people have a vote that matters to them and they watch it on television, they can see how their member of Parliament has voted. They can see it quickly and easily. We all think very carefully every time we stand to exercise our privilege of voting. We would lose something. We can talk about whether it is more important to be efficient and push a button or whether it is more important for us to stand, take a bit of time to show Canadians, and be very transparent in what we do and how we do it.

Then there is the House calendar theme. The Liberals looked at the calendar and what they should do. I think the bigger thing is the Friday issue.

There is theme about routine proceedings.

Throughout this paper, the Liberals want to do many things. They have a majority government. They can ultimately get anything they want done, but they want to take away the few tools that an opposition has to sometimes say that we are not sure the government is on the right track, or that we are going to make this a bit more difficult for it. However, when the Liberals have a majority government, they will ultimately get what they want done, but there are some ways that the opposition can show the government that perhaps it is not totally pleased with the direction it is taking. They wanted to take that way. Again, they want an audience, not an opposition.

Private members' business is another theme. There are a lot of things.

Management of debate is another one the Liberals want to change.

Privilege

•(1525)

Lots of times in the House, if we agree on a piece of legislation or know that it will ultimately pass, there will be very limited debate. When there is something as important as perhaps the marijuana legislation or the assisted dying legislation, many people want to speak to it, and it is important that they be given the opportunity. The government wants to program manage, put all of the bills on some sort of even playing field and manage it so that it makes it easier for the government. When the Conservatives were in government, they had a majority and managed to get the important pieces of legislation through without taking away the tools the opposition has to show displeasure.

Another one is question period. We are here 26 weeks of the year and the Liberals are suggesting that the Prime Minister show up one day a week for not even an hour; it is actually 45 minutes. They think a great way to modernize Parliament is that for one day a week during the 26 weeks, the prime minister will be in the House for 45 minutes so the opposition can hold him to account. That is what they are suggesting is a good step forward for efficiency and modernizing Parliament.

That could be done right now, as has been shown. The Liberals do not have to change the rules of the House for the prime minister to take every question. Indeed, today the NDP leader stood and asked a lot of questions, and for the first time ever, the Prime Minister showed disrespect in not answering a question posed by another party leader.

Why does he only want to attend question period for 45 minutes 26 days of the year? Maybe he does not like being here. Maybe he finds it tough to answer questions when his budget is not balanced the way he said it was going to be. Maybe it is tough to explain why the defence minister has stolen the valour of our military. Maybe it is hard for him to explain why he did not follow through with his electoral reform promise. However, that is his job. It is his job five days a week for 26 weeks. Whenever possible, the Prime Minister should be in the House to answer questions from the opposition.

The committee was very concerned that there was going to be a decision to ram the discussion paper through, contrary to the workings of the House since Confederation, and contrary to the consensus that we should build for these sorts of changes. The majority of the changes were only in the interest of the government creating an audience rather than an opposition.

Where are we now? We have seen this playbook before by the government with Motion No. 6 last year, which is when the government tried to change the Standing Orders unilaterally. We all know what happened then. That very bad motion had to be retracted. The Liberals' instincts keep showing through on these issues, in terms of blurring government versus Parliament. Sometimes there is great value in having the perspectives of the different sides of the House. Some members who have been around for a long time are expressing concerns with what the government is doing. The newer members perhaps are not aware how serious it is.

It is time the Liberals reflected on what they are doing and how they are doing it. We need to have the question of privilege dealt with so that people are not impeded in their ability to vote. The

government needs to seriously think about how it is manhandling and abusing Parliament and the parliamentary system. I hope the Liberals will do some soulful thinking over the next few days.

•(1530)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's concluding her remarks by making reference to the privilege itself. The privilege itself is something which, as indicated earlier, we are actually supporting. We have consistently said that this issue needs to be dealt with in PROC. Members have chosen to speak at great length to this privilege motion. I am no dummy when it comes to the tactics of opposition parties. I understand what the opposition is trying to achieve here.

Having said that, let us go back to the Friday sittings. The member made reference to the Friday sittings. I could leave Ottawa on Friday morning and be in Winnipeg for 9:30 and have a good solid day's work in Winnipeg with my constituents, as opposed to working a half day on Friday when fewer than 50% of members of Parliament are here. Members are already gone. Instead of having those hours as a half day on a Friday, we could have them by maybe starting at nine o'clock in the morning on a Tuesday or a Thursday. Most Canadians start work at nine o'clock in the morning.

I see a lot of games being played here. That is my opinion. The member just shared her opinion. Why does the member feel that there was no need to have a discussion at PROC on that particular issue?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that the debate is on the privilege motion.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, to go back to the privilege motion, if members will recall, the government, which says that it supports this and says that this was a serious issue, tried to completely ignore this issue and move to orders of the day to end this issue. All of a sudden, the government members now suggest that they are recognizing how important the privileges of members are when they did everything possible they could to delay, defer, and to move away from it. The whole purpose of their not wanting to deal with the privilege motion was to ram through things like a prime minister's question period, sitting days, and turning the opposition into an audience. The Liberals have a majority but they forgot to respect Parliament.

•(1535)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the privilege to sit in these seats is a privilege that is afforded to us because we were elected by the people of our ridings. These seats belong to the people of Canada, to the people of our particular ridings.

Privilege

I wonder if the hon. member could speak to the point that these are not seats owned by the government. Even back home in my own riding people are saying, “Oh, you are with the government”, and I always have to correct them. I wonder if the member could outline the differences between government and opposition and the House of Commons or Parliament.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question. In some of our smaller ridings, members of Parliament are representing, in Prince Edward Island, perhaps 30,000 people. I come here and I am voting for 118,000 people.

There have been pieces of legislation where I have actually gone out and I have polled people in my riding, for example, on a private member's bill dealing with adding transgendered persons' rights to the Criminal Code. I use that polling in my riding to choose how I am going to exercise my vote. I bet that a lot of members in this House do that. They think a lot about the legislation they are going to be standing up to vote on. People in my riding sometimes watch the votes. If I could not get here because of a motorcade or buses delaying me, that would not be protecting my right and in turn that of the 118,000 people whom I have talked to in order to come up with the appropriate decision as to how I am going to exercise my franchise on their behalf.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, he would invite a guest to come to the House of Commons. On one of those occasions, there was a privilege that was broken. A member stood in his place and said he had difficulty because of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's invitation for someone to present. We were very grateful that the individual, a world figure, made a presentation. It is always nice to have someone come to this place to speak. However, a question of privilege was raised. This has nothing to do with trying to take shots at prime ministers. I am glad that Stephen Harper invited special guests to come to the chamber.

Having said that, there was a very limited debate that occurred in regard to the question of privilege. People remained focused on the question of privilege itself and then it went to PROC. I sat on that committee. We dealt with it and provided some thoughts. I am wondering if the member could speak to the actual process and why she believes that we continue to have this ongoing debate on the process of privilege and unfettered access to the chamber.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, I agree with the first part of the question. We do have guests that we need to welcome, and we need to make sure our processes and procedures do not impact members' ability to access this chamber.

What the member is failing to admit, or perhaps does not recognize, but he is too experienced not to, is we have two things that are intersecting here. The reason the government did not want this to be dealt with in an efficient manner is it was busy at the procedure and House affairs committee trying to ram through changes that would make the government's life easier and it did not want to take the time from that particular task to do what it needed to do with the privilege. The member knows very well that is part of the reason we are still here today when more efficiently this would have been sent to the committee a long time ago.

I want to add that the government needs to remember what Canadians care about. They care about the budget. They care about

the free trade agreement. They care about what is going to happen with the marijuana legislation. If the Liberals were not so busy playing games with how the House works instead of going by consensus, we would be dealing with things that Canadians care about.

● (1540)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is a very important issue. Certainly Standing Orders and procedure in the House of Commons are not things I hear about very often when I am at home in my riding. We were home for two weeks over the Easter break and this issue came up on a regular basis. This is something that Canadians have started to care about. I do not think they necessarily understand what was going on initially, but what it comes down to for Canadians is what is fair and what is not fair. In my constituency they see a Liberal government being heavy-handed, trying to push things through, and playing an unfair game.

What is my colleague hearing from her constituents in British Columbia? I am certainly hearing from my constituents in rural Alberta that they are very disappointed with a government that seems to be trying to ram through changes without going through a fair process, which historically means consensus among all the parties. Could she speak about what she is hearing in her riding?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, it is interesting how things have transpired today where the government has now suggested that it is going to back away from some of the changes, but it is going to move forward with a few. One thing I heard back in my riding was, “The Prime Minister only needs to show up one day a week for 45 minutes, 26 weeks a year? That is crazy.”

The Liberals are still going to move through with changes. I think they are planning to take it out of the committee and move it into the House, although we have not seen the motion. These are changes that Canadians do not understand. When they elect a government, they expect the government to be accountable during the time that we are in session.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to stand today to speak to the privilege motion.

I would like to start by recognizing that yesterday was the recognition of Journey to Freedom Day. Hence, I am wearing this scarf in recognition of all of the boat people who came about 30 years ago now. I have a bit of a personal connection, in that in my previous job I worked at a Chrysler dealer in Barrhead, Alberta, with Leck and Sommay Champhu. They were a husband-and-wife team who were detailers at the dealership and were two of the boat people who came there. They worked there for well over 30 years. Leck still works there, although his wife is now retired. I would like to just give a little shout-out to Leck and Sommay, as well as to one of my mentors, whose name is Chone. He was also one of the boat people and was one of our top mechanics at the Chrysler dealer. I would like to give a shout-out to Chone as well today. I thank them for all of the input they have had in my life.

Privilege

Today we are debating the privilege motion. For those people back home who are not familiar with what a privilege motion would be, it has to do with the great privilege that we have to be here in the House of Commons. Each one of our seats is representative of the population in our ridings, so we are given the privilege of being in this place, and there are a number of privileges that come with being here.

There are several ways that this privilege is granted or taken away. Being able to speak is a privilege, being able to vote is a privilege, being able to be heard is a privilege, and being able to hear is also a privilege. If any one of those things is being coerced or limited, we are able to rise on a question of privilege and say to the Speaker, "This point of my privilege was broken."

A while back, two members were prevented from participating in a vote because of a motorcade that was out front, so they missed the vote. Missing a vote around here is a big deal. Really, our number one role in the House of Commons is to vote, so missing that vote was very important. The members for Milton and Beauce missed that vote, so they raised that question of privilege. From there, we had a privilege motion. Then the government moved to go to orders of the day, which essentially killed that privilege motion by preventing it from going through the normal channels, as I understand it. It has been frustrating for me to see the current government in action, specifically when it comes to changing the rules of this place and also respecting privilege.

It has been a huge honour and privilege for me to be an elected official. It is something that I have often dreamt about. If someone had asked me just a number of years ago if I would become a member of Parliament, I probably would have laughed and said, "No. There's no way an automotive mechanic from Barrhead would become a member of Parliament", but here I am.

We are celebrating 150 years of Canadian history. I like to think that Canada is one of the greatest countries in the entire world. To that point, I think that this place has made Canada one of the greatest countries in the world, so when I think about the fact that we are celebrating 150 years of Canada, I think about all of the tradition that has brought us to this time. I think about this place and all of the debates and things that have happened in this place, and the procedures and orders that have come into force in order to make Canada the great place that it is, and I think it is arrogant of us to think that at this time we have to change how this place operates to make it better.

We do live in one of the best countries in the world, and there has to be a reason for that. I would say that our system of government, our system of Parliament, is the reason. In the spirit of 150 years of Canada, I think that this privilege debate, along with some of the other changes that are happening around this place, needs to take into account that we have had 150 years of history that has brought us to today.

● (1545)

I came here respecting the traditions of this place, anticipating that we would live up to those traditions and anticipating that this place does not belong to me or to anybody. This seat does not belong to me; it belongs to the people of Canada, and therefore we need to

respect the traditions that have been handed down to us and not make significant changes to them.

I was not here in the previous Parliament, but I do understand that there were some novel things that took place in the previous Parliament, things that had not taken place before, but the rules were never changed in order to accommodate the government's desire to get something done, to get something approved.

It seems to me that the privileges that we hold here are very important, and I think that we need to ensure that they remain, going forward.

The Liberals have brought forward this discussion paper, and that has probably been the cause of a lot of the consternation that we have been having lately. There are a number of changes they want to make to the way that this place operates.

My main argument would be that if we would change how this place operates, we would have a change on the face of Canada and a change on the trajectory of Canada. I am worried about that, but I am also worried about perhaps some of the motivation for the Liberals' attempting to change the Standing Orders in this place. I will read from one of the news articles that came out May 1, this morning. It is a quote from the government House leader. It says:

Canadians elected us to deliver an ambitious agenda, so it is with regret, but full transparency, that I want to inform you that, under the circumstances, the government will need to use time allocation more often in order to implement the real change we promised.

That, to me, seems to outline probably all of the consternation that we have been having lately, all of these things. When I was not part of this place, before I was elected, I do remember the outrage and the screaming of "foul" every time the Stephen Harper government moved time allocation, especially from people from the current government. People from that party would make a lot of noise about moving time allocation.

In the campaign, I remember repeatedly having to defend the fact that we had moved time allocation, although I was not fully aware of what that meant. I said that we had an agenda that we needed to implement, and time allocation was one of the tools we had at our disposal in order to do that. Whether or not we agree with using it, it was part of the rules. We did not change the rules to do that. We used the tools that were available to us in order to get our agenda through. There was an accusation that I had to face all the time that the Conservatives used time allocation 100 times in the last Parliament.

If we look at all the discussions we have had over the last few weeks from that lens, we see the accusation that the Conservatives used time allocation over 100 times in the last Parliament, but the current government has used time allocation 22 times already, I believe, and we are only a year and a bit in. If the Liberals continue on this track record, they will have to use time allocation nearly 100 times as well, if we transpose that over the next three years.

Privilege

It seems to me that one of the big motivations for the changes to the Standing Orders is to get out of the need to use time allocation, so that the Liberals can say at the next election that they never used time allocation nearly as much as those Conservatives did when they were in power. That would be true if they get their way on the changes they want to go forward, because they will not need to because the Standing Orders would have changed. They would have changed the rules in order to get their agenda through.

● (1550)

This reminds me of something else that I have read. I do not know if any members read *Calvin and Hobbes*, but in the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics there is a game called Calvinball. I love *Calvin and Hobbes*. It is great.

An hon. member: That's all you understand.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You have to remind me.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: I am getting a bit of flack here from my own colleagues, Madam Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would just ask members to refrain. It is not questions and comments period yet. I would hope that members would give respect to the colleague who is speaking right now.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I thought for a slight moment of brevity within the room today I would read the rules for Calvinball as I discovered them on the Internet. Someone has taken the time to put the rules for Calvinball together and I thought that given the current situation we are dealing with where the government seems to be making up the rules in its favour as it goes along, I would read the rules of Calvinball so that we could see some of the similarities.

Calvinball was invented by Calvin and Hobbes. The rules include:

1. All players are required to wear a Calvinball mask. This regulation is not to be questioned.
2. All following rules may be changed, amended or deleted by any player involved at any point in the game.
3. Any player may declare a new rule whenever he/she wants. This can be done audibly or silently, depending on the zone the player is in.
4. The Calvinball may be used in any way the player sees fit, whether to cause injury to other players or to gain benefits for himself.
5. Any penalty legislation may be in the form of pain, embarrassment, or any degradation the rulee wishes to execute upon the other player.
6. The Calvinball field consists of areas, or zones, which are governed by a set of rules declared by players.... For example, a corollary zone would enable a player to make a corollary (sub-rule) to any rule already made. Or a pernicious poem place would require the intruder to do what the name implies. Or an opposite zone would enable a player to declare reverse playability on the others. (Remember, the player would declare this zone oppositely by not declaring it.)
7. Players may name flags, assigning their powers and the rules governing the use of the respective flag.
8. Songs are an integral part of Calvinball and verses must be sung spontaneously through the game when randomly assigned events occur.
9. Score may be kept or disregarded. In the event that score is kept, it shall have no bearing on the game nor shall it have any logical consistency to it. (Legal scores include 'Q to 12', 'BW-109 to YU-34, and 'Nosebleed to Pelvic Fracture'.)
10. Any rule above that is carried out during the course of the game may never be used again in the event that it causes the same result as a previous game. Calvinball games may never be played the same way twice.
11. A Calvinball may be a football, volleyball, or any other reasonable ball.

12. The Calvinball field should be any well-sized field, preferably with trees, rocks, grass, creeks, and other natural obstacles. 13. Other optional equipment includes flags, wickets (especially of the time-fracture variety), and anything else the players wish to include.

Those are the rules to Calvinball.

During my reading of the rules, members might have seen some of the government's antics in the Calvinball game. If the rules are changed as the game goes along, a player is guaranteed to win. That is the outcome of Calvinball.

As soon as we started discussing this issue about three weeks ago, I thought it sounded like something I had heard before, and that was Calvinball. I printed off all of the scenarios in which Calvinball comes up in the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics.

Everybody should read *Calvin and Hobbes*, because there are great life lessons within all of the *Calvin and Hobbes* comics.

The names of Calvin and Hobbes are based on two philosophers, John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes. Their characters are actually reversed in the book.

That was my initial reaction to it. I hope that members were able to see along with me the correlation between the Liberals changing the rules to meet their own ends.

One of the main arguments the Liberals use for wanting to change the rules of this place is they say they want to modernize this place. That to me flies in the very face of everything that I thought about before I came here. I thought that this was a place that was steeped in tradition, that this was a place that held the line fast, and that there was a whole bunch of things that we did not change. I thought that if everything else changed in the world, the Parliament of Canada would still be the same. We would still have the same basic rules that cause it to function.

● (1555)

As we move from the trajectory of tradition and looking back at the history of making this place operate on a set of principles, and move toward a more Calvinball scenario, we will lose the very things that make us Canadian. We will lose the very thing that makes this place productive and ensures that we create robust laws for the country.

One of the other things I want to mention is the difference between government and Parliament. This is something I deal with a lot in my own riding. I get this a lot. I am the federal representative for about one-sixth of the province of Alberta. Most people say, "You're the government, you should fix this problem", or, "You're the government, why do things have to be like this?" I say that I am their representative at the federal stage, but I am not a member of the government. I am a member of the official opposition not a member of the governing party. They will often respond, "But you're a member of Parliament." I say that is exactly what I am. I am a member of Parliament, along with 337 other people. I explain that only the Prime Minister and his cabinet make up the government, and the rest of us are here to hold them to account, to question what they are doing or not doing, and these kinds of things.

Privilege

That is a clarification that I would like to make, that we are all members of Parliament in this place but we are not all the government. I will make this point once again. These seats belong to the people of our ridings, not to the government.

One of the other reasons the Liberals brought forward the discussion bill they have talked about is that they want to get rid of the omnibus bills. In the news article I read this morning, it said they wanted to make it so that the Speaker could make rulings on whether omnibus bills could be voted on all at once or whether they would be broken up into different pieces. It seems to me that is deferring responsibility. If the government wants to put something in an omnibus bill, it is its prerogative to do that. If it does not want to do that, it is also its prerogative. However, to put things in an omnibus bill and allow the Speaker to break it up would mean that they would put everything in an omnibus bill and then hope for the best. The Speaker would maybe miss something or break it up into chunks that they would like. I do not see the value in that at all. If the Liberals want to use omnibus bills, they should use them and allow the people of Canada to make the judgment on that.

Lastly, I would like to talk a bit about the Friday sitting. To some degree, I feel that I get used a lot on this Friday sitting. They say they want to make it more family friendly. I am one of the members with children. I have three young children. My daughter is four, my son is two, and I have a three-month-old daughter as well. When I come to Ottawa, I take them with me. All the way from northern Alberta is about a 10-hour trip one way. To say that getting rid of the Friday sitting would make my life easier is a misnomer. Having an entire week off works well for me, but having an extra day on the weekend does not make my life any easier. In fact, I would probably see my wife and kids less often than I do currently. It is only on weeks that we are not here that I go home for the entire week. If it is two weeks in a row, I will stay here over the weekend. If we then added another day to that, it would be less incentive for me to stay in Ottawa and go home for the weekend. I would not see my family nearly as often. Therefore, not sitting on Friday is not family friendly at all for me.

• (1600)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will say that it was insightful to learn the rules of *Calvin and Hobbes*. I do not know when in the member's busy schedule he gets the time to keep up on the comics like that.

I will not run out and pick up a copy. However, I was reminded, when the member was talking about *Calvin and Hobbes*, about a real friend of mine by the name of Graham Tapper. He lost one of his eyes in an industrial accident. When he would hear somebody talk about something off topic, he would say "Give it up. You're bringing a tear to my glass eye." That is exactly what I thought of when I was listening to the rhetoric on *Calvin and Hobbes*.

From the talk about Fridays and the member not going back to his riding, I guess that is a choice. I have a very rural riding. I enjoy getting back on Fridays to spend time with my constituents. I have never heard anyone bring up family friendly, or whatever, in any discussion I have had at the doors. Constituents would like me to show up in my riding to meet with them. They do not like to have to travel to Ottawa or to only see their member once a month when they have their constituency week.

Could the member please comment on whether he feels he is doing a better job spending time here in Ottawa serving his constituents, or whether he thinks his constituents would like to see him on the odd Friday instead of waiting for a separate week in the month?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, to the point about *Calvin and Hobbes*, I have been reading *Calvin and Hobbes* for my entire life. Since I got elected, I probably have not spent any time reading it. However, that is another point.

To the point about family friendly, my riding is one-sixth the size of the province of Alberta. When I am home in my riding, I am not even at my own home. I am typically 500 kilometres to 600 kilometres away. One extra day does not really give me the time to spend in my riding. I need a week in order to be in my riding. Are we going to chop Fridays off and add on an extra week somewhere in the calendar year? We are here for 26 weeks out of the year. That is half the year. I spend the rest of the time on the road in my riding.

I know that the term "family friendly" is used when talking about taking Fridays away. Making Parliament more family friendly has often been used to describe why we need to get rid of Fridays. I feel that is being targeted towards a guy like me who has a young family. I spend a significant amount of time organizing my schedule so that I do spend time with my family.

Having Fridays off will probably be more detrimental to spending time with my family, rather than if we are here for entire weeks and then having entire weeks off to be back in our ridings. That is a much better use of my time.

• (1605)

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member hit the nail on the head when he read the quote from the government House leader.

Unfortunately, she admittedly intends to continue to use time allocation as a regular course of operation in this place. Time allocation is a very technical term. The member talked about having some confusion around understanding what that is. It took a while.

Essentially it means limiting debate. I wonder if the member could talk about it a little more, putting it in plain language, so Canadians who are watching this could understand what the government is proposing to do with limiting debate, or invoking the use of time allocation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to the response, I just want to remind members that the matter we are speaking on today is the motion of privilege.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, in terms of time allocation, it appears that the government wants to move to more of what it calls a program, where there would be so many hours of debate given to each bill, rather than debating each bill for as long as people want to debate it. However, on more contentious bills, there are more people who want to speak. The government then has the ability to say it has heard what it feels to be all sides of the argument and will only accept so many more hours of debate and then there will be a vote. That is an acceptable use of the rules in this place.

Privilege

However, it wants to move to a situation where, as it introduces a bill, it would stipulate how many hours there is going to be for debate. It would not have to move time allocation or have to say that after a certain point there would not be any more debate. Therefore, in the next election, it could say it never used time allocation nearly as often as the Conservatives did when they were in power. However, the truth of the matter would be that it did not have to do that because it programmed it beforehand and never had to move time allocation motions. It is completely disingenuous and part of the bait-and-switch agenda that the current government has.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before going to questions and comments, I again want to remind members that the debate is on the question of privilege regarding MPs' ability to access the Hill so they can do their duties, including voting.

On questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me say something completely relevant to the point you just expressed.

Members have stood in their places to speak, and we are supposed to be talking about the question of privilege on access to the House of Commons. If we were to do an assessment of the many hours of debate we have had here, it has been more of a reflection on House rules. The privilege is supposed to be of a supreme nature. When someone stands and says he or she has been denied access, we are all supposed to take that very seriously. That is what the debate should be about.

Does the member believe there may be occasions when the opposition might be using a particular rule or privilege and not necessarily addressing the privilege? I have even had to provide many comments on the rules in response to what opposition members are saying.

● (1610)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I am not entirely sure what the question was. We are given the privilege to represent our particular ridings and the people in them, and we will be held to account by those people. Therefore, the actions we take in this place will be scrutinized back home. Constituents will be the ultimate judges of whether we have used these privileges appropriately.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague is a new member.

When you were running in the election, did you know that we worked five days a week and that the House of Commons was in Ottawa?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address his questions to the Chair.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, that definitely came up during the campaign: the hours worked and the wages we were paid. It was interesting to discover that some of the candidates running against me from other parties were not aware of such things. I did my research before I came here. I understood the workload and what it was going to take to be a member of Parliament.

To the member's point, to change the rules of this place or change how this place functions to make our lives easier seems disingenuous. When I signed up to be the candidate for Peace River—Westlock, or the promised land, as I like to call it, I knew the workload and the stresses it was going to place on my family. I accounted for all of that when I planned my life and how my family and I were going to live.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, the issue we are debating today is an important one. As indicated, the move by the government to shut down the previous debate on a question of privilege and move to orders of the day without a vote was unprecedented.

I should let you know, Madam Speaker, that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Victoria.

When I refer to privilege, I am referring to our ability to represent our constituents in the House of Commons. That is why this issue is so important. We are sent here by the voters in our constituency to represent them. It is our job to be their voice in this chamber. The Liberals decided to take an unprecedented action to end debate without a vote, to simply move to orders of the day when the House of Commons had before it a question of privilege, which is the most fundamental issue according to the existing rules.

Access to the Hill is a very important issue and the Speaker has made his ruling. However, the problem is the government unilaterally decided, as has been the style for several months now, to put an end to the debate, which sends the message that a member's privilege is not as important as the bill the Liberals want to move on to. That is a problem, and that is why this debate is so critical.

The Speaker has ruled that there has been a *prima facie* breach of privilege, which has become another question of privilege because the government wants to end the debate despite the Speaker's ruling. This behaviour is becoming unfortunately typical of the government, which is saying one thing and then doing another. In 2011, the Liberals ran on a commitment to make Parliament work better, to make this place more inclusive. Now that they are government they seem to have forgotten that promise and are quickly catching up to the previous government's record on the number of time allocation motions they have introduced.

I participate in the meetings at the procedure and House affairs committee, otherwise known as PROC, where we are discussing the government's efforts to change the rules by which the House is governed, which in fact would limit opposition MPs' ability to do their job, and that is to speak on behalf of the people who elected us. The government would be wise to listen to opposition MPs when discussing ways to modernize Parliament. This is the House of Commons, not the House of the Liberals.

Privilege

We are prepared to work with the government, but not until we have its word that it will not proceed unilaterally, that it will not turn its back on over 100 years of tradition that has existed in the House and that has been respected by all political parties. The Liberals do not seem to understand why we are not letting them ram through their changes. It is because we all are elected to this place. We are the voice of the people who put us here and we all should have a voice in this chamber. We must be allowed to ask questions so the House can produce the best possible decisions, make the best possible legislation to govern democratically for the people. The voices of the opposition MPs and the Liberal backbenchers need to be heard.

Once the Liberals understand that, then maybe we will move forward. That is why the government must commit to moving forward with consensus. As the member for Malpeque recently said, this is the House of Commons, not the House of cabinet.

In the last election, the Liberals ran on a platform of change. They promised to make Parliament work better, to do things differently. They declared that 2015 would be the last unfair election, but this year they broke that promise and betrayed every Canadian who voted to see change in our electoral system. They obtained 100% of the power with just 39% of the vote, and they seem happy to continue to operate in that manner.

• (1615)

The Liberals ran on a platform to stop the abusive use of omnibus bills, but now we have over an over 300-page omnibus bill that covers everything from increasing user fees on camping to changing the role of the parliamentary budget officer.

The Liberals promised to restore habitat protections in the Fisheries Act, which were gutted by the Conservatives in 2012. We are halfway through 2017 and we are still waiting.

It is not acceptable for the Liberals to allow major projects in my province of British Columbia like the Site C dam project, the Pacific NorthWest LNG, and the Kinder Morgan pipeline project to move forward when they promised a proper environmental review process, including adequate fish habitat protections, which still is not in place.

The Liberals promised to implement the recommendations of the Cohen Commission. Instead, they continue to drag their feet. They know the Fraser River sockeye salmon are integral to the economic, ecological, and cultural health of the province of British Columbia. They know full well that we cannot afford to further delay implementing these needed recommendations.

Funding for first nations education was a big election promise for the Liberals, but now they have cut their funding commitment and are still fighting fair treatment for first nations children in court.

The Liberals promised action on climate change, then adopted Stephen Harper's completely inadequate emissions reduction targets and have absolutely no plan to meet their Paris agreement commitments.

Like I said earlier, the Liberals say one thing and then they do another. However, what they do not seem to understand is that Canadians are getting frustrated. They are getting tired of being told one thing and then seeing the government break its promises.

My constituents bring up these issues with me all the time, including in the past two weeks when I was at home in my constituency meeting with them. They feel like the Liberals just are not listening. This recent action proves them right.

Here we are with this question of privilege taking up a lot of time in the House of Commons, but we cannot move on from this and let the government do whatever it wants. As others have pointed out, the problem is that precedent will be set. If the government wants to move on to do something else, like orders of the day, then its needs to assure members of the House and Canadians that it will not impose rules unilaterally. The Liberals need to agree that all members of the House have a voice, that all are entitled to represent their constituents to the best of their ability, that they will seek consensus and that is it. Only then can we move on.

This is extremely frustrating because it prevents us from moving forward. Let us be clear. The blame lies specifically with the government and not the opposition. The Liberals created this situation. They moved to shut down debate on the question of privilege. It is unprecedented and they know it.

• (1620)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned changing the way things are done, keeping with tradition and operating a majority government with 39.5% of the people who elected it. However, is that not part of the tradition of the House since its inception? The party that garners the most seats are the majority government. Would the member not agree that this is the choice of the people at the ballot box in every election that has been held prior to the last one, that whatever party gets the most seats forms a majority government? Whether it was 172, 180 or 184, it is the government that is in power. We have had governments elected as the government in a minority process.

The member keeps talking about going back to election promises that get broken with regard to preferential ballot to be used in the future, yet when we try to deliver on something that we promised, opposition members are against it because it does not suit them. Would the member tell us is it just because he opposes what does not help him or hurts him and wants to leave it at that?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, I just want to correct my hon. colleague. He mentioned 39.5% of the people. I think he knows full well that is not the case. It is 39.5% of the electorate, or those who voted, so it is an even smaller number of people.

I have no issues with the fact that the current government was elected under the current rules and represents a majority government. I have no qualms with that. What I do have issue with is that the Liberals are ruling that way without taking into consideration the opposition. That is the issue at stake here.

Privilege

Whether it is at the procedure and House affairs committee or in this place, the issue is one of working together on the rules. Whether it is a question of privilege or a question of operating within the House, we seek consensus. That has been the tradition. No matter whether a government has a majority or a minority, it seeks consensus within the House to move forward.

If the Liberals do not seek involvement and input from the opposition, they may find themselves back on this side. They will regret having made those changes to this place and they will operate under those rules when they get back here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech and his excellent interpretation of parliamentary privilege.

A member's privilege is to represent constituents and work very hard to champion their interests. I am aware of just how hard my hon. colleague works because I have replaced him on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs while he was working through the night to defend his constituents' interests. He is doing excellent work.

That is why, as he said, it is extremely important to ensure that any proposed change to the balance of power will actually improve how Parliament works, not merely serve the Liberals' interests.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Madam Speaker, I take very seriously our privilege. We represent those constituents from our ridings and we have a duty to represent them in the House. That is why I felt so passionate to attend the procedure and House affairs committee meetings when I heard the government was to move forward with this so-called discussion paper to make these changes.

I had mentioned earlier in a question about time allocation to simply to limit debate. For me, that is limiting the voice of my constituents, and I will fight tooth and nail to represent them every time I can in the House.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today on this important question of privilege. On March 22, two of my colleagues, the member for Milton and the member for Beauce, were blocked from accessing the House of Commons, allegedly by the Prime Minister's motorcade. As a result, they were unable to fulfill their principal role as parliamentarians, namely to represent their constituents in a vote in this place.

When the member for Milton raised this question of privilege in the House, the government made the decision to end debate and proceed immediately to orders of the day. The Speaker ruled this decision to be "unprecedented". The Speaker of the House ruled that no other government, Liberal or otherwise, had gone so far as to end debate in this fashion on a reasonable question of privilege.

The government's action on March 22 appeared to speak volumes about its level of disrespect for members of Parliament and the work we all do in this place. I say appeared to, because one wants to get this to the procedure and House affairs committee for the thorough review it merits in light of this unprecedented action.

Canadians need to know just what happened, how it happened, and how it can never happen again, because this goes to the heart of what we are doing in this place: representing our constituents as best we can. If we cannot get here, allegedly because the Prime Minister's motorcade blocks us from doing that work, I think every Canadian who may be watching this debate will understand why this is so vital.

Parliamentary privilege allows MPs to fulfill their most important role: representing their constituents by voting on business in this place. By shutting down debate the way it did, the government acted with blatant disregard for the way some members were treated in that they were prevented from doing the very thing that each of us in this place is elected to do.

The government's power to move to silence the members for Milton and Beauce demonstrates that to the government, apparently, MPs' privileges and the ability to do their job is less important than government business. I was struck by the government House leader's use of the word "efficiency" and words like "modernization" in describing what they are trying to do, euphemistically, in this fashion to change the very rules under which we operate in this place.

The underlying factor is the precedent these government actions set, whether it is refusing to allow a debate on a question of privilege or unilaterally pushing through changes to the Standing Orders, thereby changing the very process for establishing these rules. We have heard a number of times already how outrageous it is. There is a long-standing convention and tradition of securing party approval from opposition members of recognized parties before proceeding to overhaul the standing rules.

It is unusual, to use a neutral word. Many of us have spoken about how the government had the opportunity to do what Prime Minister Chrétien did when he was prime minister, and that is to allow a committee, chaired by you, Madam Speaker, or someone like you, and representatives of the recognized parties to roll up their sleeves and modernize, to use the House leader's favourite word, the way in which we do business in this place. I was so hopeful that this is what would have happened.

Today I had the opportunity to ask the government House leader a very specific question, which she answered, I think. I asked if she was going to proceed with ramming the cherry-picked parts of her so-called discussion paper through in a motion later this year over the opposition of all opposition members. I believe she said yes. I may be wrong. That is certainly how I heard her answer. In other words, it would break the tradition that goes back to 1867. Here we are celebrating 150 years of Confederation, and the government proposes to make sweeping changes to the way democracy works. Why? It is because the Liberals ran on that, as if that somehow gives them the right, in a fused parliamentary system like ours, to do that.

Privilege

•(1630)

I was taken by the eloquence of the speech this morning by my friend the member for Burnaby South, who reminded this House about how Charles I lost his head, literally, when the executive tried to make such changes to the parliamentary process. The Liberals seem to forget that although they had all of 39.5% of Canadian voters support them, they do not have powers that are dictatorial in nature. We have traditions to preserve in this place, and I know I speak for opposition members on this side of the House, both Conservative and NDP, when I say that we will not allow those traditions to be broken so easily.

It is quite shocking that the government said it is not going to let the opposition block it from doing what it ran on. We know how sacred the Liberal promises are. I do not know how many times the Prime Minister came to my riding and said that this would be the last election fought on the basis of first past the post. I have lost count of how many times that promise was made. I guess that was a different kind of promise. The Liberals said in the election, and it is right on the Liberal platform page, that they would restore home mail delivery. I guess that was another promise of a different kind than this promise that has to be kept.

The point is that this is not just another promise of that sort. If the government wants to spend money differently in a budget, it is the absolute right of the government to bring a budget bill and use its majority to change things. The point Canadians need to understand is that we do not change the rules of this place because the government claims it ran on that. That is not sufficient. Changing the rules of the House of Commons is not the same thing. The Liberals are but one party, literally, in this place, and that seems to have escaped them.

Canadians should understand how outrageous it would be if the government decided to say in a campaign that it was going to change the way our courts work. After all, that is another part of our democracy and the institutions that make Canada what it is. People would say that of course it cannot do that, because that is another institution it does not have the unilateral right to change. Similarly, it does not have the unilateral right to make sweeping changes, as it purports to do here. I am sure that we on the opposition will continue to remind Canadians of what it is purporting to do.

The Liberals have talked about their so-called modernization in what they initially termed a discussion paper, which is kind of soft and cuddly. They said, "We are going to discuss this with Canadians and have a little chat about how we change the rules." That changed pretty quickly over the weekend when, late last night, the government House leader called to say, "By the way, you know that discussion we were going to have? Actually, what we are going to do is ram through changes to the rules. We are going to choose a few that are maybe easier to ram through than others, but we are just going to go ahead, bring a motion in, and ram it through using our majority. Have a good day." That is not going to work for Canadians as they begin to understand the enormous arrogance that statement reflects.

As a matter of fact, one of the things the Liberals would do is take away the tool of filibustering, a tool that, admittedly, should be used very rarely and is used very rarely, but an essential tool nonetheless for parliamentarians in this place. They think that can and should be

done. They are also apparently going to use closure. I did not say time allocation, because I believe that under the rules, and members can confirm this, time allocation can be used on bills, but when they wish to limit debate on motions on privilege matters, that is done through closure. I presume that when they face this opposition united against them, they will choose to use closure to ram through their changes.

So much for a warm, friendly, accountable, and transparent government. We look forward to that with interest, when it chooses to do that, this overwhelmingly top-down, Prime Minister-controlled government.

To add irony to irony, the government has said that one of the things it wants to do is change omnibus bills. Let me stop here and say that sometime this week, we are about to begin debate on an omnibus bill the government is introducing, a budget bill. Why is it an omnibus bill? The government is saying that it is going to change it under these modernization processes.

•(1635)

It is an omnibus bill for a couple of reasons. The Judges Act would be amended. The veterans legislation would be changed. By the way, the artificial intelligence bill, which the Liberals introduced, and the veterans bill are both now part of this omnibus bill. Is that not by definition what we do when we add a bunch of things together? It is an omnibus bill, something the Liberals quite properly complained about under Mr. Harper.

It is time for Canadians to recognize what is going on. This opposition is united in fighting against these changes.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a type of issue on which at times we are going to agree to disagree. I believe that the motivation of this government, which is trying to advance modernizing Parliament, is ultimately for the good. I have been in opposition for over 20 years. I understand the discussion paper and what is being talked about. I am disappointed that the combined opposition has decided to make it as political as it has in regard to this issue. I do not say that lightly.

When I sat on PROC, I dealt with the Canada Elections Act, which the member would be very familiar with, and the process that led to the changing of the electoral laws. Maybe we can draw comparisons between what was done then in terms of bringing forward legislation and working with others in trying to look at modernizing Parliament. What is becoming clearer is that the opposition members, collectively, and they are united on this issue, do not want to see that modernization take place.

Does the member not believe that there are rules that would make this a better place? If he does, can he please tell this House what they are?

Privilege

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, for my hon. colleague across the way to suggest somehow that we are the ones making political this debate is really quite disturbing. It is the government's choice to bring in these unilateral changes and to force them through this place. We are simply responding to that reality. Do I think the rules of this place need to be modernized? Yes. Did I propose a way to the government to do that, along with my Conservative colleagues? Yes, and that was the way former Liberal governments under Mr. Chrétien did it.

I would love to speak about omnibus and prorogation, because the Liberals do not do anything but normalize those processes. They do not make them better. They just make them, to use the words of the government House leader, more efficient.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was elected for the first time this past election. The issue before us today matters to me because I think it is important for me to have the means to carry out my duties and responsibilities.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Victoria because every time I listen to him, I gain a deeper understanding of our institution.

When the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the riding I represent, ask me questions or share their comments with me, I often tell them that I am not here to represent only the people who voted for me. I am here to represent all of the people of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

When the government says it is here to do the things that people voted for it to do, does that mean the government is here for 39.5% of the voters? Does that mean the government is not here for all Canadians?

• (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, I had the pleasure of working closely with my colleague and friend from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on the medical aid in dying bill, and I know her to be a thoughtful colleague and very sincere with her questions in this place.

We are here to represent all those people who voted for us, irrespective of that voting record. We are here to represent everyone in our riding, and I believe every member of this House understands and does just that. However, the changes that would be made by one party, albeit the government, to the rules under which we all work for Canadians, need to be understood by all those voters as being unprecedented. Yes, there have been the odd times when changes have been made, as in the election of the Speaker, without this support, but for sweeping changes of this kind, the member's constituents and mine understand this to be what it is, a power grab by the Liberals.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, Ethics; the hon. member for Edmonton

Riverbend, Employment; the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I consider it a privilege to be standing in the House today to speak to this question of privilege that has been going on in this House for quite some time.

My comments will be somewhat technical later on, but first I will reflect on my 11-plus years here in this chamber as a member of Parliament and some of the things that I have witnessed, some of the things that I have observed, and some of my thoughts and expressions that I have on behalf of my constituents.

First, let me just say that we are very privileged to live in this country where we have inherited the Westminster parliamentary system from the United Kingdom. The history is rich and it is deep. The traditions that we have today have stood the test of time. It is no wonder that Canada is one of the most respected countries in the world. I know of nobody who legitimately flees Canada from persecution or other types of problems or political strife. People are free to come and go as they choose. If they choose to leave Canada, it is on their own accord, not because Canada has become intolerable toward them, that is, of course, if they follow the rule of law.

People from all over the world flock to Canada. They migrate here. People have fled Communist countries. They have fled persecution. They have fled poor economic conditions. Whatever the motivation might have been, they have come here seeking hope and opportunity for a better future. My wife is actually one of those people who have come here from another country, to get away from the persecution of the Soviet Communist regime.

Why do I say this? We have a great system. We have a great Parliament. We have rules of law. We have procedures. We have privileges as members of Parliament. When we stand to speak as members of Parliament, at least for myself, when I am defending my privileges, I am not defending me. It matters little that I, as an individual, occupy the office of member of Parliament. What matters is the office of member of Parliament is given the due respect that it represents. In my case, what does it represent? If my privileges are in any way hampered, denied, shunned, or taken away, they are not doing that to me. They are doing it to the 115,000 Albertans who I am privileged to represent. Every single member of Parliament in this House can lay the same claim, and rightfully so.

In that context, all of my comments will be made that way. I am not talking about me. It is not about me. It is about the role that I have, the role that I have been entrusted with, and the people who have entrusted me with it.

I have a couple of observations. In the number of years that I have been here, I have seen numerous cases where members of Parliament have got up on questions of privilege about being denied access to this place. Access to the House of Commons is a right and a privilege that is protected. As members of Parliament, we have unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. This is something that we must preserve and protect. This is actually the matter before the House today.

Privilege

I have personally been fettered or have been stopped or delayed in my access to the Hill. I have never made a complaint about it, and I have never launched a complaint about it. I have been stopped by RCMP officers who I know were diligently trying to do their job on the Hill on days when the lawn was busy and I needed to get across Wellington Street to get to a committee meeting. An RCMP officer actually put his hands on me. I simply said, "I'm a member of Parliament. I have unfettered access here. I need to get to my meeting", and the RCMP officer let me go. That is fine. That is the way it should be. It is not about me. It is about the fact that I needed to do my job on behalf of the 115,000 people I represent. That was okay. I do not mind explaining myself from time to time.

When I was first elected here back in January 2006, I had never been to Ottawa before. I am a country bumpkin from Lacombe. I just fell off the turnip truck and ended up here in Ottawa. One of the things they asked for in the package I received after I had won the election was a photo of me. I could not imagine why they wanted a photo. I assumed it was to put on a piece of identification, whatever the case might be.

• (1645)

My office was in the Justice Building, where it stays to this day. I remember walking into the Justice Building where House of Commons security guards at the time, wearing blue shirts and shoulder flashes, said hello and identified me by name. How did they know my name? They knew it because they made the effort to know who I was, not because I am important, but because of the role that I play as a member of Parliament. The office that I hold as a member of Parliament is important. They need to know who I am so that I can access all of the buildings and all of the venues that I need to access as part of my role as a member of Parliament.

I have also been gifted with a pin, which all of us in the House wear. Members of the Senate wear the same thing. I do not know if RCMP officers doing security on the Hill understand what this pin means when they see it. House of Commons security officials and Senate officials know what it means. If I am not wearing my pin and in spite of the fact that I have been here for 11 years, if I go through a Senate door half the time I get stopped. Now we have a combined service of House of Commons and Senate security.

I am not casting aspersions at all, but I do not think security guards from the House of Commons normally would know all of the senators and I do not know if security guards on the Senate side would necessarily know all members of Parliament. I would argue that they should, and not because they should know who I am, but they should know who every member of Parliament and every senator is so they can be protected as they go about doing their duties. Members also need to be assured that they can get to where they need to go, whether it is for a vote in the House or a vote in the Senate, or whether it is a committee meeting or otherwise. There should be no jurisdictional squabbling or jurisdictional what I would call arrogance between the two chambers when it comes to allowing access to members of the House of Commons or members of the Senate who have a duty to perform. This has frustrated me from time to time. I hope that something like this will get corrected over time as these two security agencies come together under one umbrella.

These are the privileges that we have. We have the right to unfettered access. We have to get here to vote, which is the most important thing that I can do on behalf of my constituents. My words may sometimes not matter, but my actions do. Voting is the most important action I have as a member of Parliament and to be denied the ability to get here in a timely fashion to vote is untenable.

Let us go back and take a look at what the mitigating factors may have been that precluded my colleagues, who others have named in this debate, from getting to the chamber on time. My understanding is that it was the Prime Minister's motorcade, so let us examine that.

In the almost 10 years that I was a member of Parliament on the governing side of the House while the Right Hon. Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister of Canada, I do not recall ever seeing the prime minister's motorcade at the front door, other than once after one of the late-night votes. It was probably after midnight. I do not remember the prime minister's motorcade picking up the prime minister at the front door. Under Stephen Harper, the prime minister's motorcade was always at the back where it would not obstruct anyone or anything and would be out of sight from anybody else. It was out of the way. This was the modest way in which Stephen Harper went about his business. He did not need to make a show or production by walking out the front door of Centre Block so that everybody could see him.

Mr. John Barlow: He didn't need a red carpet.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: He did not need any of those things, Madam Speaker. He did not need a red carpet, as my colleague from Foothills just pointed out. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that he did not want it even when he needed it. That is a different approach.

I would argue that the Prime Minister's motorcade does not need to be out front where after a vote, 337 other members of Parliament and ministers need to get on buses or scurry across the road to get to their next meeting or their next appointment. If I asked the question in the chamber today of the members who are currently present how many are double-booked at least once or twice a day in places they need to be, if they were honest with each other, most of them would raise their hands.

• (1650)

I am supposed to be at an event right now, but I am also on House duty and I have this speech. I am triple-booked. That is not an uncommon situation for members of Parliament to find themselves in. Therefore, why do we not ask ourselves why the Prime Minister's car needs to be in front and why it cannot go out the back, just like the previous prime minister did? Would that have resolved the problem? I do not know. Maybe it is a logistical issue. I do not know what I do not know because there is construction going on now at both ends of the building. There was construction as well on the east side of the building when Prime Minister Harper got his car ride home. Is that one of the solutions that we have? Maybe changing the way one or two people do their business around here might make it easier for others to do the same.

Privilege

Much has been said about the privileges that are under discussion right now at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and have spilled over into this debate. Members of Parliament, according to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, have the privilege of freedom of speech in this place. We must be vigilant and we must protect that. We must be able to say what has to be said when it needs to be said and we should not be denied access to this place to say it. We should not be under threat of intimidation, coercion, or any other type of threat inside this House or out for things that we say in this chamber. When we take away that freedom of speech and opportunities for members of Parliament to speak freely, we are doing a great disservice to our Parliament, to the foundation of our democracy.

I will go back to my opening comments when I talked about how valued Canadian ideals are around the world that people flock here from every corner of the earth. Any member of Parliament who has ever been to a citizenship ceremony will see that 50 people who are sworn in are from 48 different countries usually. That is the way it works here in Canada, and that is a great thing.

We have the privilege of free speech, but we do not have the privilege of free speech if we cannot get here, if we are stopped, if we are prevented, if we are detained in any way, shape, or form. I am not saying that gives members of Parliament the absolute right to do whatever they want whenever they want to get here, but every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of Parliament to get to the House of Commons to do their business.

Members of Parliament have freedom from arrest in civil actions. This is critical. We cannot do our jobs and be free from intimidation if we are constantly under arrest or being hassled through civil action. That does not mean we cannot be sued, if that is what is required if something wrong has happened, but we cannot be arrested in civil actions. Just imagine if launching a frivolous or vexatious civil action, which may result in the arrest of a member of Parliament, was all one had to do to keep a member of Parliament from getting to a vote.

Imagine a scenario in a minority Parliament where a couple of votes might be the difference between a government falling and an election being called or a government continuing, which is why there are the same provisions in the Criminal Code about vote buying and bribery. They are very important things. These are the freedoms that we have, not because the 338 of us who happen to be here right now are any more special than the other 35 million Canadians in this country, but the integrity of the office of a member of Parliament is what is at stake.

The exemption from jury duty makes sense. We should not be part of the judiciary, but we are part of the legislative process. An exemption from being subpoenaed to attend court as a witness is another way somebody, frivolously or vexatiously, could have his or her time usurped by others, preventing or keeping a member of Parliament from doing his or her duties in the House of Commons.

The most important one, the one that is under discussion today, is the freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation, and molestation. I am going to read this into the record right from our own website. It states:

Members of Parliament, by the nature of their office and the variety of work they are called upon to perform, come into contact with a wide range of individuals and groups. Members can, therefore, be subject to all manner of influences....

Further on it states:

Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House—

That is the important part:

—or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament. Any form of intimidation...of a person for or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

● (1655)

It goes on to talk about certain matters such as bribery, the acceptance of fees and corrupt electoral practices that are dealt with in other places in law and rightfully so. However, over the years, members have regularly brought to the attention of the House instances which they believe were attempts to obstruct, impede, interfere, intimidate, or molest them, their staffs or individuals who had some business with them or the House.

In a technical sense, such actions are considered to be contempt of the House and not breaches of privilege. Since these matters relate so closely to the right of the House to the services of its members, they are often considered to be breaches of privilege.

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its members free from intimidation, obstruction, and interference. Speaker Lamoureux stated in a 1973 ruling that he had no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege included the rights of a member to discharge his or her responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts of intimidation.

As Speaker Bosley noted in 1986:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

We have had rulings and these rulings have been consistently applied in the ruling we had today, which is why we have this debate.

In the ruling of another question of privilege, Speaker Bosley stated further that the threat or attempt at intimidation could not be “hypothetical”, but must be real or have occurred.

That is what we have in this case. It occurred. Two members of Parliament were detained in their opinion and in the opinion of the ruling of the Speaker of the House unreasonably detained. What are the consequences of that going to be outside of this debate?

Privilege

In order to find a prima facie breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding of Parliament, in this case the most important one, a vote, the opportunity for our actions to match our words and for us to cast a ballot or stand in our place and be counted yea or nay on behalf of the people who sent us here.

In some cases where a prima facie privilege has not been found, the rulings have focused on whether the parliamentary functions of the member were directly involved. While frequently noting that members raising such matters have legitimate grievances, Speakers have consistently concluded that members have not been prevented from carrying out their parliamentary duties from time to time.

These matters as we have laid out in our history, whether it is in O'Brien and Bosc now or in previous rulings by the Speaker, we have enough cases before us that Speakers can properly rule about these issues. It is very important. As members of Parliament, we have to protect and safeguard our rights and privileges. Thankfully we have had Speakers in the past who have helped in that, as in the examples I have just outlined, but we have to also remain vigilant for other assaults on our privileges.

In the last three Parliaments before this one, I do not ever recall an instance, let alone two separate instances, where there has been such disruption of the House of Commons and of committees based on proposed changes to the privileges that we as members of Parliament have. I will go back to Motion No. 6, around a year ago, when it was before this place. It would have taken away virtually every tool opposition members of Parliament would have had and every privilege that had been extended to them in our adversarial system of Parliament, which has been handed to us in the Westminster system. It is the foundation of our House. The Liberals wanted to change it unilaterally, taking away those privileges. We see it again now. It is the approach of a unilateral decision to make numerous changes to how this place works without consulting members of Parliament.

• (1700)

I would urge all my colleagues who are here today, on whatever side of the House they happen to be, to safeguard their rights and privileges, because every inch of ground they give up, they will never get back.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I assure the member across the way, when it comes to the Standing Orders and changing them, I take the matter in the utmost seriousness. I also respect the fact that the Prime Minister of Canada is trying in the best way possible to modernize Canadian Parliament. That is something I believe a majority of Canadians would want to see take place.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member spent 95% of his time related to the privilege and my question will be on that.

We should commend and compliment the incredible efforts that our current security people put in place. Whether it is our security forces in the gallery, at our doors, outside, or in the parliamentary precinct in general, they do an outstanding job. We try to assist them by wearing pins and, if possible, to provide an I.D. It is not as easy as

one thinks to memorize 338 faces with names and in different seasons, where toques are worn at one time, then baseball caps, no hats and so forth. They should be commended for the phenomenal job they do in protecting this parliamentary precinct.

Given the context and everything he has said, given that we have agreed from the beginning that this should be going to PROC and given that we support the subamendment, why would we not have PROC do what it has done in the past? When I was on PROC, a question of privilege would come up, a debate occurred and then it went to PROC. PROC deliberated and came back with recommendations. Why would we not do the same thing here?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: As I said, Madam Speaker, I understand my hon. colleague's question, but it is the approach. Had the Liberals actually approached members of the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the other parties in the House of Commons and said that they would like to engage us in a conversation about how we were going to change any of our Standing Orders, about how we were going to address any of the issues that I brought up in my speech, I would guess that conversation would have been met with a little less resistance than having a paper dropped under the threat or duress of getting the changes rammed through in a timely fashion.

I understand the Liberals have egg on their faces because they were unable to keep their electoral reform commitments. As my colleague from Peace River—Westlock pointed out in his speech, and I was giggling as I used to read *Calvin and Hobbes* all the time, changing the rules as we go along to make them suit our needs is no different than the cash for access fundraising rules that we are about to see now. The Liberals are changing the rules as they go along, not changing the behaviour to come into compliance with the rules, to make them suit their needs.

That the approach is all wrong and that is why the hon. member and his party are struggling to get anything done in this Parliament.

• (1705)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague really did stick to the issue of privilege we are debating today, but there is a link between the privilege debate and perhaps why the government did not want to move that to committee. I wonder if he could articulate for those who might be confused, because it truly is a bit of inside baseball, that this is a creation of the current government, the issue we are having right now, and why we are still debating this as opposed to more important issues.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I wish we were discussing matters that would have a broader effect on the constituents I represent. However, my privileges as a member of Parliament on their behalf are being hindered. My right as a member of Parliament serving in Her Majesty's loyal opposition is being hindered or altered without any input from me at all.

I have not been asked once by any member of the government or any member of Parliament from the governing party. I have not been approached in the hallway, in the committee room, or anywhere by any member of Parliament from the Liberal Party of Canada asking me what it would take for me and my party to come around to some sort of agreement. Not once has that conversation ever happened.

Privilege

What is at stake here is not just the question of privilege being debated today, but all the rights and privileges we have as members of Parliament. That extends well beyond the basic privileges of voting and being able to speak in the House. It is ensuring that we have the right checks and balances in place to ensure our democracy is sound and stable, and we have the best foundation. I tried to make this point in my speech. The foundation of our country is our democracy, and this is the basement. It is the foundation upon which the rest of our country sits.

We are discussing whether members of Parliament can actually get to the chamber on time for a vote. We are discussing whether an approach by the government of the day is that the government can come in and change the rules of the House of Commons to suit its needs. The Liberals might argue that is not what they are trying to do, but that sure is what it looks like to me because I have not been asked once, and I do have friends on the other side of the House. There are some good people. They talked to me, but they never brought this issue up once with me. I have to ask myself why.

When I trace all the lines back, this is simply a decree coming through the government House leader from the Prime Minister's Office. There are three or four people making the decision on how Parliament should work, and my guess is maybe one of them actually has a seat in this chamber.

If the member across the way who asked the question and my colleague from this side of the House wonders why people have their backs up, why there is a filibuster in the procedure and House affairs committee, why there is a filibuster going on right now as we discuss this question of privilege in the House of Commons, well, if one does things wrong, one is going to get the wrong reaction, and a different approach can be taken. It was supposed to be sunny ways. It does not feel sunny today at all.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, to address the issue of why the member perhaps feels a bit on the outside looking in on this whole idea of changes to the Standing Order, whether it is the government House leader or myself, on numerous occasions we have welcomed and encouraged members across the way to get engaged in the discussion. We spent an entire day last fall talking purely about the Standing Orders. PROC has dealt with a preliminary report, and then we had a discussion paper provided to PROC. A tremendous amount of dialogue has taken place.

It is up to the member, if he so chooses, to get into the discussion. If he chooses not to take me up on my invitation to meet with me, or the government House leader or others, that is up to the member across the way to make that determination. However, he should not try to give the impression that the government has not been doing its job in consulting and working as much as possible, where there is co-operation, in trying to modernize our Parliament, or at least to have that discussion about the rules. We have talked about it a lot.

The member said at the beginning of his speech that he had been here for 11 years. Compare what I just explained when Stephen Harper changed the election laws, another part of Canada's foundation. Why does he not draw the comparison? He should tell us exactly how Stephen Harper changed the election laws.

● (1710)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, the only thing I really recall being changed in the elections law was that people had to prove who they were before they could vote. I do not think that is a real mind-boggling concept for most people in Canada to understand. One should actually be a Canadian citizen, over 18 years old, and able to prove it to a returning officer. What a terrible concept.

Let us just change the rules of the House of Commons, making sure the prime minister is only accountable one particular day a week. Let us change the rules so the Liberals send the image to all Canadians that a four-day workweek is all we need. Let us just put that out there in a paper to the procedure and House affairs committee with the Liberal majority and ram it through. Let us change democracy and look victorious in the eyes of the glorious electorate that voted for the Liberal Party. There is so much resentment right now from the people who voted for this government, not only in Alberta but across the country, because the approach is 100% wrong. The priorities are often misguided and whenever the Liberals have a chance to make a good decision or a bad decision, the bad decision seems to win the day.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak about a question of privilege. It is unfortunate that we have to go through this process. However, we did have a motion brought forward by my colleague, the member for Perth—Wellington, regarding the free movement of members of Parliament in the parliamentary precinct.

I am sure that all members of this House understand what kind of honour it is to be here, to be a member of Parliament, and to be elected by the hard-working constituents we all represent in our respective ridings. This is something I think about often. I had the opportunity over the Easter break to be home in my constituency office, meeting with my friends and neighbours. I certainly never dreamed about being in politics. I never aspired to be a member of Parliament.

It was because of the incredible support and confidence shown by the residents of Foothills, my friends and family who supported me, those who have encouraged me, and those who have inspired me to do my work in this place each and every day. I understand what kind of a profound honour it is to represent the constituents of southwest Alberta and to have the confidence of constituents.

What being an MP means to me is that I show up for work every day. I work hard and I stand up for the interests of my constituents and my province. I always remember when I am here that it is the people of Foothills who sent me here, and it is the people of Foothills who will give me that chance once again in 2019.

My constituents of Foothills are smart, full of integrity, driven, principled, entrepreneurial, and hard-working. I am challenged each and every day by my constituents, their work ethic, and their deep love for our riding and our province. I am sent here by them to work hard for them.

Privilege

As I said, it is an honour to be here, but with that honour comes responsibility, a responsibility to represent those people who sent me here, whose time, energy, support, and exercising of their democratic right have allowed me to take a seat in this hallowed building. When I am here, in a seat in the House of Commons, I speak with their voice, the voice of Albertans: farmers, ranchers, small business owners, and families.

I cannot imagine the betrayal they would feel if I were blocked from having their voices heard, if I were blocked from having my right to represent them in this House.

Today I speak for those people whose voices were not heard when their members were denied the right to vote by being denied access to this precinct, by being denied their democratic right to vote on budget day. It was not my vote which was not counted. It was not my constituents who were not represented that day. However, I feel it is vitally important that, as members of Parliament we ensure that all Canadians are represented in this House. No member should be denied the ability to represent their electorate during a vote.

There is no greater privilege as a member of this House, and no greater duty and responsibility, than the duty and obligation to be in this House to cast a ballot on behalf of our constituents.

Our parliamentary privilege is our very ability as members to represent our constituents in this place. It is the essence of why we are here. Being denied that privilege is a blow to the keystone of our democracy, which is representing our constituents.

As my colleague from Chilliwack—Hope said a couple of weeks ago when he spoke on this issue, when the rights of one member are violated, the rights of all of us are violated. The Speaker ruled that there was indeed an unacceptable delay on the buses due to motorcades, security, and due to a media bus.

However, that provided little consolation to the two members who were forced to miss the vote on budget day. For nine minutes, members were held up by security and were unable to proceed here to fulfill their duty and privilege as parliamentarians to stand up on behalf of their constituents.

I have been a little appalled to hear some of the members of the government try to place the blame on the members of Beauce and of Milton for having their privileges violated. This is absolutely unacceptable. I am sure that if the tables were turned, if this were a member of the Liberal Party who was denied their right to vote on budget day, their reaction to this issue would be quite different. In fact, I am disappointed that the members opposite are not sharing our view on this issue.

● (1715)

I would have hoped that they would have the same reasons we have for being upset. I would have hoped that they would see that the rights of their colleagues are being denied and they would join us and stand up to vehemently protect the rights of a fellow member of Parliament. The fact is that our colleagues were prevented from doing their duty as elected members of this place who are entrusted to do so on behalf of their constituents. All of us have that duty to the constituents we are honoured and privileged to represent. This motion on a question of privilege calls for this matter to be studied by the procedure and House affairs committee. A further amendment

to the motion says that this should take priority over all matters currently before the committee, which is where MPs from all recognized parties discuss these rules, violations of these rules, and the rights of members of Parliament.

There are precedents for this to occur. There have been examples in the past. For example, in 2014, former MP Yvon Godin was denied access to the House of Commons. After bringing the issue before the House, the Speaker found that indeed there was a prima facie case. As a result, it went to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and proper measures were put in place so that security realized the importance of members making it to their seats. However, in this case, the government prevented this from going to the procedures and House affairs committee. It prevented us from having a vote to ensure that this went to committee.

It would seem almost unbelievable, but the fact is that the Liberals are taking away the rights and privileges of fellow members of Parliament. They are fighting against the rights of my colleagues from Milton and Beauce to be heard at the committee. They are denying us the right to vote to send this to committee and to make it a priority at committee. In my opinion, in doing so, they are clearly showing that they are not taking this matter seriously. In denying the rights of all members of Parliament to represent our constituents, the Liberals are demonstrating that these rights are not worth fighting for.

Why would the Liberal government turn its back on its colleagues? Do they Liberals think so little of the rights and privileges of members of Parliament? Unfortunately, the answer is yes. The Prime Minister thinks so little of the rights and privileges of members of Parliament that not only is he denying the rights of the members for Beauce and Milton, but he is aggressively trying to quash the rights of all members of Parliament and opposition members. In fact, the reason that the Liberals do not want this issue to go to the procedure and House affairs committee is because right now the committee has been taken up by a government trying to push through changes to the Standing Orders which would rob the opposition of the tools we need to do our jobs. Why would the Prime Minister concern himself with the privileges of just a couple of opposition MPs when he can ram through changes to the Standing Orders that would remove the privileges of all opposition members of Parliament? It is a sad statement when in Canada we have a Prime Minister who has such little respect for the rights of his colleagues and of all Canadians who have sent them here.

Privilege

The Liberals have recently brought forward a discussion paper to modernize the House of Commons, and apparently forcing through ideas on the entire House and its members is what we now call a discussion. With the changes that the original paper proposed, the Liberals wanted to take away our right to debate at committee; they want to cut off debate in the House of Commons pre-emptively. They want to invoke time allocation, which means that they would cut off debate even before it starts. If I remember correctly, when we were in government and I was on the majority side, as Mr. Harper used to like to say, the same Liberals decried and condemned time allocation, citing how undemocratic and evil it was. Now the government House leader has said that because the opposition has been slowing government business, it is necessary for them to invoke time allocation.

I am sure that I heard in the 2015 election campaign that the Liberals were going to do things differently. There was going to be a new sunny, fresh way to approach government. Thus far, the Liberal government has been anything but, from the heart out. I can see, looking across over the last several weeks and months, that even some of the Liberal backbenchers are disillusioned by what they have seen from their Liberal government. This is a top-down, heavy-handed government, and this is not what those members expected.

I am sure that is why you have lost three opposition bills. Is that not right?

• (1720)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member to address the Chair and not other members in the House.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, when they were elected in 2015, they were expecting this utopian approach to government. They would not heckle. They would sit there quietly and listen to our great debates. Obviously, that has long been forgotten.

I think that a lot of these members, the Liberal members, the backbenchers, were not anticipating having their own voices silenced, their own opinions disregarded, their votes whipped, and their rights repressed. Welcome to the Liberal style of government. Welcome to real change.

Now that they are in power, they want to strip the opposition of any ability we have to hold the government to account. They are still considering the shutdown of Parliament on Fridays and allowing the Prime Minister to be accountable to this place for just 45 minutes a week.

They can try to put whatever kind of spin they want on this. However, I was home in Alberta for two weeks and met with representatives from various energy companies, the agriculture sector, and we have more than 100,000 Albertans out of work. Many of them have been out of work for 18 months or longer, and I am going home and telling them that we are going to work a four-day week. The government should be burning the midnight oil trying to find a resolution to what has been hurting our energy sector in Alberta and across Canada.

However, instead of doing that, instead of working as hard as they possibly can, seven days a week, to try to help those who are out of

work, on Thursday afternoons, they want to call it a week and go home to their ridings.

When I ran for election in 2014, I did a bit of homework. I know, like any other job, that a member of Parliament works five days a week. I know many of us in this House, and I am not saying everybody, understand that there is no such thing as a five-day workweek. Many of us work seven days a week. I take Sundays off for family. I try my very best to keep Sundays free. That does not always happen, but we do our best.

I also knew that the House of Commons was in Ottawa and that I was going to have to be here maybe 150 days of the year. I heard earlier today from one of my colleagues across the way that it would be great on that extra day to be home and in their consistency when their residents want them there. I have 220 other days of the year that I am in my constituency working hard to represent them, but for the other 140 days, they expect me to be here in Ottawa, working hard to represent them—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I want to remind members that there is one person who has the floor. If they would like to have other conversations, then I would ask them to take it out of the House of Commons.

The hon. member for Foothills.

Mr. John Barlow: Madam Speaker, I hope that the Liberal members are paying very close attention. What they are trying to do also permanently curtails my voice, and the voice of others who are sitting here, with respect to the amount of time and the different mechanisms at our disposal to raise issues that our constituents bring to us, the issues they elected us to represent them on.

The Liberals are going to eliminate our ability to discuss committee reports. They are going to eliminate the ability of members of Parliament to move procedural motions and to do such things as adjourn debate or move that a member now be heard. As members of Parliament, we have many of these tools at our disposal to ensure that we hold the government to account, and the Liberals are trying to take those tools away.

That is what has been happening at the procedure and House affairs committee. The government has shown very little willingness to work with the opposition parties to come up with solutions that all of us can agree on. I hope the Liberal backbenchers are paying very close attention to what is occurring in the House right now, because sooner or later, though they might not like it, they will be in opposition, and when that time comes, they will have to reap what they sow. Right now they are robbing the opposition of all of the critical tools we have to do our job and hold the government to account. Whatever party is in government when the Liberals are relegated to the opposition and pounding on the desks about how unfair these Standing Orders are, it will be interesting to see if that government will be keen to change the rules back to their advantage.

Privilege

The opposition parties do not always have to agree. However, when we are talking about the fundamental rights of the opposition, the integrity of our parliamentary institutions, and the ability of MPs to do their job without impediment, when we come together to challenge the abuses being imposed on us by the government, that is when we should be coming together. We do not want to set a precedent of the government making unilateral changes to the way our democracy works to its own advantage. I think the government members can understand that this would be a problem, because they will not be in government forever.

The House does not belong to the executive branch. The House of Commons belongs to each and every member of Parliament, to every one of us as parliamentarians. We must be free to do our job without impediment, without intimidation, and without interference. We must be able to speak for our constituents. It is for us to decide how we govern ourselves in this place. We are not to be told how to govern ourselves by the executive branch.

The purpose of these rules is to protect the rights and voices of the minorities in this House. They are a crucial part of our democracy. They are not there to make this place more predictable and more convenient for the government and they are not there to give the government an audience. They are there to hold the government to account. When members are denied the right to vote, we do not expect the government to take action against members of Parliament by cutting off their right to debate. We expect the rights of the minority to be protected. That is what the House rules do. That is what we are doing here when we talk about privilege: we are protecting the rights of the minority, protecting the rights of each individual member of Parliament.

That is why, as government in the last Parliament, never once did we propose changing these rules without the consent of all of the other parties. That is why the only changes ever made by the Conservatives to the Standing Orders were made with the consent of all opposition parties.

Many of my colleagues have pointed out that Jean Chrétien, Stephen Harper, and Paul Martin, all previous prime ministers, sought the consensus of the opposition parties before making fundamental changes to the Standing Orders and how the House of Commons operates. However, the Liberal government is eager to make unilateral changes to the Standing Orders without allowing a meaningful voice to the opposition.

It was not without hard work and filibustering at the PROC committee for weeks that the Liberals have now removed some of the more controversial points in the discussion paper from their proposed reforms. However, this does not change the overall tone of the government, its blatant disregard for the privileges of all members of this place, and the important role the opposition has in holding the government to account.

We are now at the point where the government has sought to adjourn the debate on the question of privilege without a vote. We have arrived at this place, and this point of debate, because of the efforts of the Liberals to force through unilateral changes to the Standing Orders.

● (1725)

The Speaker quite wisely ruled that it was not appropriate for the debate to simply end at that point, and the possibility of a motion to discuss this was brought forward at committee. It does not replace the important decision on what is happening here. It needed to happen in the House of Commons. It needs to be followed by a vote in the House of Commons and to then go to the procedure and House affairs committee.

Never before in the history of this place has a matter of privilege been dealt with in this way. Never before has a government shut down and prevented all 338 members of the House from voting on a matter of privilege. Shutting down debate on a question of privilege and moving on to orders of the day is simply unprecedented. When members of Parliament are denied the right to vote on whether it was a violation of privilege, we see the arrogance of the Liberal government, and it is unprecedented.

My colleague from the New Democratic Party made an excellent point in his speech when he was explaining why the question of privilege is so important. He said, "Access to the Hill is a very important issue. However, the problem is the government unilaterally decided, as has been the style for several months now, to put an end to this debate, which sends the message that the members' privilege is not as important" and we have to move on to one bill or another.

The Liberals are fighting against the right of their own colleagues from Milton and Beauce to be heard at PROC. They are our colleagues, all of us together in the House. Are the rights of all members of Parliament to represent our constituents not something we all should be fighting for? If so, why will you not fight for it?

● (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I suspect that you would not grant me the amount of time it would take to address many of the points the member has put on the record and which I adamantly oppose in the strongest way. The member should be a little more transparent with regard to what is actually taking place here today.

This government is attempting to modernize Parliament. The opposition parties are playing their role. Having said that, members of the opposition have said that this is a matter of privilege. Virtually every member will stand up and say how important privilege is. The member across the way said himself that we should protect the rights of individuals, and I agree. I have always argued that, even when I was on the opposition bench and even today.

Opposition members have said that this is a filibuster. They have admitted that this a filibuster that is going on today on a matter of privilege.

If a matter of privilege is so important, as I believe it is, and if unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct is so very important, is it appropriate to filibuster on such an important issue?

Privilege

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, that is why we are doing this. The government is denying us the opportunity to fight for our privilege. You did not allow us to have that vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sure the hon. member is not talking about the Speaker. I will let him correct that.

Mr. John Barlow: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

My colleague has asked why we are taking time to discuss this issue. It is because it is a critical issue. The opportunity for me to represent my constituents is such an important part of what is done in the House. Two of our colleagues were blocked from exercising their right to vote on an important issue. They were blocked not only from their right to vote but from their right to represent their own constituents. The Liberal government thinks that is of so little consequence that it does not want to make it a priority at PROC.

What we are seeing right now is a Liberal government that has disrespect for the traditions and the culture of the House but also for our ability as members of Parliament to represent our constituents. That is why we are fighting as hard as we possibly can to make sure that Canadians understand what is happening here.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the comments by my colleague, especially as they relate to what is happening in Alberta right now, with horrific job losses and the challenges the whole province is facing. Albertans would dearly like the opportunity to work a five-day week now.

I would like my colleague to perhaps narrow in on that, because it relates to privilege and what is happening at PROC, which is why the government does not want this debate to go there.

The Liberals said a few months ago that it was family friendly, but now, because they realize it is not resounding with their constituents, they are calling it “a day in the constituency”.

Could my colleague talk about what the Liberals are doing, how they are doing it, and why the language change? All of a sudden, what was family friendly has become something different, but in my opinion, in the end, it is really just to benefit themselves.

• (1735)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is exactly right. When this family-friendly, four-day workweek was suggested, Liberals were expecting to be applauded, but what they got was a significant pushback from Canadians. I have constituents who would love to work a four-day workweek or a five-day workweek. They just want to work. That is what we are facing. How do we go back to our constituents, wherever they are in Canada, and say we are working pretty hard, but four days seems to be good enough? We are here working on behalf of taxpayers, and taxpayers expect some very good bang for their buck. They want us to be here, working hard.

I just cannot go home to Alberta, with 125,000 people out of work, and look at them with a straight face and say we are going to start four-day workweeks. I would not be able to look my constituents in the face, or myself in the mirror.

We are here 140 days of the year. I compare myself to those working in the oil sands. They go up north for a couple of weeks at a time and then they come home. They do not go up for four days and come home for a three-day weekend. They go for several weeks at a time and then come home. Why should we be treated any differently from typical Canadian workers who work five-day workweeks?

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, although I do not think this is one of the more substantive issues before us in terms of standing rules, it is important that we look at the parliamentary calendar from time to time. Every parliament around the world has different sitting times. Provincial legislatures meet far less than the federal Parliament. In my view, we work, at least in my case, seven days a week. Some of the time I am working here in Ottawa and sometimes it is in my constituency.

I do not view the suggestion that we go to four days as a good one, but my reasons are entirely different. If we have four days here in Parliament, even if it is the same number of hours, we will have the increased pressure to be flying to our ridings. That is a good thing to do for work, but it imposes real costs on the taxpayers who pay for all of the flights, and there are greenhouse gas costs. I would like to look at the carbon footprint and the costs of travel in looking at our workweek, so I favour a six-day week in Ottawa, with three or four weeks of committed time here and then three or four weeks in our ridings.

However, I do object if Liberals are suggesting four days here. I do not think they are suggesting that we have three days off to do nothing. We work wherever we are, seven days a week, and I would ask the hon. member if he does not agree with me that when we are in our ridings, we are also working.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I agree. I cannot speak for everyone, but I think most of us understand there is no such thing as a five-day workweek in this job.

A lot of it is perception. I think she would agree with me that if we tell Canadians that we are going to be working a four-day workweek here, the vast majority of them are not going to believe us when we say we are working in our constituencies. I work seven days a week a lot of the time. I know many of us in the House do, and I completely understand that. However, I am not going home to Alberta and telling my constituents that I am going to work a four-day workweek and that when I am in my constituency, I am also working every single day. Some get it; some do not.

Members made a commitment when they came here. When I ran in the election, I understood that I was going to be in Ottawa 145 days of the year and that when members are here, they are expected to work. That I knew coming into it. We still have 220 days in the rest of the year to be working with our constituents.

My colleague brought up a great point about looking at the calendar. Maybe that is an option, but that is something we should do together, as a whole, in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We should not have it imposed upon us by the Liberal government. If there are opportunities for us to rework the calendar, to be here for two weeks and home a week or to have other options, that is something we could discuss together, but it should not be imposed by one party on the other 300-and-some members.

• (1740)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am here most Fridays, if not virtually all Fridays, but I can say that less than half of the members quite often are here. We should not try to give Canadians the impression that for that half day, 338 members of Parliament are here. I would be happy if I saw 150. We have to be careful with regard to that issue.

It is also important for us to recognize the privilege issue that we are debating, which is unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. The government supports the subamendments. Getting to a vote is what everyone wants to happen. We all want this to go to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, but some Conservatives say they will filibuster. Why filibuster and prevent it from going to PROC?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, to the member's first point on Fridays, we are expected to be here on Fridays. Many of us are here on Fridays. Again, as I said, a lot of it is perception.

We understand in this House that not everybody is doing a 40-hour workweek. When we go home to our constituency, we know that a lot of us are working. However, I cannot speak for everybody. I do not intend to speak for everybody.

On the second part of the question, we want this to go to the procedure and House affairs committee. Our issue is that we want it to be a priority at the committee. The Liberal government is saying that it will not be a priority. It wants to continue to ram through these changes to the Standing Orders. That is what this is about.

We want to make sure that the privileges of individual members of Parliament are a top priority.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today in order to talk about a matter of vital importance to Canadians from coast to coast. I stand to talk with regard to parliamentary privilege.

The fact that I just said a conversation with regard to privilege is absolutely essential to Canadians is probably causing a lot of eye-rolling to those outside of this chamber, because why would we talk about privilege and say that it is vital? Privilege has a negative connotation that often goes with it, after all. The truth is that I do not blame those who might roll their eyes at this, but I would like to explain further why this is so important.

Typically the word “privilege” is bad. It means that some individuals have preferential access or freedoms that others do not have. For example, last week the Prime Minister revealed that his brother was let off the hook with regard to marijuana charges because of the connections of his father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. That is a negative privilege.

Privilege

I believe that most Canadians would agree that this is unacceptable. It is elitist at best, and fraudulent at worst. Another example of negative privilege is the fact that the Prime Minister took a free vacation on a private Caribbean island owned by a billionaire who lobbies the government for money from time to time. It seems rather provocative.

However, despite these negative instances where one's privilege has clearly been misused, there is also a very positive connotation that comes with the word “privilege”, particularly “parliamentary privilege”.

Members of Parliament are granted privileges, not in the sense of favouritism or elitism, but because of the responsibility that we carry. There are certain privileges or responsibilities that we are granted. For me, it is to represent the 115,000 people who live in my Lethbridge riding. When I use the term “privilege”, I am talking about parliamentary rules and traditions that protect democracy and empower us as members of Parliament to do to the job we were elected to do, and to do it faithfully, fairly, and justly. Parliamentary privilege has less to do with me and far more, in fact everything, to do with the Canadian public.

Today's debate was initiated because one of my colleagues who was on her way to vote in this chamber a number of weeks ago—and, of course, to vote in this chamber is her parliamentary privilege—was stopped by the Prime Minister's security detail and blocked from being able to enter the House.

Members know that this is absolute nonsense. It is a member's privilege to move and to speak freely in this place. It is not only her right, but it is actually her obligation. It is the very thing that her constituents sent her here to do. As voting is one of the primary ways that we represent our constituents back home, it is of vital importance that we have access to this chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you agree, because you found enough merit within our claims to permit the motion that is before us today to allow debate. Shamefully, the government's initial response to the Speaker's ruling was to move unprecedented closure in order to shut down said debate. The Liberals did not want to hear that a mistake was made and that parliamentary privilege was breached.

The Speaker has never had to rule on such an issue before, because never has such dictatorial action been taken by the party in power. There is admiration for China's dictatorship, and then there is outright implementation. In this, we have witnessed the Liberals do just that.

Privilege

Right now, as I speak in this House, colleagues of mine are filibustering the Liberals' outrageous plan to so-called "modernize" the House of Commons. What is meant by that is threefold. The Liberals would like to stop sitting in the House of Commons on Fridays. They would like to move us to a four-day workweek. The second thing they want to do is have the Prime Minister, who is already absent about 66% of the time, be further absent, by only coming in for one hour a week to discuss the issues that are in front of this nation. The third thing that I will bring up is that the Liberals would like to shut down the opportunity for free-flow debates. Instead, they would like to put time restrictions in place that would forcefully shut down discussion with regard to the issues that face Canadians.

• (1745)

My colleagues and I are committed to standing up and speaking out against this incredibly dictatorial action of the Liberal government, and we are not the only ones. We have as our allies the New Democrats, the Green Party, the Bloc Québécois, and many of the independents within this place as well.

We have been filibustering late into the night for weeks now. One of my colleagues, the member for Calgary Shepard, spoke for 10 hours straight. Why are we so dedicated to the cause? We are taking this action, not because we are excited to forfeit sleep, or to put up with messy hair, or to disgrace ourselves with bad breath and unbrushed teeth, but actually we are committed to filibustering the Liberals' obnoxious plan to shut down the voice of the official opposition in this place and the opposition as a whole because we believe that Canada's democracy must be defended.

We are taking a stand for Canadians, everyday Canadians, for moms, dads, brothers, sisters, labourers, business owners, farmers, scientists, teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, and students. We are in this place debating today because we are taking a stand for Canadians from coast to coast.

Without a strong opposition in place to hold the government to account, Canada's system of governance fails its people. The House of Commons, after all, is the people's House. All parties have talked a great deal about how we can best make this House reflective of all Canadians, but what the Liberals appear to be blind to today is the fact that the majority of Canadians did not actually vote for them. In the last election, 60% of Canadians did not check "Liberal" on their ballots. For this House to truly reflect Canada, it must allow the views of the majority of the people in this country, those who did not vote for the Liberals, to have a voice. The way we accomplish that is by allowing the opposition members within this place to have a voice.

Our Westminster form of democracy, which has proven to be the longest standing and most robust in the world's history, was built to resist the tyrannical whims of the head of government. Whether it is our current Prime Minister with his admiration for China, or the merciless kings that once existed, this chamber was designed from its inception to ensure that members of Parliament who represent the people are given the ability to fearlessly debate in the interest of Canadians, regardless of how inconvenient or threatening it might be to the agenda of the government in the present day. This is our

democracy. This is what men and women of the past have fought and died for. We are committed to protecting that today.

This House belongs to Canadians, not to the Liberal elite. The fact that the Liberals are trying to make changes that will squash the voice of the opposition and protect the Prime Minister from having to stand in this place and give account for the actions of his government is absolutely ludicrous. The actions of the Liberal government are not against me. They are against the people of this country. They are against Canadians.

The Liberals like to talk about respecting science and evidence-based policy-making; however, their actions tell me a very different story. As any grade 3 student might tell us, the scientific method involves creating a hypothesis and then testing it, and as anyone familiar with the scientific method knows, testing the facts to ensure the hypothesis is correct requires a great deal of debate.

Scientists rigorously dispute one another's findings in order to finally realize or come to the concrete truth. This is why we attach greater weight to peer-reviewed studies than we do to one-offs or independent research. If an idea represents the best approach, it should clearly be defensible in public and should easily stand up to criticism and debate. This is why it is curious, given the Liberals' self-stated love for science, they appear entirely consumed with removing debate and opposition from this place.

The Prime Minister only wants to show up for work in the House of Commons for one hour, one day a week. The Liberals want Fridays off. They believe that a four-day workweek is more than enough. Above all, the Liberals want to remove the opposition's ability to test any of the Liberals' policy ideas through debate and questioning.

• (1750)

By their actions, it is clear that the Liberals who govern this country are worried that their ideas will not hold up to public scrutiny. Given the number of policy reversals, ministerial apologies, as with the many we saw today, and political scandals, as we are also witnessing in the news today, the government certainly does have reason to shut down debate. Liberals do not want us to ask them the tough questions. They do not want to be held accountable for their actions.

Democracy is meant to be an adversarial system. In fact, the Liberals paid lip service to this very fact in their government report calling for the changes we are debating here today. There is reason that the opposition is two-and-a-half sword lengths from the government benches. The testing of ideas and moral character is meant to balance the significant power possessed by the government of the day, which means that it gets a little heated in here sometimes.

The ability of the opposition to test the government's agenda and its motive is what is at stake in the debate we are having today, particularly with the amendments to the motion before us. Because the people of Canada have the final say as to who they choose to lead them, the people are best served by having all of the facts at their disposal, and that is the opposition's responsibility.

Privilege

A muzzled opposition does not serve Canadians well, or the interests of democracy, or the future of our country. Despite the Trudeau family's obsession with China and Cuba, and any other number of dictatorial socialist states, Canadians have firmly rejected this way of government. Canadians are not interested in a government that sacrifices the ability of the opposition to hold the government members to account and to make them answer for the legislation they are trying to push through at a fast pace without reasonable discussion.

Interestingly, it was the Liberals who ran on an election promise to protect the rights of parliamentarians. They want to protect the rights of parliamentarians by stripping the very privileges that belong to us as the opposition in the House. Unfortunately, we see that this promise is clearly being broken. It is another one to add to the list.

Time and time again, the Liberals have attempted to undermine the House, and thus they undermine the people of Canada. Allow me to illustrate with a few examples how the Liberals attempt to limit my participation in the House would impact my constituents, those who are in Lethbridge. I represent a region within southern Alberta. Our primary industries are agriculture and the retail and public sector services that come with being a regional hub. We have a large university and a community college. Both are located directly in my riding.

If the Liberals are successful in getting their way, this is what is at stake. Their shutdown of my voice would mean that I would lose my ability to fight in this chamber against the changes that the government made with regard to mortgage rules. These are changes that have denied many young people within my riding and others who have aspired to own a home for the first time in their lives, who have saved and saved. They are now stripped of the ability to buy that first home. The Liberals will shut down my voice and prevent me from being able to speak out on behalf of these individuals.

Furthermore, I will lose my ability to fight in this chamber for a generation of young Canadians who are going to be saddled with hundreds of thousands of dollars of federal debt because of the reckless spending of the current government. Students who I talk to from coast to coast to coast are scared of what their future looks like. When they talk about their future, they are not talking about 30 or 40 years from now. They are talking about after graduation and wanting to find a job to be able to pay off their student debt, to pay their rent, and to put fuel in their cars. They are talking about the necessities of life, and because of the government, they are going to have a very hard time making ends meet.

• (1755)

Not only that, in the near future their taxes will go up, government services they rely on, such as health care, will be pulled back, and job creators will lose confidence in our market, as many of them already have. They will pull out investments and they will cut back the number of jobs available.

What is more, if the Liberals are successful in ramming through their changes to the Standing Orders, I will lose my ability to effectively stand on behalf of the agricultural producers in my riding. These are the very individuals who help stabilize the economy within the Lethbridge region.

The United States is our greatest competition when it comes to agricultural exports. Feedlots are closing up shop all across Alberta right now. That hugely impacts my area. The carbon tax is making it extremely difficult for them to run an effective business. Combine that with the Liberal imposed ban on the most commonly used pesticide and the Liberal imposed increase to payroll taxes, the farmers are feeling as if they have just been kicked in the gut.

Furthermore, I will lose the ability to fight the Liberals' ending of tax deferral for grain farmers, who will then lose the ability to plan for the next season in order to recover from the bad crop because of the changes that have been imposed.

I will also lose the ability to fight for real solutions to the opioid crisis, which is significant in my region, and includes many people in Lethbridge, their lives, their families, their future.

I will lose the ability to speak to legislation. I will lose the ability to question the Prime Minister, aside from one hour per week, and I will lose the ability to question anyone in government on Fridays.

All in all, the Liberals are threatening to make me nothing more than an ineffective spectator. By doing so, the Liberals are robbing my constituents of their rights to be represented in this place.

The Liberals would like to turn the House into an aristocracy, a place where the Liberal elite represent the Liberal elite. However, my colleagues and I are very committed to representing constituents from coast to coast to coast, ensuring that the voices of Canadians are accurately heard in this place. This debate is about defending those people. They elected us to gather in this place and to make decisions that would benefit their welfare.

To ensure the rights of Canadians are upheld, we must ensure that members of Parliament are protected from the bullying tactics of the government of this present day. A member of the House was denied the ability to represent her constituents at a vote because the Prime Minister felt he was more important than her. That member and her constituents are unlikely to see any justice for this breach. The Liberals are likely to use their majority of seats in the House to defeat the motion.

However, suppose it does pass. It will then be referred to a committee that the Liberals have paralyzed, through their attempts to fundamentally alter the ability of the opposition to do its job. The Liberals are making every attempt they possibly can to silence us, those who are on the side of opposition. They claim they are modernizing Parliament, but since when does modernizing look like a return to an aristocracy.

In the report put forward by the government House leader, the member for Waterloo states:

As society changes, the demands of our institutions change as well. Parliament must adapt to a changing and evolving political landscape and should respond to demands of greater accountability, transparency and relevance.

Since when is greater accountability, transparency, and relevance created or achieved by shutting down debate?

Privilege

This is nothing more than a Liberal power grab. It is a disdainful motion to shut down the voice of every Canadian who did not vote Liberal in the last election. The debate before us today is not about members of Parliament; it is about the Canadian people. A muzzled opposition does not serve Canadians, or the interest of democracy or the future of our country in any way whatsoever.

It is my hope the Liberals will take seriously the things that have been said here today, and throughout the weeks preceding, and they will change their minds with respect to being dictatorial in nature and shutting debate in this place.

● (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member across the way will not be surprised that I disagree with many of the comments. There are lots of reasons for individuals who would be listening to the debate to understand what we are talking about is a privilege issue of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct, which I would argue every member of Parliament believes is of the utmost importance. In fact, the government of the day has been talking of its utmost importance by saying it should go PROC. We have been encouraging for it to go to PROC. I have stood in my place and said that we are voting in favour of the amendment.

Let me read the actual amendment. This is what we will be voting on. At times I wonder whether the members across the way understand what we are voting on. It reads:

and that the Committee make this matter a priority over all other business including its review of the Standing Orders and Procedure of the House and its Committees.

We have heard Conservatives admit that they are actually filibustering a matter of privilege. The member across the way explained why they were filibustering in the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs, but she did not explain why they are filibustering the matter of privilege, which is all about unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct.

She should put the Conservative speaking notes to the side and explain why the Conservative Party has decided to not allow this important vote to take place so that it can go to the procedure and House affairs committee. That is something all members ultimately want to see happen. Could she explain the filibuster? Those are not my words; those are words that members of her own caucus have said on the record.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, counter to his request, I am totally going to use my speaking notes. In fact, all 30 pages of them.

Here is the deal. We are in the House debating today because we have a voice. As opposition we have a voice. Our voice should be heard in this place on behalf of Canadians from coast to coast, because their voices need to be heard. When we allow the Liberals to shut down debate, they are actually silencing the voices of Canadians. They are not only silencing the voices of Canadians today, but they are actually showing disrespect for our past and what has been brought forward with regard to democracy, as well as for our future and where we are going, and the fact that we need to protect democracy.

NOTICE OF CLOSURE MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice that with respect to the consideration of the question of privilege currently before the House, at the next sitting a minister of the crown shall move, pursuant to Standing Order 57, that the debate be not further adjourned.

● (1805)

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. colleague from Lethbridge was not here in the 41st Parliament. Regarding the language of dictatorship and association with the People's Republic of China with this government, and as much as I object to the current Liberal government deciding to put forward changes to the Standing Orders that are not achieved by consensus, I wonder if the hon. member is familiar with the following facts. Stephen Harper brought forward a Canada-China investment treaty that binds Canada until the year 2045. It was never allowed to go to the parliamentary committee on trade, was passed by Privy Council in a secret cabinet meeting, and allows state-owned enterprises of the People's Republic of China to bring multi-billion-dollar arbitration cases against Canada in secret.

I wonder if she might want to reconsider the position of someone in a glass house when there are abundant stones.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, it would be like the Liberals to clap for something that is totally irrelevant to the discussion that is before us today.

That is really all I need to say. The question is irrelevant, so I am actually not going to answer it.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Speaker, I hate to interject here but I would like clarification on the notice that the government House leader presented. I believe she said that the debate would be not further adjourned. Is that correct?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Yes. It is clarified? Very good.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I hope you can shed light on this. I do not believe it is the option of a member of Parliament to pass judgment on the relevance of a question. It was directly relevant to points made by the member for Lethbridge. She raised the People's Republic of China. She called the current government a dictatorship. She claimed that the previous government under Stephen Harper was not one. I pointed out that the reality of the fact is somewhat to the contrary. She raised all those points. How does she rule on relevance?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid I will have to classify that as debate and not necessarily a point of order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Privilege

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Lethbridge brought up some important points during her speech on the need to be heard in the opposition. I notice that the executive branch has managed to shut down all of its backbench already, because all we have heard from today is the House leader. None of the backbenchers are actually standing up for their privilege and their right to be heard. That is an internal matter for the Liberal Party.

I want my colleague from Lethbridge to reaffirm, even though the backbenchers will not have anything to do with this debate and are willing to let their privileges be eroded, why it is important for us as opposition members.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go to the hon. member for Lethbridge, I notice that there is some bantering back and forth on both sides. It is very friendly bantering, and I encourage people to cross the floor and talk to each other, but very quietly.

The hon. member for Lethbridge.

Ms. Rachael Harder: It is two and a half sword lengths, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. member's question is with regard to the backbenchers on the government side and the fact that very few of them have actually participated in this debate. It seems to be only the parliamentary secretary to the House leader who is responding to us. That actually concerns me, because I wonder why the Liberals do not have a voice in this. Why do they not stand in this place and participate in this discussion? It was just acknowledged that it is, in fact, an important discussion, that it is, in fact, an important question of privilege before us. We would think that all members would want to participate in that conversation, that they would want to speak on behalf of their constituents, and that they would want to accurately represent them in this place. After all, that is why we were elected to be in the House of Commons. It is to represent the common people of Canada.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there have been many Liberals who have had the opportunity to engage on this issue, but there is a sense from the Conservative Party we are into a filibuster. I asked the member across the way why the opposition, according to some of its own members, made the decision to filibuster the issue of privilege, the privilege being unfettered access, when everyone agrees to it.

We allow it to come to a vote, it goes to where everyone wants it to go to, the procedure and House affairs committee, and the Conservatives continue to want to filibuster.

The member explained her filibuster in PROC, but she still has not explained why the members are intentionally filibustering on the important issue of privilege here on the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1810)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, I believe I answered this question. I made reference to the fact that yes, filibustering is taking place at PROC, which is a committee, with regard to the procedures of this House. Of course, the filibustering taking place there is because there are actions being taken by the Liberals, who are trying

to impose a squashing of our voices as the opposition in this House. That is why we are filibustering there.

In terms of what is going on here in this place, we are actually enjoying an open discussion or debate, which, contrary to what the Liberals might understand, means that we go back and forth. Preferably, more than one member on your side would speak. That is really what we would prefer.

We go back and forth, and it means that we exchange ideas. It means that sometimes we are going to agree, but most of the time we are going to disagree, because that is our job. That is our responsibility. We were elected to this place to represent Canadians. Not all Canadians think alike, so there is going to be a variety of perspectives within this House. That is the House of Commons. That is the way it is supposed to be, and we are going to do all we can to prevent the Liberals from shutting that down.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go back to debate, I want to say to the hon. member for Lethbridge that when she said “your side”, I looked behind me and did not see anyone there. I am sure she meant the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the question of privilege currently before the House, and perhaps most importantly the ability of members of Parliament to properly and effectively represent their constituents.

I have learned a lot since coming to Ottawa after being elected by the people of Hamilton Mountain. Much of this has been good and exciting. However, some of it has not been so good, and at times disheartening. One of the things that has not been so good is learning that Liberal promises made during an election are not worth the paper they are printed on. It turns out that the real definition of “sunny ways” is to not keep one's promises if one does not have to. Actually, sometimes I think sunny ways is a code or a signal to the Prime Minister's team to forget what was said during the election, because now it has a majority and it does not have to care about what it said.

I will speak more about broken promises later, but now I want to speak about one of the other things I have learned since getting elected, and that is the importance of members of Parliament being able to speak on behalf of, and to truly represent, their constituents. After all, that is the reason we are here. That right, that privilege, is what we are talking about today. It seems to me that, for the most part, the rules of this place put that above all else.

However, what I have learned is that there are many in this House who are willing to use process, who are willing to play games with the rules in order to hamper the ability of members to effectively represent the people who sent them here. This takes away the ability of all members to work together to bring about change that could be meaningful and make a difference in the lives of their constituents and all Canadians. People did not send us here to play games. When I get away from this Ottawa bubble and go home to talk to the people of Hamilton, they do not care about procedural manoeuvring, game playing, and who outdid who at committee. They care about what meaningful work we are doing to make their lives a bit better.

Privilege

One prime example of this gamesmanship happened at committee with the government's legislation to change the Canada pension plan. During the committee process, we discovered a major flaw with the legislation that would negatively affect women and those people living with disabilities. The minister agreed that it was a problem, as did many members in this House on both sides. All the members at committee recognized the problem and agreed it should be fixed. I worked with legislative staff to develop the wording required to fix the problem in the bill and presented a number of amendments at committee. These amendments would have solved the problem, and millions of Canadians would be spared significant hardship. It seemed like an easy and routine matter.

However, the problem did not get fixed. Instead, some minister's office became involved. What followed was a whole series of procedural manoeuvres and game playing, which resulted in the amendments being ruled out of order on a questionable technicality. Then we watched the government members close down any further debate by calling for adjournment. It was a shameful display of arrogance that I found shocking and disheartening.

That brings me back to the present question of privilege before the House. It is my understanding that this matter had to be brought back to the floor a second time, because the government shut down debate when it was first brought up in the House. The question before us is important, namely the right of a member of Parliament to access the chamber in order to vote. That is a fundamental right and a responsibility of each member of Parliament. However, what is important in this discussion of the government's decision to shut down debate on a question of privilege, which happened in this House on April 6, is when the matter was superseded by the adoption of a motion to proceed to orders of the day. Apparently, this had never happened before. In the long history of debate in this House of Commons, this was unprecedented.

The ability of members of Parliament to represent their constituents in this chamber and at committee is the most important fundamental right of all of us who sit in this House. On April 6, the Liberal government tried to change that. This question is not just a debate about a member's access to the Hill or the House, it is also a question about a majority government's decision to take away the rights of members of Parliament and their constituents, simply so it can push through its own agenda. .

•(1815)

This is from a party that promised during the election to make government more open, accessible, and accountable to the people. This is from a party that promised to end the practices of a previous government that prevented the meaningful participation of members of Parliament. This is from a party that promised to restore the integrity of the institution and the ability of members to represent their constituents.

As with many of the Liberal election promises, we got something totally different, but I guess we should not be surprised about another broken promise from the government. I do not have time here to address all of them, but the promise it made to 20,000 pensioners and former Stelco employees is a good example. When the current Prime Minister visited Hamilton during the last election, he said

income insecurity for retirees across Canada “is extremely concerning to us.”

He also said, on the U.S. Steel mess:

Unfortunately, we have a government that, over the past years seems to have made decisions around foreign investment based on case-by-case, back-of-the-napkin political concerns rather than what truly is in the best interest of Canadians.

That is what the Prime Minister said.

His candidates at the same event detailed the Liberal position:

A Liberal government will use all legal tools at its disposal to ensure that U.S. Steel lives up to all of its obligations, whether that be full pension rights/benefits or providing the employment in Hamilton that it promised to do.

That was according to Flamborough-Glanbrook Liberal candidate Jennifer Stebbing.

The candidate and present member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is quoted that day as saying that the Conservative record on standing up for Canadian workers is abysmal. He said the Conservative government's lack of action to protect pensioners in the Statutory Review of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act was completely unacceptable, and yet another example of ignoring the concerns of Canadian pensioners. He said that “unlike the Harper Conservatives, Liberals believe in the principle that employers must honour the commitments made to retirees and that pensioners must be included in any consultation and planning process to make changes to their existing plans. We have a collective legacy of valuing the long-term pension security of Canadians, a belief upheld in both word and deed.”

After the election the Liberal government has done nothing with the mess of U.S. Steel and Stelco, or for the workers and pensioners who are facing hardship as a result. In a year and a half, it has said and done nothing. This also includes Essar up in Sault Ste. Marie. Nothing has been done to help those people, who going through the same hardships as the people in Hamilton.

Talk about a government with an abysmal record. It should take a good look at itself. This is just another broken promise from a government with a long list of broken promises. We should not be surprised that the government is trying to unilaterally ram through changes to how the House of Commons works instead of working with all members to develop a consensus on those changes, and I just want to highlight some of the things that were addressed in the House today.

We talked about how Liberals want to put time allocation in now, something that the present government was so critical of the previous government for doing. The Liberals said at election time that they were going to fix this. Now, today, they are saying that they are going to change their promise and are going to use time allocation even more. That is another broken promise.

Electoral reform is another broken promise. When will the Liberals live up to something they agreed to, something they said to Canadians? I know that in Hamilton people are expressing frustration. They basically want me to use some kind of steelworker language in here to tell Liberals where to go. I know I cannot do that, so fuddle duddle.

Privilege

One of the things I was really shocked about today is that the government House leader is warning in her letter that “without those reforms the government will be forced instead to impose time allocation to limit debate and get legislation passed.” She said:

Canadians elected us to deliver an ambitious agenda, so it is with regret, but full transparency, that I want to inform you that, under the circumstances, the government will need to use time allocation more often in order to implement the real change we promised.

It should say “to implement the promises that we are changing now”, not the change they promised, because all the promises the Liberals made are being reneged on.

• (1820)

Another point mentioned, and I do not know why this was even a proposal put forward on the reforms, was having the Prime Minister answer all questions in one question period each week. That is unbelievable. That can happen now. The Liberals do not need our permission. They do not need anybody's permission. They can just do it. However, I want to give them a piece of advice. We have witnessed it twice now and they may want to take a good look at what the Prime Minister has been saying on TV. It would maybe educate them a bit and update them on the issues.

The Liberals should be embarrassed. What they have done is absolutely phenomenal. Today in the House, when the Prime Minister was answering questions, several of the questions were on the Minister of National Defence. It was a very important issue. The Prime Minister gave a short answer that basically said nothing, and he repeated himself seven or eight times. I suggest the Liberals should get a new CD or record that does not skip over and over again. There has to be some type of logic in the answers, not just the Prime Minister thinking that whatever he says people will believe.

I am getting quite frustrated because the Liberal government has done so much renegeing. The Liberals say that there is so much they want to do, that they are ambitious, that they want to fulfill their promises, and they say how they want to do it. So far, they have failed on Canada Post, the steel industry, softwood lumber, electoral reform, pay equity. The list goes on.

As I said, we should not be surprised that the government trying to unilaterally ram through changes to how the House of Commons works instead of working with all members to develop a consensus on those changes. It is consistent with how it has operated for the last year and a half. It is, however, disappointing to many members and Canadians, especially after the Liberal election promise to make positive changes to how the House of Commons functioned and to do it in a way that would benefit all members and all Canadians. It seems the only changes the Liberals want to make are the ones that benefit themselves. So much for the sunny ways.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening off and on to the discussions today in the supposed debate that is occurring in the House around parliamentary privilege and the right to access Parliament Hill. Everybody on this side is in full agreement with the member. From a parliamentary privilege standpoint and right to access, the Liberals agree. However, all members across the way wish to talk about is the filibuster occurring in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Liberals are in agreement as far as parliamentary privilege is concerned. Maybe the member could go back to his caucus and discuss putting an end to this filibuster so we can actually get to the important work Canadians elected us to do.

• (1825)

Mr. Scott Duvall: Mr. Speaker, I have been here all day, not off and on.

In the member's terms, he thinks we are filibustering here today. I know it is being done in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, but today we have been discussing the question of privilege. The NDP feels that what was being done at PROC was not warranted.

Some new information was dumped on us this morning that Liberals were going to backtrack now. Unfortunately, this was on the news yesterday. That is the disrespect we on this side of the House get. We got it this morning. Then the member asks why we are debating this. We do not know what is in the information. We have not read it. We do not even know what the Liberals are asking for. We got it through the newspapers. That is my answer.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about time allocation. I would like to know what the member has to say about the comments made by the member for Winnipeg North. On December 3, 2013, he said, “To say that time allocation is about scheduling is so far from reality that it is totally amazing that he would even stand in his place...” He said, “It is an assault on democracy, and it is as simple as that.”

Would the member agree that what the Liberal Party is imposing on the House is an assault on democracy?

Mr. Scott Duvall: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with what the member has said. It is a case against our democracy, but the Liberals have a short memory span. When it serves what they want, they will say anything, but they do not remember what they said before. That is the problem. They will use great phrases, great statements, make it all sound very good and tell Canadians what a great job they are doing, but the real truth is it comes to nothing. They renege on whatever they want in order to get something through.

I certainly agree with what the member said. It is a crime on our democracy, but I wish he would remember those words when he wants to use it for all of the people and not just for himself or his own Liberal government.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand my colleague's frustration with respect to the member for Winnipeg North.

When he was sitting over here, not too far from my seat, he often stood up and criticized the Conservative government. As usual, he would shout his dissatisfaction at the government any time it used time allocation.

Routine Proceedings

The question I have for my colleague has to do with the Liberals' hypocrisy. They said that there was no consensus on electoral reform, so they broke a promise on something they had firmly committed to. However, when it comes to rules and procedure, they do not need a consensus; they absolutely have to keep their promise and do not ask any questions.

Why do the Liberals have a double standard when it comes to their promised reforms to the electoral system and reforms to the rules of the House? They have completely different criteria for adopting each set of reforms.

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for all the work that he does for his constituents. The question was about the Liberals saying that they do not need consensus, but when it comes to electoral reform they said they needed consensus but could not get consensus. It is something that both opposition parties on this side of the House are trying to figure out. Maybe some day the Liberals could indulge us and give us a great answer because I do not have one.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

The House resumed from April 11 consideration of the motion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 6:30 p.m. pursuant to order made Monday, April 3, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Call in the members.

• (1850)

[English]

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

(Division No. 257)

YEAS

Members

Aboultatif	Albas
Alghabra	Alleslev
Allison	Ambrose
Amos	Anandasangaree
Anderson	Arnold
Arseneault	Arya
Aubin	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Barlow	Barsalou-Duval
Baylis	Beaulieu
Beech	Bennett
Benson	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block	Boissonnault

Bossio	Boucher
Boudrias	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Bratina
Breton	Brison
Brousseau	Brown
Caesar-Chavannes	Calkins
Cannings	Carr
Carrie	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Champagne	Chan
Chen	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Cooper
Cormier	Cuzner
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davies	DeCoursey
Deltell	Di Iorio
Diotte	Doherty
Donnelly	Drouin
Dubé	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseau	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Eglinski	Ehsassi
Ellis	Erskine-Smith
Eyking	Eyolfson
Falk	Fast
Fergus	Fillmore
Finley	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser (West Nova)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Freeland	Fuhr
Gallant	Gameau
Garrison	Généreux
Genius	Gill
Gladu	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Gourde	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Harcastle	Harder
Hardie	Harvey
Hehr	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jeneroux	Johns
Joly	Jordan
Kang	Kelly
Kent	Khalid
Khera	Kitchen
Kniec	Kwan
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Laverdière
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Liepert
Lightbound	Lobb
Lockhart	Long
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKenzie	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Malcolmson	Maloney
Marcil	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	May (Saaneich—Gulf Islands)
McCaughey (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendès	Mendicino
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Érables)
Soeurs)	
Monsef	Morneau
Morrissey	Motz
Mulcair	Nantel
Nassif	Nater
Nault	Nicholson
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Peschisolido	Peterson

Adjournment Proceedings

Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Plamondon
Poillievre	Poissant
Quach	Qualtrough
Ramsey	Rankin
Ratansi	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rioux
Ritz	Robillard
Rodriguez	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Rusnak	Saganash
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Sangha
Sansoucy	Sarai
Saroya	Scarpaleggia
Schieffe	Schmale
Schulte	Shanahan
Shields	Shipley
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sopuck
Sorbara	Sorenson
Spengemann	Stetski
Stewart	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Thériault
Tilson	Tootoo
Trudeau	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Vecchio	Viersen
Virani	Wagantall
Warkentin	Watts
Waugh	Webber
Weir	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wong	Wrzesnewskyj
Young	Zahid
Zimmer— 279	

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Foote

Moore— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

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

• (1855)

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for almost a year now I have been asking questions about the Liberals' ethics. I was elected for the first time in 2006 and I took on my parliamentary duties to serve Canadian democracy and all Canadians with honour and respect.

Like all my colleagues, I have seen the way this Prime Minister behaves and I have heard his apologies. To me, his apologies will be nothing more than words until he changes his behaviour. I am dismayed by the show this Prime Minister puts on when he

apologizes in the House. Nothing he has said to justify his many ethical breaches has me convinced that he is innocent in any of this.

Since coming to power, and in response to the outcry, the Liberal government has been responding to questions about the ethics of its members, including the Prime Minister, with talking points. This is the first time that a prime minister has been investigated by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Either the Prime Minister does not understand that he should be above suspicion, or he does not give a damn about it.

The Prime Minister takes trips south of the border, sells access to himself for \$1,500 to his millionaire friends, and discusses government business with his wealthy Chinese friends. Ordinary Canadians do not necessarily have \$1,500 to spend on getting answers from this government.

The Prime Minister seems to have learned a few things from his father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who used his legal and business connections to get out of delicate situations. We do not have to look very hard to discover that our Right Honourable Prime Minister stated that his father was able to avoid a difficult situation by using his connections. This is what he said in his Vice Canada interview:

My father reached out to his friends in the legal community, got the best possible lawyer.... We were confident that my littlest brother wasn't going to be saddled with a criminal record for life...

As the saying goes, “like father, like son” or in this case “like Prime Minister, like minister”. The Minister of National Defence is following in the footsteps of his leader by giving Canadians and our soldiers a number of fictitious accounts of his time in the Canadian Armed Forces. The minister has said many times that he was the architect of Operation Medusa, even though he was not in command of that operation. He was trying to improve his image at the expense of other members of the armed forces.

When it comes to ethics, prime ministers, MPs, and ministers should not be above the law. We are the face of Canada, the face of Quebec.

• (1900)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member across the way, and I must express some disappointment, in the sense I believe that the opposite has actually occurred. We have a Prime Minister who believes in accountability and transparency. Virtually every action that this government has taken to date has been a fairly clear indication of that sense of commitment. I do not say that lightly.

I was here when the Prime Minister became the leader of the Liberal Party. One of his first actions as leader of the Liberal Party was to enact proactive disclosure, ensuring that Canadians from coast to coast to coast would know how members of Parliament were using their expenses, so that it became public. Even today's Prime Minister, the then leader of the Liberal Party, asked for unanimous consent of the House to have that procedure put in place. The Conservatives and the New Democrats said no to accountability, no to transparency. That is what the Conservatives and the NDP did back then.

Adjournment Proceedings

A little while after, the leader of the Liberal Party then indicated that Canadians deserve to have more accountability. He said that the Liberal members of Parliament would have proactive disclosure. A few months later, to their credit, the Conservatives recognized that the leader of the Liberal Party was doing the right thing, and they then adopted our position.

Through a motion in the House, we were able to shame the New Democrats into adopting proactive disclosure on members' office budgets. Since being in government, we have seen a Prime Minister who has done what he did when he was in opposition, and that is to seek further proactive disclosure. Today in question period, a member asked the minister responsible for democratic reform a question. We talked about new rules that are going to be put in place through the Liberal Party in a proactive way. We are also going to be introducing legislation, telling Canadians once again that we as a government, and the Prime Minister, believe in proactive disclosure. Now we are going to do the same thing in terms of fundraising. This is not only going to apply to government ministers, but also to leaders of recognized political parties inside this chamber. We are going even further than what we told Canadians we would do.

I would ask members across the way, in reflecting on this, to emphasize that no laws or rules were broken. If there were no laws and rules that were broken, then there was no conflict of interest. When the issue has been brought to the floor of the House, when the Prime Minister has been challenged to take action, we did that much more. The Prime Minister asked the Minister of Democratic Institutions to look at ways in which we can improve the system, recognizing that there is an expectation. The Prime Minister wants to meet the expectation of Canadians on this file. That is why we now have a Minister of Democratic Institutions who has brought forward the idea and will be bringing forward legislation that will ensure there is more accountability, not less. It does not just apply to government and cabinet ministers; it will also apply, from what I understand, to leaders of official parties inside the House.

We see that as a good thing, and we only wish that the Conservative Party would recognize the reality of the situation, which is that the government is proactive.

• (1905)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, just because the member opposite speaks loudly does not mean he is more ethical than everyone else.

I asked questions about the Prime Minister's ethics. I am sorry but this is in the Liberal Party's DNA. This is not the first time that we have had this type of discussion. The Liberals have been in office for 18 months, and we are starting to get used to their way of doing things. They use talking points. They were the first to protest when our government did things the way they do them. Now, they are protesting again, and they are the ones in power.

The Liberals behaved unethically and did things that were against the law. They got caught and they lied about it. They apologize publicly, but then they do the same sort of thing again and again. Guess—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member said that I had prefab answers. I was not looking at any script when I was speaking to the House. That was not a prefab answer. That just happens to be the truth. Whether the member across the way agrees with reality and the truth is ultimately up to her to decide. All I am doing is presenting the facts, and the fact of the matter is very clear: we have a Prime Minister who, not only today but since he was elected leader of the Liberal Party, has taken a proactive approach in ensuring that there is more accountability and transparency in Canada when it comes to dealing with members of the House.

That is something the member across the way completely ignores. That is her choice, but the facts remain the same. I believe that at the end of the day, Canadians will recognize that in fact we do have a Prime Minister who is genuine in wanting to make sure there is a higher sense of accountability and transparency in the House of Commons. Whether the Conservatives and the NDP want it or not, that is something we are committed to doing.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand here today to again raise the issue of the jobs crisis in my home province of Alberta.

Although months have passed since I asked the Minister of Infrastructure when Alberta's struggling families can expect the Liberal government to present a plan that will actually create the jobs they need, nothing has changed. In fact, Alberta's unemployment rate continued to rise last month, and jobs in the natural resource sector crumbled. It has become clear that the government has no clear plan for job creation and simply continues to collectively bury its head in the sand, ignoring Alberta's unemployment crisis.

The reality remains that thousands of Albertans are out of work and struggling to provide the basic necessities for their families. What was the government's answer in budget 2017? It eliminated tax credits to help the oil and gas industry and wrote a \$30-million stimulus cheque to Alberta's NDP government. Let us be clear: Premier Notley does not have a very good track record when it comes to stimulating Alberta's economy. Neither of these measures will do anything to directly help Albertans get back to work.

In addition to the empty measures in budget 2017, the government continues to claim that its infrastructure projects will create jobs, but that is simply not occurring. In fact, it is the opposite. The infrastructure announcements made by the government have not created the immediate jobs that are so desperately needed. Money is not flowing, real core infrastructure projects are nowhere to be seen, and no jobs are being created. The projects that are currently being approved, such as the Yellowhead Highway in Edmonton, will not start construction until 2023. That is an awfully long time away when Alberta could use this project to hire some of the currently unemployed Albertans.

Adjournment Proceedings

It has become clear to Canadians and Albertans that the only thing the federal Liberals have accomplished with their infrastructure investments are photo ops and ribbon cuttings, rather than creating the jobs they promised.

Canadians across the country, and especially in Alberta, are tightening their belts as they face a tough job market and a high cost of living. Canadians deserve a government that creates jobs, keeps taxes low, and spends their tax dollars responsibly. Instead, we have a government that is more interested in nickel-and-diming taxpayers and promoting itself.

I would again ask the minister, does the government have a plan that will actually create jobs for Albertans?

• (1910)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend is absolutely right to champion the needs of Albertans and to seek on their behalf some assurances on what is happening today in Lethbridge or Stony Mountain or Stony Plain. It is very much on the minds of all of us here, certainly on the government side. There is no question that Alberta families are facing difficult times and that many middle-class Albertans feel anxious about having access to opportunities to succeed for themselves, and of course, for their children.

Albertans have endured a number of challenges unique to the province and local economies over the past few years. That is why our government has taken a range of actions to give Albertans, and indeed all Canadians, opportunities to succeed. Our aim is to create growth in a way that benefits the broadest possible set of Canadians, unlocks the full potential of our people and businesses, and is fiscally sustainable so that we have the flexibility to deal with recessions and pressures from an aging population.

We began by reducing income taxes for nearly nine million middle-class Canadians. We have made more strategic investments in infrastructure, investments that can create much-needed jobs today while delivering benefits for years to come. Total federal investments in infrastructure will top \$180 billion over 12 years. That is sort of a big number over a broad time.

What does that mean for Albertans? Our first phase of funding, announced in budget 2016, includes almost \$350 million to upgrade and improve public transit systems as well as just under \$200 million for investments in water and waste water projects in Alberta alone. As of right now, over 100 projects have been approved, and the vast majority of those are in progress, creating and sustaining jobs for hard-working Albertans.

However, this is not the only industry where our work is helping to support job creation. In co-operation with the provinces, we have approved two pipelines that are expected to create more than 22,000 construction jobs in western Canada.

Having worked in Fort McMurray for over 10 years, I keep in touch with my friends and even family who are working in western Canada. They are ecstatic about the progress this government has made on those pipeline announcements. That includes the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project that our Prime Minister announced last November. It will create 15,000 new

middle-class jobs in Alberta and British Columbia during the construction phase, the majority of those in trades, and also 440 permanent jobs during its operation.

Last month, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour announced a collaborative project with the Government of Alberta that will put Albertans first in line for local jobs. The pilot will help employers find and hire Albertans who have lost their jobs in the oil and gas sector and in other occupations affected by the resource downturn. This will be good for workers. This will be good for business. This will be good for all Albertans.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary made my point for me when he said that these things will happen. The problem is that they are not happening. They are promised to start in years like 2023, five or 10 years from now. Albertans are in a crisis right now.

The Prime Minister has encouraged Albertans to hang in there as pink slips replace paycheques. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities tells us that by holding hands together, we will get out of this crisis. Such platitudes are doing nothing to help our struggling families as the number of unemployed Albertans grows every month. Albertans need more than the empty words and promises they are getting from the government. They need good jobs that will help put food on the table and a roof over their heads.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, \$550 million alone, just in infrastructure, has already been signed off for Alberta. Those are projects that are ready to go. What is also good is that now there is some hope in Alberta, and there is hope in B.C., because this government undertook the hard work of working with communities, getting broad social support for initiatives like the pipelines. That is instilling in that economy the opportunity for investment in Alberta, investment in projects going forward, and investment in their communities. That is what is going to create jobs.

The private sector is certainly stepping up to the plate knowing that this government is with it. That is what is going to help buoy the economy in Alberta and continue to grow Alberta's economy. We are proud to work with the Province of Alberta and industry to help with Alberta's recovery.

Adjournment Proceedings

●(1915)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is facing a very large crisis right now with people illegally crossing our land border with the United States and making asylum claims, some of which are false. The reality is that this particular situation is increasing. Thousands of people are doing this. We have seen a massive increase year over year from last year and this was during the dead of winter. We are expecting this problem to get significantly worse over the summer months. To date, all the government and the Prime Minister have done to address this is to issue a tweet called #WelcomeRefugees. Rather than saying this is illegal and it needs to stop or providing any sort of plan to stop this activity, the government is making it worse.

What does that mean? It means there is a significant impact on affected communities. Using the province of Manitoba as an example, the provincial government has stated that resources are strained. Its health care system, the employee income assistance program, its legal aid assistance program are being strained by the people illegally crossing the borders and accessing these services. Child protection placement services are being strained. Affordable housing units are being strained. English-language training and translation services are being strained. The resources of Canada Border Services Agency, as well as the RCMP, along with border towns, are being strained.

There have been reports of families who have had people illegally crossing the border knock on their doors in the middle of the night, which has caused their children to be afraid. There have also been reports on the CBC that over half of the people illegally crossing the borders have, quoting from a news article, “serious criminal records”. This is putting communities at risk. It is putting a significant strain on taxpayer-funded services that are there for people who legally enter the country. Frankly, it is also straining resources for people who are coming to Canada through legitimate legal means and are trying to immigrate to our country.

We heard over the weekend that a facility in Gretna, Manitoba, which was originally built to house Canadian seniors is now being used by the Manitoba government as an emergency stopgap measure to house people illegally crossing the border. What has the government done on this? It has done nothing to date.

I have noticed that across political stripes, it does not really matter what political affiliation one is, there is a great concern among Canadians that the government has been silent on this. We know the government has been very hesitant and is trying to prevent the RCMP from releasing numbers on how many people are coming across the border. From the responses I have received in the House, the government expects Canadians to think that this problem is going to go away if we ignore it.

My question is very simple. I raised it in the House of Commons today in a question for the minister. The minister did not answer the question. There is a legal loophole in the safe third country agreement that allows people to illegally cross the border and still make asylum claims in Canada, even if they have already done it in the United States. At this point in time, I think that loophole is causing a major problem and we need to close the loophole in order

to give first responders another legislative tool to stop this problem. Will the government close the loophole in the safe third country agreement to prevent the problem of illegal border crossings from growing further this summer?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way might be a bit disappointed in my response, but the adjournment question that was asked this evening was on Syrian refugee resettlement. I will stick to that subject.

Some refugees arrive in Canada broken by the civil war in their country. Those with limited language skills or education need time to become fully contributing members to our labour market and society. In addition to adapting to their new life in Canada, resettled refugees must frequently deal with significant trauma, as I was saying. It is important to remember that our resettlement program is first and foremost about saving lives and bringing people to safety. It is not expected that all refugees will be able to fully support themselves upon their arrival in Canada.

That being said, this government is committed to ensuring that these new permanent residents are provided with the tools they need to set themselves up for success. Between July and September 2016, the government conducted a survey of Syrian refugees, as well as focus groups and interviews, in order to understand what the obstacles to their progress had been up until now. This evaluation revealed that Syrian refugees are generally integrating at the same rate as other resettled refugee groups have in the past.

As with the previous refugee populations that Canada has resettled, many of the recent wave of Syrian refugees have limited or no English or French language skills. However, as we have seen from numerous media stories, their lack of language skills has not tempered their enthusiasm to contribute to their new communities or find employment.

In general, Syrian refugees who were surveyed said they were happy with their life in Canada and that their immediate and essential needs are being met. However, all refugees need support and time to become accustomed to their new communities and adapt to a whole new life in Canada. The evaluation also found that there were unique challenges for these refugees. For example, adult Syrian GARs tend to be less educated and less fluent in Canada's official languages than other resettled adult GARs admitted in recent years.

In the first seven to nine months, employment rates were roughly 10% for government-assisted refugees and 50% for Syrian privately-sponsored refugees. This is aligned with historical employment rates for resettled refugees in Canada one year after their arrival. The employment rate was the same under the former Conservative government, which the member opposite was a member of.

As in the case of the Syrian refugees who arrived recently, this is largely because government-assisted refugees tend to be more vulnerable and typically have lower language skills, which of course presents a barrier to employment.

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We encourage all refugees to access the settlement support services they need to help them succeed. These include language training, employment services, and community connections. These services are available to refugees and to all permanent residents at no cost until they are granted Canadian citizenship.

This fiscal year, the government will invest more than \$900 million to assist all newcomers in improving their language skills and to provide other settlement services that will help them find employment. While the integration process takes time, it ultimately helps refugees to succeed and to contribute to Canadian society. As with previous refugee arrivals, we expect the majority of Syrian refugees will ultimately succeed in our labour market and society. We are very pleased about that.

● (1920)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I asked my colleague what the government would do to prevent illegal border crossers from coming into Canada, and he spent his entire four minutes talking about the Syrian refugee initiative.

There is some congruency in that legitimate refugees who are coming into Canada through legal channels are being stymied by what is happening on our borders. The fact that the government is completely turning a blind eye to the strain on taxpayer-funded resources, like our health care system, like our first responders, like the Canada Border Services Agency, like the affected towns and communities, is just crazy. It does a disservice to everyone.

Frankly, the government is losing social licence to operate when it comes to the immigration program. Canada has always had one of the strongest immigration systems in the world, but under the current

government and its changes we have actually seen Canada fail on this.

Will the government close the loophole in the safe third country agreement and prevent illegal border crossers from coming into Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Speaker, once again, tonight's adjournment debate is on the question of refugee resettlement.

As I said before, these people need a little time to adapt to life in Canada and their communities. That is especially true for Syrian refugees who fled places plagued by a devastating war. Our government is making sure that these people can fully integrate into our society and their communities.

Once again, we will invest \$900 million to assist all of these newcomers with improving their language skills and provide other settlement services that can help them find employment.

Our government wants to make sure every support is in place so that everyone who comes to Canada can succeed and contribute to our society. That is a very clear commitment on the part of our government.

● (1925)

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 7:25 p.m.)

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