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(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 16, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the 2017 spring reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), these documents are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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TRANSPORTATION MODERNIZATION ACT

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-49, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and other Acts respecting transportation and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

AUTISM

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to present an e-petition that was initiated by Ken Robertson, an urban aboriginal autism activist and a constituent of mine in my riding of Davenport.

This e-petition calls on the federal government to gather data on urban aboriginal children with autism and the length of the wait list for support for off-reserve children. In addition, it calls for the federal government to work with the provinces, territories, and stakeholders to develop a pan-Canadian strategy for autism spectrum disorder, including awareness and education campaigns; child, adolescent, and adult intervention; and innovative funding arrangements for financing therapy, surveillance, respite care, community initiatives, and basic research.

I look forward to our government's response.

I would like to thank the almost 700 Canadians for supporting this important initiative.

•(1005)

FALUN GONG

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from thousands of my constituents in Victoria.

Falun Gong practitioners have faced persecution in China for over 20 years. Hundreds of thousands of people have been arrested, tortured, and put in prison, where many were systematically killed to supply organs for a state-run transplant industry. As many as 100,000 such transplants have occurred every year in Chinese hospitals since 2000.

These petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to establish measures to end the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China and to urge the Chinese government to bring the perpetrators to justice.

ALGOMA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise once again to table petitions regarding the Algoma passenger train.

The petitioners indicate that the economic impact in northern Ontario is huge. A \$2.2 million subsidy was giving a return of over \$48 million in economic stability.

The petitioners are concerned that this train is still not on the rails. They are asking that the Minister of Transport put the Algoma passenger train back in service in order to ensure the mission of Transport Canada, which is “To serve the public interest through the promotion of a safe and secure, efficient and environmentally responsible transportation system in Canada”.

[*Translation*]

WATER QUALITY

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present a petition that concerns Lake Champlain and is addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Routine Proceedings

People in Brome—Missisquoi who live along the shore of Lake Champlain drink the water from that lake. For years now, proliferation of cyanobacteria has been negatively affecting water quality to the point where the situation is critical. Consuming water contaminated with cyanobacteria poses a health risk to shoreline residents. All matters relating to the water quality of Lake Champlain are governed by the International Boundary Waters Treaty and the International Joint Commission. In 2008, that commission looked into the water quality problem in Missisquoi Bay, but its work has since ceased.

Protecting Lake Champlain is of paramount importance, and we are calling on the minister responsible for Global Affairs Canada to review the mandate of the International Joint Commission so that it may resolve the issue of water quality in Lake Champlain.

[English]

JUSTICE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning to present two petitions. The first is a really critical issue that is unexamined in this Parliament. There is successful legislation in the Province of Quebec, as the petitioners point out, to ban something called SLAPP suits. It is an acronym for strategic litigation against public participation.

Petitioners from my riding point out the case of Fraser v. Saanich in British Columbia as an example of a corporation's use of the courts to shut down public opposition to that corporation's activities, or in other areas of public policy.

HIV/AIDS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is also from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands. The threat of HIV/AIDS, while less in our public consciousness than it was a number of years ago, is still a threat. The petitioners call for the government to embrace the notion of a national AIDS strategy using the proven principle of treatment as prevention.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES, AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present petition e-739, which I sponsored and which has been certified by the clerk of petitions. The petition has been signed by 1,863 Canadians. It calls on the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to review and potentially modify the new selection process for parents and grandparents sponsorship applications.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in support of private member's Bill C-316. This sensible proposal has been brought forward by my colleague and friend the member for Calgary Confederation.

The petitioners are calling on the House to improve the organ donation system in Canada by making the process to register as an organ donor easier. This would be achieved by adding a simple question to our annual tax returns. Currently, 90% of Canadians support organ donation, but only 25% are registered. Some 46,000 Canadians are awaiting a live-saving transplant. We know that making the registration process easier will save more lives.

• (1010)

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table two petitions. The first petition is petition 154, on health care services. The petition notes that the Canada Health Act ensures access to emergency medical care and hospital stay. However, it notes that many Canadians pay out of pocket for prescription medications, for psychologists and registered therapists, and for ambulance services as well. They are calling on the Government of Canada to amend our health act to include prescription medications, psychologists, registered therapists, and ambulance services as a right for all Canadians, regardless of their ability to pay.

The petition is signed by more than 500 people calling for this action.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition has to do with animal cruelty. The petitioners note that the vast majority of Canadians support modern and enforceable legislation that protects all animals from deliberate and reckless acts of cruelty. They also note that animal cruelty is considered a property offence under the provisions of the Criminal Code, which have not significantly been revised since they were first enacted in 1892. The amendments to the provisions, which Parliament passed in April 2008, merely raised the potential penalties for the few accused persons who can be convicted and did not materially improve protection for animals. The petition further notes that amendments to the Criminal Code are still required to close the loopholes that allow perpetrators of animal cruelty to avoid conviction.

Petitioners feel that Canada has weaker legislation than other jurisdictions and are therefore calling on the government to modernize the animal cruelty provisions in the Criminal Code to effectively protect all animals from deliberate acts of cruelty.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVILEGE

PROPOSED CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE BANK

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to offer additional submissions on the question of privilege that was raised last week by the hon. member for Victoria and supported by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

In his remarks on Friday afternoon, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons quoted from one press release in an effort to exculpate the government's arrogant approach to setting up the Canada infrastructure bank while Parliament is seized with legislation proposing its creation.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer you to the job postings at the appointments.gc.ca website maintained by the Privy Council Office. Those documents are the ones any serious candidate interested in the positions would be reviewing. Nowhere on there is there any suggestion that Parliament's approval has yet to happen. A reader might be forgiven for concluding that the bank already exists, that this is a *fait accompli*.

Not only do these job postings suggest that the bank is a done deal, but they also treat the particulars of the bank's mandate, which are actually details buried in the government's omnibus budget bill, Bill C-44, in the same fashion. Let me quote from the job postings as found on the government's website on Friday.

On the posting for the bank's chairperson, we read, "The new Canada Infrastructure Bank is being established to initiate and invest...." That also appears in the postings for directors and the president.

Then, we read the following concerning the mandate of the Canada infrastructure bank:

The Bank will be mandated to invest \$35 billion into projects.... The Bank will also act as a centre of expertise on infrastructure transactions...and provide advice to all levels of government in that context. In addition, the Bank will lead a data initiative to improve knowledge....

Those same phrases appear in all three job postings.

Now, if we turn to the proposed Canada infrastructure bank act, which would be enacted by clause 403 of Bill C-44, we see the following: Proposed paragraph 7(1)(e) of the proposed act would establish the bank as "a centre of expertise on infrastructure projects". Proposed paragraph 7(1)(f) would give the bank a mandate to "provide advice to all levels of government with regard to infrastructure projects". Proposed paragraph 7(1)(g) would authorize the bank to "collect and disseminate data".

Proposed section 23 of the proposed act reads in part:

The Minister of Finance may pay to the Bank, out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, amounts of not more than \$35,000,000,000 in the aggregate

Later in the job postings for the chairperson and directors, we see this comment: "The Board of Directors of the Bank will be composed of the Chairperson and 8 to 11 other Directors."

Looking at the proposed act, proposed subsection 8(1) states, "The Bank has a board of directors composed of the Chairperson and not fewer than eight, but not more than 11, other directors."

Privilege

These are all details which are currently before the House of Commons and could theoretically be amended at committee, at report stage, or even by the other place, but the government treats them as final and settled, given how those job postings read.

The parliamentary secretary's defence of the government's arrogance seems to be that some other document that includes a passing reference to parliamentary approval should get them off the hook.

•(1015)

Speaker Milliken ruled on May 29, 2008, at page 6276 of *Debates*, on advertisements about pending amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. He stated:

It is with these precedents in mind that I reviewed the advertisements in question. They contain phrases such as "the Government of Canada is proposing measures", "These important measures, once in effect," and "These measures are currently before Parliament". In my view, the advertisements clearly acknowledge that these measures are not yet in place. I am therefore unable to find evidence of a misrepresentation of the proceedings of the House or of any presumption of the outcome of its deliberations.

There is nothing in the job postings to suggest that Parliament has yet to approve the bank's creation or that it could, in its work, tweak the government's proposed details. The job postings most certainly presume the outcome of deliberations in the House.

Most recently, the Speaker's predecessor, the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, was also asked to rule on a procurement notice seeking audit information concerning the financial impact of scrapping the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly, a policy initiative in the 2011 Conservative platform. His ruling on September 28, 2011, at page 1576 of *Debates*, held:

The notice itself presents a hypothetical scenario. It does not foresee a specific timetable for legislative action, let alone presume the outcome of such action. As I see it, the notice and task force terms of reference form part of a planning process that might be expected in contemplating the possibility of the repeal of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I know the member for Malpeque does not expect the Chair to monitor all internal processes undertaken by the government as part of its preparatory work in advance of proposing legislative measures to the House. Accordingly, I cannot agree with the hon. member for Malpeque's statement that "The government presumes that the act has been repealed, which in fact it has not". I see no evidence of such a presumption.

In the present instance, I do not believe that the wording of the text of the notice of procurement posted on the MERX site is ambiguous: rather, in my view, it presents a hypothetical case and seeks information on the impact of such a scenario.

There is, to put it simply, nothing hypothetical about how these job postings read. Given that the appointments.gc.ca website is administered by the Privy Council Office, I can only assume that it was acting on the express instructions of the Prime Minister's Office, which would have been micromanaging the rollout of a marquee initiative of the budget.

Mr. Speaker Parent, on March 13, 1997, at page 8987 of *Debates*, was also called upon to rule on advertisements, and offered this piece of advice to government communications staff:

Privilege

Those whose duty it is to approve the wording of communications to the public for a minister must surely be aware that the terms used in parliamentary language have a very specific meaning. Trying to avoid them or to use them for advertising purposes shows a lack of consideration for the institution of Parliament and the role of the members in the legislative process. If there is no ambiguity in the choice of terms the public will be better served and the House can get on with its work without being called upon to resolve the difficulty caused by such misunderstanding.

Unfortunately, this sound counsel was simply ignored by those in the PMO who approved the wording of these job postings. The whole episode is, sadly, yet another example of a prime minister and a government who are dismissive of Parliament, and simply find the House of Commons to be an irritant and speed bump on their path to governing.

● (1020)

The House of Commons is, and must always be, seen as more than a rubber stamp for the government's legislative proposals. To address this attack on the authority and dignity of the House of Commons, I urge you to find a *prima facie* case of privilege.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock for the submission she made to add to the submission of the hon. member for Victoria. I am aware that the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has also made a submission on this question of privilege. I will take it under advisement, and look forward to coming back to the House with a ruling.

I understand that the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman wishes to make additional arguments on his question of privilege.

COMMENTS OF MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to provide an addendum to the submission I made on May 3 to my original question of privilege raised on April 4, 2017.

As you will recall, and the record will show, my original question of privilege concerned statements made by the Minister of National Defence in this House concerning the hardship benefits, danger pay, and the tax relief status of members of the Canadian Armed Forces stationed in Kuwait on Operation Impact.

The additional information and evidence supporting my question of privilege comes from a briefing note provided to the Minister of National Defence and obtained through the Access to Information Act by my office on Friday, as well as a ministerial order issued by the President of the Treasury Board on April 17, 2017. The briefing note reads in part:

The initial assessments for the Op IMPACT (Kuwait) locations were conducted on 11 June 2015 (with an effective date of 5 October 2014, the start of the operation) and established a Risk Level of 2.13. In accordance with the Income Tax Act, the Minister of National Defence requested that the Minister of Finance designate Op IMPACT (Kuwait) locations for Tax Relief. The Minister of Finance concurred with the request and designated Op IMPACT (Kuwait) for Tax Relief.

Therefore, under the previous Conservative government, all members of the Canadian Armed Forces deployed to Operation Impact in Kuwait were provided with a tax relief status on their hardship and risk pay effective October 5, 2014. This was able to occur because former defence minister Jason Kenney took the initiative to request that then finance minister Joe Oliver designate

Operation Impact, Kuwait location, for tax relief. The request was approved without question simply because it was the right thing to do.

The solution to this problem is rather simple and should have never reached this point. The briefing note goes on to say that the tax relief status was re-evaluated on March 31, 2016, under the current Liberal government. The result of this re-evaluation was that our troops stationed at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait could no longer receive the benefit, effective September 1, 2016.

According to the briefing note that was prepared by the Minister of National Defence on November 24, 2016, all troops stationed in Kuwait on Operation Impact were receiving the benefit effective the first day of the operation, October 5, 2014, until September 1, 2016. The minister and his office were aware of this.

However, the Minister of National Defence said in the House on March 21, 2017, “the previous government was the one that actually sent our troops to Iraq without the tax-free benefit.” In question period on March 8, he said, “I would also like to correct the member in terms of the previous government's actions on this. It actually sent troops into Kuwait without the tax-free allowance”. On March 9, during a debate on this very issue, the minister said, “Our troops did not have tax-free status when they were actually deployed for that operation. It was in February 2016, after my visit to Kuwait.” During that debate, he also said, “I cannot change reality. When I visited the troops, they did not have a tax-free allowance.”

The minister has already apologized once for his attempt to change reality. I hope he does so again, and this time actually takes responsibility for his wrongdoings. The Minister of National Defence's first visit to Kuwait was in November 2015. As I read in my original question of privilege and the addendum, the tax relief status was effective from October 2014 until September 2016. Therefore, while the minister was visiting troops in November 2015 in Kuwait, the tax relief status was still in place.

We now have several documents in our possession that prove all soldiers deployed to Kuwait on Operation Impact were receiving tax-free status on their hardship and risk pay effective from the date that the operation began, October 5, 2014, until September 1, 2016, including a briefing note prepared specifically for the minister and a response to an Order Paper question with the minister's signature.

Furthermore, due to the government's lack of willingness to take action to correct the mistake of cancelling the tax-free status for the soldiers in Kuwait in Operation Impact, I had to table a motion on March 9, 2017, on behalf of the official opposition which reads:

That the House call on the government to show support and appreciation for the brave men and women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces by reversing its decision to take away from the soldiers fighting against ISIS the tax benefit which provides them with \$1,500 to \$1,800 per month for the hardship and risk associated with their deployment, and to retroactively provide the payment to members stationed at Camp Arifjan whose tax relief was cancelled as of September 1, 2016.

Government Orders

The motion was passed unanimously. The minister told this House, “We support the motion related to Canadian Forces members at Camp Arifjan, who were deployed when the risk level was adjusted.”

However, on April 17, 2017, the President of the Treasury Board issued a ministerial directive to provide personnel at Ali Al Salem Air Base tax exempt status until August 16, 2017, while those at Camp Arifjan, a mere 40 kilometres away, were only provided the tax exempt status until December 18, 2016.

• (1025)

Furthermore, the access to information request I referenced also notes that the chief of the defence staff provided direction to evaluate the Kuwait region as a whole rather than each base separately. This direction was ignored, which is evidenced by the ministerial order that extended the tax exemption for Ali Salem Air Base to August 2017, while Camp Arifjan had its benefit cut as of December 2016. I hope the government is not being vindictive and penalizing our troops at Camp Arifjan for speaking out about this unfair situation.

Therefore, the government did not reverse its decision to take away the tax benefit. It only provided retroactive payments for three and a half months, leaving soldiers deployed for up to eight months without the tax exemption.

To summarize, on multiple occasions in this House, the Minister of National Defence accused the previous government of deploying troops to Kuwait and Iraq without the tax exemption. We now have a response to Order Paper Question No. 600 with the minister's signature, multiple access to information requests, and a quote from the minister in an April 19 press release from DND that say otherwise.

Furthermore, by supporting the Conservative motion on March 21, 2017, the minister agreed to retroactively pay the tax relief benefit to soldiers at Camp Arifjan. However, a ministerial directive issued by the President of the Treasury Board on April 17, 2017, and a press release issued by DND on April 19, 2017, state that those troops will only be receiving retroactive payments for three and half months and not for their full deployment.

The Minister of National Defence has a clear, intentional, and repetitive pattern of making misleading statements.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I submit, for your consideration, the following documents: the access to information request I just referred to; the ministerial order from the President of the Treasury Board issued on April 17, 2017; the response to Order Paper Question No. 600, signed by the Minister of National Defence; and the press release issued by the Department of National Defence on April 19, 2017, confirming the ministerial order and that troops deployed to Kuwait for Operation Impact had the tax exempt status effective on the first date of their deployment.

I look forward to the ruling on my question of privilege.

• (1030)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman for his additional arguments. I will take the matter under advisement. Assuming there are no further arguments on this

question of privilege, I look forward to bringing a ruling in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

BILL C-7—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That in relation to the Senate amendments to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration of said stage of the bill; and

That fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the day allotted to the consideration of the Senate amendments of said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the bill then under consideration shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has become old hat for the government, a signature move. Every time things do not go their way, they find a way to muzzle opposition members and limit their right to speak. This is totally unacceptable. The government has been leading the country for just a year and a half and we have seen, over the past few days in particular, how it is in a rush to do things and how it disrespects parliamentarians' rights and tries to force through important bills that are essential to Canadians. It is fast-tracking all these things without giving parliamentarians time to speak.

Need I remind hon. members that we are the voice of the Canadians who voted? We are not just 338 people. We represent 35 million Canadians in the House. Every Canadian has a right to speak. Why does the government keep attacking Canadians' right to speak here in the House?

• (1035)

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we inherited a serious situation. The Conservative government refused to take measures to deal with this issue despite the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling.

When we were elected and formed the government, we had to take steps in November 2015 to ensure that the RCMP's plan was consistent with the Supreme Court ruling.

Government Orders

The work of the RCMP is respected across Canada and we respect the Supreme Court's ruling of January 2015. Our government has the responsibility to respond to it, especially since the previous government failed to do so.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, general arguments about time allocation aside, with respect to this particular motion, there is an important question. The Senate reported back with its amendments in June 2016. That was almost 11 months ago. The government's position was that it needed time to analyze those amendments and come up with an appropriate response. The Liberals tabled that response five days ago. They needed time to consider and pronounce on the Senate amendments. They then offered amendments of their own that are no less complex than the ones made by the Senate. To provide not only opposition parties but stakeholders, such as the NPF, the MPPAC, and the AMPMQ, with only five days to consider their response is simply not enough.

Why do the Liberals think it is fine for the government to take 11 months to consider those changes and to then tell us that we need to hurry this through under time allocation to get it done? Why could they not have come back to the House sooner with this response, and if it really was the case that it took 11 months, why will the government not give the House a bit longer to consider the response?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, in fact, our government's treatment of this legislation and the engagement with both the House and the other place reflects our respect for Parliament. We accepted proposed amendments from the House to remove some sections pertaining to the Government Employees Compensation Act, the workers' compensation provisions, and we have accepted a number of provisions from the other place: removing the RCMP-specific provisions on what may be included in collective bargaining and replacing those restrictions with a management rights clause; and removing restrictions on the items that are generally not bargained in a federal context, such as pensions or items that would require amendment of the legislation. We rejected that amendment because, for instance, on the pension issue, we do not typically include pensions in these collective bargaining areas.

The point is that we accepted amendments from both the House and the other place as part of this. We want to get this right. We have great respect for the work of the RCMP, and we have great respect for the decision of the Supreme Court. This legislation would provide, for the first time, members of the RCMP with collective bargaining rights. It reflects the consultations that occurred under the previous government, when the RCMP wanted collective bargaining rights. There was a desire for one national union to represent them and for the union to be focused on representing RCMP members and the right to binding arbitration. This legislation was strengthened by the engagement of both this House and the Senate and reflects the Supreme Court decision and the wishes, broadly, of the RCMP.

• (1040)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, back to my colleague's comments, we got the government's response five days ago. The President of the Treasury Board likes to talk about how we are taking into consideration the amendments unanimously passed in the Senate, and there were four of them. It

took the Liberals, by the way, just under a year, 11 months, from June 2016, when they were first presented with the Senate's report.

One must ask what the responsibilities are of this House when they bring in time allocation on something as significant as this, because what is known as the unionization bill is important to the RCMP. It is important to many of its members.

The member who led it in the Senate is a member of the government that agreed unanimously with the amendments they are bringing forth, but the President of the Treasury Board has come back to us saying that they accept some of this but do not accept all of it.

The Senate did the scrutiny work through independent senators and partisan senators in both parties and brought back a report, and we are allowed only a very tight period of time to debate the ones the government decided arbitrarily it is going to accept and the ones it is going to reject. It seems to me that this push to not have debate in the House is typical of what we are seeing time and time again with the repeated time allocation motions coming to the floor of this House. This is a government that campaigned on doing the exact opposite: coming to the House and hearing thorough discussions of these issues from all parliamentarians from all sides.

I represent members of the RCMP in my riding, as most of us do in this House, and I have spoken with them. They have legitimate concerns on several fronts. All of a sudden, we are told, "Let us cut the time short on this, because we need to push it through."

I am going to ask the President of the Treasury Board why, when he says it is so important to get this right, he is cutting out the right of parliamentarians to help get it right.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I can tell members that we take the work of Parliament, both in this place and in the Senate, seriously, which is why we have accepted amendments to this legislation both from the House and the Senate, which I believe reflects our respect for Parliament and our desire to ensure that this is the best possible legislation.

Again, with respect to the previous government, in January 2015, there was a Supreme Court decision. When we formed government 11 months later, there had been no legislative action to respond to that. We, as a new government, have responded. I believe that we have the right balance that reflects the consultations conducted with the RCMP and the intent of the amendments of the Senate.

Government Orders

There is one Senate amendment we rejected, which I will speak to specifically, on the secret ballot issue, because it completely contradicted the principle of Bill C-4, another piece of legislation on this. We viewed it as being an anti-union, anti-organized labour amendment that did not reflect the views of this government. I talked to my colleagues from the New Democratic Party. They were in agreement that it was not one we could support based on our government's respect for organized labour within the public service and broadly. We did not support. That is one we actually rejected.

However, clearly, we took seriously the amendments proposed by the Senate, including eliminating many of the exclusions, and we are in a position now to move forward. We also took seriously the amendment from this House on the Government Employees Compensation Act. We do respect this place, but there is an urgency for us to move forward with this legislation for the RCMP.

● (1045)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, presumably, if we want to get something like this right, we have to do some consultation. My understanding is that none of the prospective bargaining agents were aware of the language of the motion prior to Thursday. Could the government confirm to us that management of the RCMP did not have a sneak peek or special input into the composition of the motion as well.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, the consultations with RCMP members were broadly participated in by RCMP members across Canada. That occurred, again, under the previous government. However, it is my understanding that they were extensive consultations, which is why we felt we had a good understanding of the direction provided by those consultations, and that is reflected in this legislation. It provides collective bargaining rights to the RCMP for the first time ever and the right to collective bargaining, leading to binding arbitration.

The consultations were quite clear. RCMP members were not looking for the right to strike, but were looking for the right to have collective bargaining and ultimately binding arbitration. This is a significant step forward. It is fair to RCMP members, for whom we have remarkable respect for their important work in protecting our communities. We are looking forward to moving forward.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in listening to the President of the Treasury Board, it is important to remember that Bill C-7 represents a historic turning point for RCMP members. It would give them the labour relations framework to allow them to pursue their collective interests in the way they wanted.

Could the minister please tell us how Bill C-7 specifically provides the framework for which members have asked?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Avalon for his hard work on this file. The bill is a priority for us. It responds to what was initially a Supreme Court decision in January 2015. The previous government did not respond expediently to that decision. When we were elected and took office in November 2015, we had a responsibility to act.

The consultations that had occurred made it very clear that RCMP members were looking for collective bargaining rights and leading to binding arbitration, a national union to represent them, and the union be focused on largely representing RCMP members. We believe the

legislation does reflect those consultations. We are also comfortable with the input both from the Senate and from the House. Again, there was an amendment on GECA, as an example, and the other place with respect to the elimination some of the exclusions. We have listened to and engaged not only RCMP members, but also the House and the Senate.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, I believe no one on this side of the House or inside the House is questioning the right of RCMP members. It is in the backdrop of the Supreme Court ruling that this work and this legislation is being undertaken. The real problem is what is becoming a daily occurrence, and that is the issue of the government invoking time allocation.

I go back to what the government said in the throne speech, which was that to give Canadians a stronger voice in the House of Commons, the government would provide more time for open debate, free votes, and reform and strengthen committees. However, we have just five days to debate this, while an unelected Senate took its time and issued a report to the government. The government came back with a response late last Thursday and an elected Parliament was only given five days to review this and very limited time to debate this. In effect, the government is allowing the Senate to do the heavy lifting and we, in an elected Parliament, are just an afterthought.

Why the hypocrisy? You talked about more open debate and yet you invoke time allocation.

● (1050)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the hon. member to address his questions to the Chair.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, why the hypocrisy with respect to time allocation, not allowing this elected body to have a free and strong debate on the issues that came back from the Senate?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, under our government, committees of the House have become more independent. I was here for almost 10 years in opposition when the Harper government ran committees of Parliament as branch plants of ministers' offices. That was unacceptable then, and we have rendered committees more independent of the government. There are a lot of free votes and government members frequently express their views, or those of their constituents, in those free votes.

The member used the term "hypocrisy". I do not like using that term in Parliament. However, respectfully for the hon. member, the previous government prorogued Parliament to avoid confidence votes. If we want to talk about respect for Parliament and if the Conservatives want to use the term "hypocrisy" in this place, they should look in the mirror. Proroguing Parliament to avoid a confidence vote was a low point in the life of Parliament since 1867.

Government Orders

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are talking about time allocation, and I am curious about the sequence of events here. The bill was introduced at the Senate on May 31. The Senate took 20 days to consider the bill and send amendments back to the government. The Senate passed the amendments on June 21.

The government has had almost 11 months to consider the amendments from the Senate. They are now being brought before the House, and we have five days to consider them. Looking at those five days, there are really only two days for actual debate, one of which is a half day. This is the pattern with respect to the timeline for that.

Why did it take the government 11 months to consider the amendments from the Senate? Why is it only allowing five days for their consideration in the House, with an actual debate time of only two days?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, the legislation has received over 16 hours of debate in the House. Four committee hearings have heard from 25 witnesses. Our government has accepted amendments from both the House and the Senate. I cannot remember the previous Harper government accepting amendments from the other place or from opposition parties.

We believe the time has come to act, to respect and respond to the Supreme Court decision of January 2015, and to do so in a way that not only respects the Supreme Court decision but also the broad consultations conducted with the RCMP.

I know the New Democrats, as a party, have a strong belief in collective bargaining rights. For the first time ever, this will provide the RCMP collective bargaining rights and the opportunity to be represented by a union or potentially unions. It was clear in the consultations that there was a desire to have a national union representative. This is a significant step forward, and I look forward to us making that step together as Parliament.

• (1055)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, my question for the hon. President of the Treasury Board is this. Time allocation is being used time after time. My colleagues have made the point adequately that the government has had since June 21 of last year to review the amendments from the Senate. This is important legislation. Of course collective bargaining for the RCMP is not being created in the legislation through the wisdom or good will of the governing party. It is a requirement of the Supreme Court of Canada. We want to move ahead with it.

However, I find it galling that we are being told we need time allocation on the bill, which will almost certainly mean that either members of the Bloc Québécois or the Green Party will be allowed to speak, but not both. I find that distressing. Perhaps the President of the Treasury Board could shed some light on this. I cannot see any reason for urgency, such as slapping time allocation on the bill, unless the rumours of an imminent prorogation are true, which I hope they are not.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, one of the findings of the consultation was the desire among RCMP members to have one national union representing them. Ultimately, that decision will be

made by them. It is important we move forward to enable that to occur.

For the leader of the Green Party, with whom I have worked for a long time and for whom I have tremendous respect, the Supreme Court decision was over two years ago and the previous government did not act. This is significant legislation and it is complex legislation. This would be a significant step forward for the RCMP. We look forward to moving it forward.

There have been 16 hours of debate in the House. Committees of the House have reviewed the legislation. The Senate has been active as well. We have accepted amendments from the House and the Senate. The member will recall that accepting amendments was not something the previous government did. We believe in constructive relations and the acceptance of amendments, which can have the potential to strengthen legislation. We are actively engaging Parliament, both the House and the other place.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the House is well aware that the Liberal Party was in third party position. I spent over two and a half years working on issues like sexual harassment and harassment in the RCMP at the request of members who were the victims through much of this. One of the recommendations in the report entitled “Shattered Dreams” and another one that I had done called for the need to unionize and for a collective agreement with the RCMP, in addition to civilian oversight, in order for members to have somewhere outside of the force to get help.

I asked several times in the last year when the legislation was going to go forward. From my perspective, there was a time issue with respect to seeing some movement in the RCMP, so the great members of the RCMP would have some additional protection.

My colleague has met with several of the women whom I have referenced and he is well aware of the personal stories of the RCMP. Would he share one or more of those stories with the House?

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the important work she did on sexual harassment in the RCMP. It was pioneering work at the time. She undertook an important leadership role.

Every member of the House, regardless of partisanship, understands it is absolutely essential that the RCMP be a healthy workplace free of harassment and sexual violence. The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness feels strongly on this and he has acted. He has worked with the RCMP and the commissioner. Our government is absolutely committed to whatever steps are necessary to ensure RCMP members, trainees, and employees feel safe and respected among their colleagues and supervisors.

Reports that describe similar serious and long-standing concerns relating to harassment within the RCMP make it very clear there has been a real problem that needs to be addressed. As a government, we are seized with this.

The issues identified bring significant cost to the victims' well-being and health and to the reputation and credibility of the RCMP. It is absolutely essential that we not only act to protect the health and well-being of members, but also defend the reputation of the RCMP on which Canadians depend to provide security, safety, and law enforcement across our country.

I again thank the hon. member for her continued work on this. Our government takes it seriously and will continue to take it seriously.

• (1100)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, it is kind of unbecoming for the President of the Treasury Board to answer every question by laying it at the feet of the previous government when it took 11 months, almost a year, to bring it here today. He still has not answered the question as to why it took 11 months and all of a sudden there is a rush to get this done.

Why did it take you almost a year to bring this back to the House?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It did not take me almost a year. I would remind the member to address questions to the Chair.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board for a brief answer, please.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, it is clear that there have been 16 hours of debate in the House on this matter. There are amendments both from this place, the House, and the other place, the Senate. There have been four committee hearings at which 25 witnesses were heard, but that is also built on the consultations done across the country under the previous government by the RCMP, which I understand were quite extensive. That being the case, we are in a situation now where it is important to proceed. It is over two years since the Supreme Court decision, and we are moving forward with amendments that reflect the will of both this House and the Senate.

We look forward to the enactment of this legislation, which would provide RCMP members, for the first time ever, with the collective bargaining rights they deserve.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Carole Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Carole Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Carole Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Carole Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1140)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 276*)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Alleslev | Amos |
| Anandasangaree | Arseneault |
| Arya | Ayoub |
| Badawey | Bains |
| Baylis | Beech |
| Bennett | Bibeau |
| Bittle | Blair |
| Boissonnault | Bossio |
| Breton | Brisson |
| Caesar-Chavannes | Carr |
| Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) | Casey (Charlottetown) |
| Chagger | Champagne |
| Chan | Chen |
| Cuzner | Dabrusin |
| Damoff | DeCoursey |
| Dhaliwal | Dhillon |
| Di Iorio | Drouin |
| Dubourg | Duguid |
| Duncan (Etobicoke North) | Dzerowicz |
| Easter | Ehsassi |
| El-Khoury | Erskine-Smith |
| Fergus | Fillmore |
| Finnigan | Fisher |
| Fonseca | Fortier |
| Fragiskatos | Fraser (Central Nova) |
| Fry | Fuhr |
| Gameau | Gerretsen |
| Goldsmith-Jones | Goodale |
| Gould | Graham |
| Grewal | Hajdu |
| Harvey | Hehr |
| Holland | Housefather |
| Hussen | Hutchings |
| Iacono | Jones |
| Jordan | Jowhari |
| Kang | Khera |
| Lambropoulos | Lametti |
| Lamoureux | Lapointe |
| Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | Lebouthillier |
| Lefebvre | Lemieux |
| Leslie | Levitt |
| Lightbound | Lockhart |
| Long | Longfield |
| Ludwig | MacAulay (Cardigan) |
| MacKinnon (Gatineau) | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) |
| May (Cambridge) | McCrimmon |
| McDonald | McGuinty |
| McKay | McKenna |
| McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) | McLeod (Northwest Territories) |
| Mendès | Mendicino |
| Mihychuk | Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs) |
| Monsef | Morneau |
| Morrissey | Murray |
| Nassif | Nault |
| Ng | O'Connell |
| Oliphant | Oliver |
| O'Regan | Ouellette |
| Paradis | Peschisolido |
| Peterson | Petitpas Taylor |

Government Orders

| | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Philpott | Picard |
| Poissant | Qualtrough |
| Rioux | Robillard |
| Rodriguez | Romanado |
| Rota | Rudd |
| Ruimy | Rusnak |
| Sahota | Saini |
| Sajjan | Samson |
| Sangha | Scarpaleggia |
| Schiefke | Schulte |
| Serré | Sgro |
| Shanahan | Sheehan |
| Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon) | Sidhu (Brampton South) |
| Simms | Sohi |
| Sorbara | Spengemann |
| Tabbara | Tan |
| Tassi | Tootoo |
| Trudeau | Vandal |
| Vandenbeld | Vaughan |
| Virani | Whalen |
| Wilkinson | Wilson-Raybould |
| Wrzesnewskyj | Young |
| Zahid — 165 | |

| | |
|-----------|--------------|
| Viersen | Warawa |
| Warkentin | Watts |
| Waugh | Webber |
| Weir | Wong |
| Yurdiga | Zimmer — 122 |

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.[*Translation*]

I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

● (1145)

[*English*]

RESUMING DEBATE

NAYS

Members

| | |
|--|--|
| Aboultouf | Albas |
| Albrecht | Allison |
| Ambrose | Arnold |
| Aubin | Barlow |
| Barsalou-Duval | Beaulieu |
| Benson | Benzen |
| Bergen | Berthold |
| Bezan | Blaikie |
| Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis) |
| Block | Boucher |
| Boudrias | Boutin-Sweet |
| Brassard | Brousseau |
| Brown | Calkins |
| Cannings | Carrie |
| Choquette | Clement |
| Cooper | Cullen |
| Davies | Deltell |
| Diotte | Doherty |
| Donnelly | Dreeschen |
| Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona) | Dusseault |
| Duvall | Eglinski |
| Falk | Finley |
| Fortin | Gallant |
| Garrison | Généreux |
| Genius | Gill |
| Gladu | Gourde |
| Hardcastle | Harder |
| Hoback | Hughes |
| Jeneroux | Johns |
| Kelly | Kent |
| Kmiec | Kusie |
| Kwan | Lake |
| Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry) | Laverdière |
| Lebel | Liepert |
| Lobb | MacGregor |
| MacKenzie | Malcolmson |
| Masse (Windsor West) | Mathysen |
| May (Saanic—Gulf Islands) | McCaughey (Edmonton West) |
| McColeman | McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) |
| Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) | Moore |
| Motz | Mulcair |
| Nantel | Nater |
| Nicholson | Paul-Hus |
| Pauzé | Plamondon |
| Poillievre | Quach |
| Ramsey | Rankin |
| Rayes | Reid |
| Rempel | Richards |
| Ritz | Saroya |
| Schmale | Shields |
| Shipley | Sopuck |
| Sorenson | Stewart |
| Strahl | Stubbs |
| Sweet | Tilson |
| Trost | Trudel |
| Van Kesteren | Van Loan |

The House resumed from May 12 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

The Speaker: Order, please. I encourage members to take their conversations into the lobbies and I would ask members to assist me.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona has 16 minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will pick up more or less where I left off last Friday.

Members will recall that debate started on the government response to the Senate amendments last Friday. The response had been tabled only the preceding evening, the Thursday evening, and I want to come back to that because it is an important part of the debate around this government response that there has been limited time, and because of the time allocation just passed because of the government, there is only going to be a very limited amount of time for the consideration of the government response in the House. That is not just time for debate. That is time for the opposition parties, to be sure, but also for the stakeholders like the prospective bargaining agents and RCMP members themselves to digest what the government response to the Senate amendments is and then to determine whether they agree with that. Therefore, it bears repeating that it is not a lot of time.

When we look at the government's own assessment of the complexity of the matter and how much time it takes to do justice to these issues, we get a very different idea of how much time one would want to take to be able to consider the government's response. The Liberals took almost 11 months to consider the response of the Senate to their bill. I would remind the House that we voted on the original version of Bill C-7 on May 30, 2016. That bill was then introduced in the Senate on May 31, 2016. I have not heard any of the government members say that the other place did not give Bill C-7 its due consideration. In fact, they said that the Senate did quite the job of going through the details of that bill. The Senate did that in about 20 days, from May 31 to June 21, 2016. Then it took almost 11 months for the government to come back, and now it is asking us to take a position on its response within only five days. Therefore, there is a real question of fairness.

Government Orders

I would never want to suggest that the President of the Treasury Board was misleading in his answers to the House. Earlier, he did say that we have debated this bill in the House for 16 hours. If that was not meant to deliberately mislead, then it is a sign of some laziness, perhaps, that he did not bother to change his speaking notes from third reading of the bill, which also was moved under time allocation. What we debated at that time, in May 2016, is very different from what we are debating today, which has to do not only with the amendments made by the other place, because we have not had an opportunity to deliberate on those in this place, but on top of the amendments made by the other place that the government took 11 months to consider, we are now also having a debate on the government response to those amendments. That is not a simple response. It is not a simple rejection or acceptance of those amendments. It is actually an amendment to those amendments.

Therefore, the idea that we are going to do a proper job and do justice to RCMP members across the country who have fought for years in court to get the right to bargain collectively and want to see it done properly—and the government says it wants to see it done properly—and get that done in five days, unfortunately I do not think we can. I regret that, and I regret that we only have those five days. We are doing our best on this side of the House to give our considered opinion on the content of that legislation, but it is hard to do so under the time constraints unreasonably and unfairly imposed by the government on this motion. That is important to say, because it is no small part of how the debate today is going to unfold and of the decision that is ultimately going to be taken.

We do have some concerns. There are some positive aspects to this response and then there are some aspects that warrant further study. I will say again that the study is not going to happen, because we are going to settle the issue today, one way or the other, and the bill will be on its way back to the other place.

On the positive side, it is no secret here that we do support having a card-check system as an option for RCMP members. The government has been clear and consistent in its support for that. We agree on that. That is good, and we are glad to see in the government response that it is maintaining the commitment to making card check available. That is something that is important in principle, but it is also important logistically in this case because RCMP members are spread out right across the country. They are in rural and remote communities. Some RCMP members are posted internationally. They can reach 50% or more of the membership and if they agree with having a union, then they know that if they have a vote they are going to get that 50% plus one.

• (1150)

If there is a vote, all at once, that means everybody has to get a ballot at the same time, they have to be able to return that ballot within a similar time frame, and the logistics of organizing that are very difficult. It is especially difficult if that is going to be thrown on the prospective bargaining agent. These are not established unions, by definition.

The RCMP has not been unionized before, and Bill C-7 rightly requires that a union representing RCMP members would have to consist only of RCMP members. Bill C-7 also talks about one national bargaining unit that is police only. There is not a pre-

existing union with the resources and expertise that could mount that kind of vote, and do it in a way that all RCMP members could be reassured that it has the thoroughness and integrity of process that RCMP members would expect when certifying a bargaining agent.

We were glad to see that in the bill. We are glad to see the removal of exclusions from the bill. Members of the House who have been following this legislation will know that we in the NDP have been arguing very hard for the removal of those exclusions. We believe that is the best way to ensure that RCMP members get the free and fair collective bargaining that they fought so hard to achieve for themselves in court.

Just as a quick aside, we have heard the government trying to take credit somehow for conferring collective bargaining rights on RCMP members. That is simply not true. The Supreme Court made that decision, and it is because of the Supreme Court that RCMP members have the right to bargain collectively. That was not a decision of the current government, and it was not a decision by the last government, not by any stretch. That is a right that was conferred on RCMP members by the Supreme Court as a function of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms here in Canada that the court has said guarantees people the right to collective bargaining if they want and if they choose that for themselves.

Bill C-7 helps set a framework for collective bargaining, but we also know that Bill is not necessary, although it is desirable if the government gets it right. It will have certain things that RCMP members have said they want: one national bargaining unit, binding arbitration, and some other features. That is good. It makes sense to have a unique framework for the RCMP, in terms of collective bargaining.

However, Bill C-7 does not give them that. The RCMP has the right to collective bargaining right now. In fact, there are two active applications before the labour board to represent RCMP members. One is by the NPF, for a national bargaining unit, and the other is by the AMPMQ, to represent members only in Quebec. I will come back to that in a bit.

This is where we are. Bill C-7 is not the government conferring collective bargaining rights to the RCMP members. That is a right they won; that is a right that is theirs irrespective of the point of view of any government of the day. That is something that has been guaranteed to them by the Supreme Court.

We are glad to see the exclusions being removed and the government ultimately agreeing with the NDP suggestion at committee and here in the House of Commons last May, which was to get rid of those exclusions.

However, we do have concerns that the management rights clause, which is being put in place of the exclusions, may be used as a way to reintroduce those exclusions by other means. It may be that we could dispel those concerns over time, if we had the time to study this properly. It is true that in many cases there are management rights clauses, either in collective agreements or in legislation. That is okay.

Government Orders

However, some of the language is interesting. In the Senate amendment, the Senate essentially said that the management rights of the RCMP would include anything having to do with the human resources powers conferred to the RCMP commissioner under the RCMP Act. What we have heard from the government is that it did not agree with that, and it is going to change that. It wants a more targeted management rights clause.

The word used by the parliamentary secretary on Friday in debate is “targeted”, not “limited”, so the government changed the language from management rights having to do with the human resources authority granted to the commissioner under the RCMP Act to a management rights clause that enshrines the power of the commissioner to ensure effective operations. That sounds, on the face of it, pretty good. Who would not want the operations of the RCMP to be effective?

However, the arguments made by the commissioner before committee, both at the House and the Senate, for the exclusions were essentially saying that all these things have to be excluded because to not exclude them would impede the effective operations of the RCMP.

• (1155)

I think RCMP members, and Canadians, have a right to feel suspect that this management rights clause, I would argue, while it may be more targeted from a functional point of view on the effectiveness of the force, is nevertheless broader in that it allows the commissioner to reach outside of his existing authority under the RCMP Act for human resource issues only—there is an itemized list in section 20.2(1), (a) through (l)—and interpret that to mean just about whatever the commissioner may want to have it mean, depending on what is being brought to the table.

There are reasonable concerns about that. I think more time is needed to examine that to see if this is just going to be another way for the RCMP commissioner to reintroduce exclusions. I would say, even though we may be able to challenge the RCMP commissioner's interpretation of that language—the RCMP commissioner may not be the final authority on that—what it does mean is that when a new bargaining unit, if the RCMP members do choose to certify one, brings things to the table, they can end up in lengthy delays, first at the labour board, potentially, and then in court, trying to define what “effective operations” means. Then we are going to have someone at the labour board, presumably, weighing in on whether the commissioner is right about what it takes to run effective operations as the RCMP.

It is not clear to me that this management rights clause does not provide another way of introducing some of those exclusions. It is not clear to me that it is not going to trigger lengthy and onerous processes in order to, ultimately, be able to define that language because it is not defined by the government what “effective operations” actually means, so there is no limited scope to that definition offered by the government. I think that is something we are concerned about.

With respect to grievances, the government says it does not want grievances filed under the PSLRA and under the RCMP Act. Grievances should rest in one place, so we do not have dual claims.

Again, on the surface, that does make some sense. That sounds like a common-sense argument, just as it sounds pretty good when the President of the Treasury Board says we have already debated this for 16 hours. However, then we look into the details and we wonder if maybe that is not a bit misleading.

The thrust of many of the government's arguments with respect to Bill C-7 is that it wants to align RCMP labour relations better with the pre-existing model of the public service. However here, all of a sudden, what we are seeing is the grievance process carved out and put under the RCMP Act. Rather than trying to have the maximum number of grievances happen under the PSLRA, we are getting the maximum number happening under the RCMP Act.

There are two issues with that; one has to do, in a very practical sense, with what that means in the workplace. The non-commissioned officers of the RCMP are being deemed public servants. That is a process that is happening and will be complete sometime in 2018. What that means is that we may have an RCMP officer and a civilian member working side by side in the same office—like a divisional headquarters, for instance—dealing with sexual harassment from the same superior officer, and it is going to have two different grievance processes. One is going to happen under the PSLRA, and an independent third party, essentially, oversees that grievance process. However, for the officer, that grievance process is going to happen under the RCMP Act. We know that, at the end of the day, it is the commissioner who ultimately rules on that.

In fact, we just had a report come out yesterday that said that part of the problem in the institution and the culture of the RCMP is that grievances ultimately get determined in-house by the commissioner. One of the recommendations was to move away from that.

The report that came out just yesterday from the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission, called “Report into Workplace Harassment in the RCMP”, says:

...unlike public service employees who have the right to grieve the outcome of a harassment complaint in accordance with the procedures set out in their collective agreement (including arbitration before an independent third party), RCMP members still do not have access to an impartial third party appeals body.

That is because their grievances go through the RCMP Act.

What the government is doing in its response directly contradicts the advice of the report that came out yesterday, which said that grievance processes need to get further away from the commissioner, not closer to the commissioner, and it is doing it in a way that actually deviates from its mainline argument for most of what it is talking about, which is to bring RCMP labour relations practices into closer conformity with the rest of the public service. It feels a bit as if there is some cherry-picking going on, in terms of when to apply the argument for harmonizing public service labour relations and RCMP labour relations and when, when it is convenient either to the government or management—it is not always clear—to have things dealt with separately under the uniqueness of the RCMP.

Government Orders

•(1200)

We are concerned that there are issues of fairness both, as I say, in the concrete case of the workplace and also in terms of the general arguments provided by the government. It bears saying that one of the problems with this process is that too often it has been too difficult to determine the difference between government interests and management interests in this debate. We know that stakeholders did not get a sneak peak at the government's response. That is why I asked the President of the Treasury Board if RCMP management did and if RCMP management had special input into this process that other groups did not have. I note that we did not get a straight answer to that question. We got an answer to another question that was not asked.

If the government is trying, which I think it should, to give the perception that it is not tied at the hip to management in this process, but to actually be an independent third party arbiter that is trying to set up free and fair collective bargaining, I have to say that so far, it has done a very poor job of that.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks and noted that the focus tended to be on how to simultaneously govern the RCMP as public servants and also as police officers. It is a challenge that municipalities, provinces, and other authorities right across this country have insofar as police having duties which are completely different from the civil service in terms of the management structure, as well as the execution of those duties, and the powers those duties contain.

Would the member opposite not agree that we cannot treat them as civil servants, pure and simple, precisely because of the extraordinary powers that they have? Therefore, we need to custom fit a separate collective agreement around the police component of the RCMP workforce in order to make sure the law enforcement components of it are treated separately. Subsequent to that, if he acknowledges that, is it not for the RCMP itself and management to set out the terms and effectiveness of those relationships and not necessarily something Parliament should impose from afar?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more. There are unique aspects to the RCMP. RCMP members would tell us that. They think they should have a special framework for bargaining, and that is why we support, in principle, Bill C-7. Our dispute has been with the details of how that is going to be implemented.

Yes, absolutely, there needs to be a unique bargaining framework. Our point has been that, yes, that should be determined by management and the union at the table. Our concern has been that the government's approach, in our view, has too often not been distinguishable from management's approach. There are some broken aspects of the institution right now, which is what the CRCC report yesterday talked about, that not all is well within the RCMP.

Our concern is that giving layer after layer of protection to management in the legislation would actually legislate some of the broken aspects of the current culture and not allow management and the union to work that out. We believe that having a good union with full capability to bring things to the table and work things out at the

bargaining table and job sites effectively is a good way to start correcting some of what is wrong in the culture of the RCMP and that the government may be interfering with that by the way it is protecting management in legislation.

•(1205)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, from the comments my colleague made, it is clear that the bill is very complex in terms of the changes that have been brought forward and hence, adequate debate needs to take place in the House. Of course, the government has chosen to impose time allocation.

The member raised a point which is very important with respect to different points of view between management and stakeholders. I have an example from one of my constituents, who raised the issue on another bill, Bill C-4, which was meant to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. At committee, he highlighted the fact that his employee was invited to the committee to offer a different point of view from his own. A case in point is that management opposed Bill C-4, but the employee of the company did not agree with management. That is a very important distinction. Hence, it is important to ensure that those voices are heard as well.

I wonder if the member would elaborate on that distinction, the importance of it, and how the process the government has embarked on falls short.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, this really has been part of the story. It has been a long story now, because the need for legislation creating a framework for collective bargaining for RCMP members has been before the government and before the House almost since we convened. Through that process, there are many who felt that the government is in a very close working relationship with management on this and that it is simply not the case that prospective bargaining agents who are providing the voice of rank and file members have had the same access to government and the same influence on government when coming up with these rules.

For the NDP, the role the government should be playing is as an independent arbiter. There was a decision made by the Supreme Court which said that RCMP members should have the right to free and fair collective bargaining, and the role of government should be to have gone out and figured out what are those aspects that are unique to the RCMP that call for a special framework.

We heard from RCMP members that they want one national bargaining unit. They want binding arbitration and they do not want the right to strike. Those are the important elements of Bill C-7, but beyond that, a lot of our debate, particularly with respect to the exclusions, has been about how much of what management does not want to have to deal with is management going to be exempted from dealing with through the legislation. A lot of people have felt that the government is simply too close to management on those issues. That is a problem because even if it is not the case, it certainly creates the perception that RCMP management is calling the shots.

Government Orders

I will give another example of where the government has helped to make a mess where there need not have been one. The period of 11 months from getting the Senate amendments until now was way longer than it had to be. What happened in April, just a couple of months ago, eight months after the Senate amendments, was that two organizations applied for certification. One is making an application to be a national bargaining agent, which would be allowed under Bill C-7, but the other is making an application to represent Quebec members only, which would not be allowed once Bill C-7 passes. I have heard from members who now feel that if Bill C-7 had passed earlier, they would not have had a problem, but now that these applications have been made, they feel that the government's rush to get this through effectively amounts to taking sides between one applicant or the other. When the legislation passes, and that is the question that is now before the labour board, it will rule one of those applications out.

By needlessly delaying, the Liberals have created at least a perception that they are taking sides which need not have been created. They created a lot of legal uncertainty and for the organization that has applied to represent Quebec members only, a lot of needless work, because at the end of the day, this is not going to happen for them if the government gets this through.

An hon. member: Don't take sides.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I am just saying that is what we have been hearing and I think it is unfortunate to be in a position where the government is perceived to be taking sides by anyone. It did not have to be that way. We just had to have this conversation two months ago.

•(1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his very coherent answer to the questions asked. He is very knowledgeable about labour issues, the right to unionize, and collective bargaining.

Just now, I clearly heard him ask the government why it took its time on this bill. There is an inexplicable 11-month delay. Some members are saying that they should not take sides in this matter.

I would like my colleague to tell us, then, how exactly the government can justify such a delay. Either it was incompetent or lazy, or it acted out of self-interest.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, this is a problem, and it is not one that the government can say in good faith that it was not aware of, because it is one that we have raised.

We have said that we need to get Bill C-7 back to the House, because it is creating legal uncertainty for prospective bargaining agents. Exactly because Bill C-7 is not what confers the right of collective bargaining on RCMP members, because it is a decision of the Supreme Court, they are allowed to apply it at any time under the existing rules. Therefore, because the NDP agrees with what the government is saying, if not what it does, that there is justification for a unique collective bargaining framework for RCMP members, although we may disagree about the details of what should be in it, we thought it was really important to get that in place as soon as

possible. We knew and the government knew that there were prospective bargaining agents out there getting people to sign cards, demonstrating interest in the lead-up potentially to a vote. Bill C-4 has not gone through the Senate; the government cannot seem to accomplish that, so those agents do not know if they would need to have a vote or whether a card check is going to work. There is a lot of legal uncertainty.

We have been saying for a long time that the government needs to act on Bill C-4 and get it done. It needs to act on Bill C-7 and get it done. Otherwise, the government is risking getting into a situation where people start to act in the current legal context and then the rug is pulled out from underneath their feet, and all of a sudden the rules that they were organizing and applying under are not the same rules that their application is being treated by.

That is exactly the situation that is developing. It was not hard to see or imagine that would happen. It is a real shame that we have reached this point. The government needs to do a better job of extricating itself from this, lest it be perceived as being partisan in an area where it really ought not to be.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Oakville North—Burlington.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of the government's motion related to Bill C-7. This piece of legislation is important for both the RCMP and for Canadians. It is a step forward in Canadian labour relations.

As we all know, the bill originates with the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada more than two years ago, in January 2015. There is some urgency for us to enact this piece of legislation into law so that the RCMP can be the best police force in the world, with good management practices matching the ability of our RCMP officers to keep Canadians safe.

The court found that certain parts of the RCMP labour relations regime were in fact unconstitutional because they prevented the formation of an independent RCMP employee organization. The government took steps, including extensive consultation, to bring this framework into compliance with the Supreme Court's ruling, and Bill C-7 is the result.

I differ with the position of the previous speaker by saying that there has been extensive consultation. The bill has been under a microscope for a great deal of time in a committee of the House of Commons and a committee of the Senate, as well as through debate in the House of Commons and debate in the Senate. It is now time for us to act quickly on this motion to ensure that we can have effective collective bargaining for the very hard-working members of the RCMP.

Government Orders

With the passage of this bill, RCMP members and reservists would, for the first time, have a labour relations framework in place that would allow them to choose whether or not to be represented in negotiations by an employee organization, something that other police services in Canada already have. Almost 100 years ago, the Vancouver police union received its charter and was established with the mandate to effectively and democratically represent its members as a bargaining unit under the British Columbia labour code. It is time for us to act so that Canadians have a similar approach to policing in Canada.

Action is something that RCMP officers know a lot about. As the chair of the public safety and national security committee, I want to commend members of the RCMP for consistently and constantly serving and protecting Canadians with diligence, with grace, and with a tremendous competence that Canadians have begun to appreciate more and more. Whether it is diving into icy water to rescue a woman in distress or protecting us in this very place, RCMP officers demonstrate their personal dedication and self-sacrifice in service of others, and now we as members of this chamber need to reciprocate and take action to help them, to serve them, and to protect them.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness are strongly committed to whatever action is necessary to help RCMP members, trainees, and employees feel safe and respected among their colleagues and supervisors.

A number of steps have been taken since 2014 to protect RCMP members in the workplace. These include measures to address harassment and conflict management as well as promote a healthy and respectful workplace.

The RCMP continues its ongoing efforts to improve its work environment, including a modernized code of conduct, a streamlined harassment investigation and resolution process, and improved training for harassment investigators. Bill C-7 builds on these efforts to implement a robust labour relations regime for the RCMP. To that end, the government has given thorough consideration to the Senate's amendments and is now ready to move forward.

The government's response significantly addresses the main concerns that we heard at the House of Commons standing committee as well as in the Senate, and I am very proud to support the government's response to the Senate amendments.

In the spirit of compromise that is so important in an institution like ours, the government is willing to accept the removal of all restrictions on what may be included in collective agreements and arbitral awards that are specific to the RCMP. These restrictions on what could be collectively bargained for were the focal points of the criticism that we heard at committee and that we are now acting on.

Sometimes this kind of conversation takes time. However, that conversation has been had. I stress to members of this chamber that the reality is we need to act quickly and effectively. We have considered, and now is the time to act.

•(1215)

That is why I am pleased to report that the government's response would allow the employer and any future RCMP member bargaining agent to engage in meaningful discussions in good faith on topics of

importance to the RCMP members and reservists who were excluded from collective bargaining rights under the original version of Bill C-7.

As a result, matters associated with transfers, appraisals, harassment, and general aspects of workplace wellness, including the promotion of a respectful workplace and early conflict resolution, could be discussed at the bargaining table and included in a collective agreement or arbitration award. Of course, conditions of work, such as hours of work, scheduling, call-back, and reporting conditions could also be collectively bargained, as could leave provisions, such as designated paid holidays, vacation leave, sick leave, and parental leave. Labour relations matters, such as terms and conditions for grievance procedures and procedures around classification and workplace adjustment, are also part of that process.

The proposal before us today also accepts the idea of a management rights clause, but proposes implementing a more targeted clause that focuses on protecting the authorities that the RCMP commissioner needs in order to ensure effective police operations. This is a balanced approach. The reality is that the bargaining unit would have the right to engage in conversations at the bargaining table about issues important to RCMP members, and management would reserve the right to ensure that Canadians are safe and protected and that we have operational institutional effectiveness at the RCMP, not by excluding anything in collective bargaining but by ensuring we have a targeted approach to make sure the RCMP functions properly, as Canadians would want.

As I am sure all my hon. colleagues on these benches do, the Government of Canada takes seriously the responsibility to protect the safety and security of Canadians. This amended management rights clause supports that responsibility.

Now let us consider why the motion disagrees with the removal of restrictions that replicate those applying to other areas of the federal public service.

As our national police service, the RCMP must have a labour regime that is aligned with and consistent with the fundamental framework for labour relations and collective bargaining that exists within the whole of the federal public service. As such, Bill C-7 extends to RCMP members many general exclusions that already apply in the rest of the public service, such as staffing, pensions, organization of work, and the assignment of duties.

With respect to pensions, while the public service pension plan has never been the subject of collective bargaining under the Public Service Labour Relations Act, or its predecessor, the Public Service Staff Relations Act, the federal government has traditionally consulted with employee representatives on pension issues and is committed to continuing that conversation, negotiation, and consultation.

Public sector pensions have established statutory pension advisory committees whose membership is composed of employer, employee, and pensioner representatives. These committees review matters respecting the administration, design, and funding of the benefits provided under the superannuation acts and make recommendations to the responsible minister about those matters. This is an activity we would continue.

Government Orders

When it comes to the certification process, I do not believe that the certification of a bargaining agent to represent RCMP members and reservists should require a secret ballot. We need to be consistent with the government's proposed law, Bill C-4, and it would be reasonable that an organization wanting to represent RCMP members should not be subject to certification processes different from those of other organizations under federal labour relations legislation.

Finally, the government proposes to not proceed with expanding the mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to hear grievances on a wider range of matters relating to terms and conditions of employment. That would be inconsistent with its work with the rest of the federal public service.

Now is the time to act on Bill C-7. The House of Commons standing committee deliberated it thoroughly and thoughtfully, and heard concerns. The Senate has deservedly done its work and has appropriately amended it. The government has considered those amendments and has determined that some of them fall in line with the government's proposed agenda with respect to the RCMP certification process.

I am pleased to support Bill C-7 and welcome all other members to support the bill and our amendments as we go forward.

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted in the speech by my colleague from Don Valley West that he used, with respect to the management rights clause, the words “more targeted” and not “more limited”. That is an important difference. We on this side of the House are still trying to get our heads around exactly how the RCMP commissioner's right to maintain an effective operation is defined and how broad a scope that right actually gives him. It is not defined anywhere else, as far as we know.

Perhaps as a member of the governing party and supporter of the bill, the member for Don Valley West has some information. New Democrats are concerned that when he talks about RCMP members being able to bring their concerns to the table in good faith, have management hear them, and then make a decision about what they think constitutes effective operations of the force, it will be a little like the Liberals listening to Canadians and saying, “You guys can say what you want. We will come to town halls”, and then doing what they want.

I cite electoral reform as an example: Canadians had the right to consult, and the Liberals listened and heard, and then did whatever they wanted. In fact, in this case they completely contradicted the testimony we heard at committee and everything else.

We do not want RCMP management to have the right to behave as the Liberals do on issues that matter to Canadians; we want to make sure that something effective can come out of negotiations at the table, and we are not convinced that we are there.

What exactly does it mean to give the RCMP commissioner the right to ensure the effective operation of the force, and where is that defined? If we could be pointed to the document, that would be great.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that RCMP management needs to consider thoughtfully a number of issues that

ensure the safety of Canadians. What the government is proposing is absolutely consistent with what it believes about collective bargaining. With collective bargaining, it is very important to ensure that everything is on the table that needs to be there, so the number of exclusions in the initial draft of the bill has been reduced to zero.

I am very pleased that the government is accepting the proposal from the other place that would ensure RCMP members have every opportunity to express themselves and negotiate issues of harassment, of appraisal, of relocation. These are the kinds of things they were asking for, and that is consistent with evidence we heard at committee.

The committee also heard that for effective functioning, for the proper appropriation of the authority given to the commissioner of RCMP, management needs to reserve rights to ensure they can target and appropriately use their authority under the legislation given to them by Parliament to ensure that Canadians are safe and that the operations of the RCMP are not limited.

RCMP officers face different challenges in different parts of the country. As a long-time resident of Yukon, which is M Division, I worked closely with the RCMP there. The reality is that some things are different in Yukon from what they are in other parts of Canada. Other places where a force is contracted to a province are different from the places where the RCMP is a national police force. The RCMP commissioner and the new commissioner who will be appointed sometime in the near future need to have that authority so that Canadians can rest assured that the operations of the RCMP are effective and safe.

• (1225)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here today because the government received amendments sent unanimously by the members of the Senate. In other words, they studied the bill and sent it back here to the government for consideration in June of last year. One might say that 11 and a half months is almost a year.

Today the opposition is being told that we have limited time to speak to those amendments. It is important to note that they were unanimously passed in the Senate and that in some ways the Senate did the hard work in scrutinizing this bill, which is welcome. Then we were told last Friday morning—I first heard this late Thursday evening—that this is the government's position. That is 11 and a half months later.

I asked the President of the Treasury Board earlier why all of a sudden the Liberal government needs to rush this bill into existence. What is the rush? It took your government almost a year. Perhaps you could shed some light on why we are now placed in a position of having limited time to speak to these amendments.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will point out that we have 45 seconds left and that I am sure the hon. member wants the response from the hon member for Don Valley West, not me.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to thank the members of the public safety and national security committee that considered this legislation very strongly and at length, as did the Senate.

Government Orders

This is a lesson in parliamentary democracy. We have two Houses. We have a government that listens to both Houses. We have good deliberations in committee in both places. The government receives those recommendations and takes its time to deliberate. I am sure that it looked at the evidence heard in our committee and in the committee of the Senate and was able to take due deliberation time.

I also want to thank the members on the other side of the House on our committee, because they were effective in their questioning. They were effective in the way they brought forward issues, and I think they are probably very happy with the ultimate result.

I think they can rest assured and will support us in getting this piece of legislation done quickly so RCMP officers and Canadians can have a mutually beneficial relationship and Canadians will be safe.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill C-7. Let me begin by saying that the government appreciates the thoughtful consideration given by the Senate to this historic piece of legislation that would enshrine in law the collective bargaining rights of regular RCMP members and reservists.

Our national mounted police service has been keeping peace across the land for almost a century and a half. I would like to thank members of the RCMP for their service and also for their advocacy on this legislation.

The only police force in Canada not to have the right to engage in collective bargaining has been the RCMP. The labour relations regime this bill would create would mark the beginning of a new era in the history of the RCMP.

Bill C-7 has several elements that reflect the clear preferences expressed by RCMP members during the consultations with members that occurred during the summer of 2015. Specifically, members indicated that they wanted a labour relations framework that would provide for a single national bargaining unit, a union that would primarily focus on representing RCMP members, and recourse to binding arbitration if a collective agreement could not be negotiated. Bill C-7 would create this framework.

Bill C-7 would also build on previous efforts to implement a robust labour relations regime for the RCMP, efforts that have included a number of measures to promote a healthy and respectful workplace. For example, in support of the 2014 amendments to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act, several of the RCMP's human resources management processes, policies, and procedures were updated. Among these were, first, a new investigation and resolution of harassment complaints policy that provides greater clarity and a single streamlined approach for dealing with complaints; second, a process to address misconduct in a more timely and effective manner and at the lowest appropriate level; third, a new code of conduct that specifically identifies harassment as a contravention of the code; fourth, an amended training curriculum that specifically addresses respect in the workplace and harassment; and, finally, an informal conflict management program.

Moreover, in February 2016, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness asked the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission to undertake a comprehensive review of the RCMP's

policies and procedures on workplace harassment and to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations the commission made in 2013. The commission reviewed the adequacy, appropriateness, sufficiency, and clarity of these policies, procedures, and guidelines for preventing and addressing allegations regarding workplace harassment in the RCMP.

Further, in July 2016, the Minister of Public Safety announced the appointment of Sheila Fraser as a special adviser. Her role was to provide advice and recommendations to the minister regarding the application of various policies and processes by the RCMP after the filing of legal proceedings against the organization in four specific cases. The recommendations made by Ms. Fraser and the commission will be carefully reviewed and will inform further work on improving the workplace of the RCMP.

While the RCMP has made strides with the initiatives, programs, and policies it has implemented, these two reviews will be useful in helping the minister fulfill the mandate the Prime Minister has given him to ensure that the RCMP is free from harassment. The government is strongly committed to whatever action is necessary to help RCMP members and employees feel safe and respected among their colleagues and supervisors.

As a member of the status of women committee, I and the other members of the committee have studied the issue of gender-based violence and harassment as well as barriers to the economic security and workplace leadership of women. We have heard that harassment in the workplace is a large barrier to women's participation in the economy, so I am very pleased to see the government taking action to ensure that female members of the RCMP can feel safe and respected at work.

Our proposed response to the amendments would strengthen the actions I have outlined by increasing the scope of what can be bargained, including harassment, an issue I brought up with the commissioner at the public safety committee. The government's proposed response meaningfully addresses the concerns with Bill C-7.

The bill we are debating today seeks to accept certain amendments and to amend or not accept others. Let me begin with the government's proposal to accept the removal of all restrictions on what may be included in collective agreements that are specific to the RCMP. As a result, matters associated with transfers, appraisals, harassment, and general aspects of workplace wellness, including the promotion of a respectful workplace and early conflict resolution, could be discussed at the bargaining table and included in the collective agreement or an arbitral award.

● (1230)

With this one change, we would increase the scope of what could be bargained considerably. I am pleased that the government has heard the concerns of the Senate and has acted on them, in particular on the issue of exclusions.

Government Orders

The proposal before us today would also amend the management rights clause adopted by the Senate. It proposes implementing a more targeted management rights clause that would focus on protecting the authorities the RCMP commissioner needs to ensure effective police operations. This approach would preserve the commissioner's authority to manage the RCMP and would ensure the operational integrity of the police service and the broader accountability of the RCMP for the safety of Canadians. The Government of Canada takes the responsibility to protect the safety and security of Canadians seriously. This clause would support that responsibility.

Let me now turn to the proposal to reject the requirement for a secret ballot vote for the certification of a bargaining agent to represent RCMP members and reservists. Our government believes that there should be a choice between a secret ballot and a card check system. A secret ballot only system is inconsistent with providing a fair and balanced process of certification and properly recognizing the role of bargaining agents in that process.

Let me now speak to our proposal to not proceed with expanding the mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to hear grievances on a wider range of matters relating to terms and conditions of employment. Under the existing Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board has jurisdiction to hear grievances related to the interpretation or application of a collective agreement. Accepting this expansion would be inconsistent with the role of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board in relation to the rest of the federal public service. What is more, there are already specialized grievance and appeal processes established under the RCMP Act to deal with these matters. In fact, such an expansion would create two different grievance processes that would apply to RCMP members, allowing them to file identical grievances under both the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the RCMP Act. This could potentially lead to conflicting decisions and undermine the commissioner's ability to ensure effective police operations.

Instead, and consistent with the rest of the federal public service, Bill C-7 would allow represented RCMP members and reservists, with the support of their bargaining agent, to file grievances pursuant to the Public Service Labour Relations Act on the interpretation or application of a collective agreement or arbitral award. Such grievances would be adjudicated by the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board. RCMP members' right to file grievances and appeals to address workplace issues would continue to be administered pursuant to the RCMP Act.

I heard repeatedly from RCMP members about the exclusions contained in Bill C-7. I believe that the proposed response to the Senate amendments would meaningfully address the concerns with respect to Bill C-7 by increasing the scope of the issues that could be bargained. The amendments would also ensure that the employer and any future RCMP member bargaining agent could engage in meaningful discussions, in good faith, on topics of importance to RCMP members and reservists.

At the same time, the proposal would take into account the operational integrity of the RCMP as a police organization. It would ensure alignment with the labour relations regime that applies to federal public service employees. With these amendments, Bill C-7

would continue to respect the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision by providing RCMP members and reservists with a meaningful process for collective bargaining.

I thank the RCMP members for their patience as this bill moves through the legislative process.

● (1235)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask about the member's comment that the government believes in choice between a card check system and a secret ballot.

That sounds good, but on the other hand, if I am a member of a workplace that is certified through a card check system, I actually do not ever get a choice. I just wake up one morning, go to work, and am told, "Oh, well, the card check process happened. You are part of a union now." I did not get to vote. I did not get to talk to my colleagues, and nobody ever explained the process. I came into work one day, and there was a union. That is not choice, I would submit.

I would say that a good legislative framework on unionization would ensure that choice is invested in every single member of that workplace such that members have an opportunity to deliberate and then decide in an environment where they are protected from intimidation, either by management or other workers. A secret ballot is what we have in this country for other elections, because it reflects that principle.

Why does that member think, and why does the government think, that in the sort of misguided name of choice, some workers should actually not even be consulted until unionization is really a *fait accompli*?

● (1240)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, on this issue, the two sides of the House have a fundamental disagreement on the best way to proceed with the formation of a union and a fair and balanced approach to unionization. Giving the union the choice of which method to use is consistent with what our government has proposed in various legislation on labour relations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how can my colleague explain the fact that this legislation was forgotten on a shelf for nearly a year and that the House now has to rush to make a decision? The Liberals are saying that this is urgent, but they have been asleep at the switch for nearly a year.

What happened?

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, as a member of the public safety committee, the bill received extensive consultation. We had considerable discussion on it. It then went to the Senate for further consultation. Then it came back to the government. I am quite pleased with what we have before us today. We repeatedly heard at committee what they wanted to have in place. Therefore, I am quite pleased the government listened to what the Senate said to us with respect to the exclusions. The one issue I heard about more than anything else was the fact there were exclusions in the bill. We have removed those, and here it is today.

RCMP members have told me they would like to see the legislation move quickly. In fact, one woman has contacted me almost weekly. Therefore, I think she and other members will be quite pleased that the bill has come to the House and we are moving on it.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and friend from Oakville North—Burlington for her service on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today is a good day. The RCMP will now be able to bargain the issue of harassment. Could my colleague expand on what she has heard and what her views are on the importance of this step today?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his advocacy on gender equality in the workplace. It has been an issue for the RCMP. We have discussed this at the public safety committee and I have questioned the commissioner on the issue.

To see us moving forward, allowing members to have that issue on the table for negotiation, is critical. It is extremely important for RCMP members, and in particular female RCMP members, who predominantly have been subjected to harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the House that the official opposition respects the Supreme Court's decision that the RCMP officers are entitled to bargain collectively. The Conservative Party supports the role of the mounted police and we thank the members for the great work they do on the front lines, serving Canadians every day.

It was interesting to hear the prior speaker from the government side say that we needed to move fast. It has taken the government almost 12 months, since June 2016, to bring the legislation to the House in response to the Senate amendments. RCMP families and members have been waiting that 12 months.

It is well known within policing circles across Canada that RCMP members have fallen behind significantly in their remuneration and their benefits as a result of that 12 months and the fact that this issue has taken so much time to come back to the House.

When members across the aisle say that they meet with members and that they will be happy, of course they will be happy because we are finally dealing with it. However, since the time of the decision, it has taken the Liberals two years to get to here. Clearly, this could have happened a lot sooner. Today we are told that we will only have five days of debate, that the Liberals are shutting the debate down. The reality is that we will have only two days of debate.

I will give a quick background on what is known as the RCMP unionization bill.

The Supreme Court ruled, in the *Mounted Police Association of Ontario vs. Canada*, that the existing labour relations regime violated the rights of the RCMP members under section 2(d) Freedom of Association of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court ordered the government to remedy this charter breach.

As the official opposition, we took the position that the original bill, while a reasonable response to the court's ruling, could not be supported as it denied the RCMP members the right to vote or, as some people refer to it, a secret ballot in the certification process.

In June 2016, the Senate returned a significantly amended Bill C-7 to the House. Let me talk about those Senate amendments. These Senate amendments came back, after the Senate's scrutiny and study. They were unanimously supported by all members of all parties on all sides within the Senate. The amendments included: first, the right to vote or the secret ballot certification process; second, confirmed and clarified the existence of management rights for the RCMP commissioner; third, removed a number of items excluded from negotiations in the original bill, such as transfers, relocations and dismissals, uniforms and equipment; and fourth, enabled an arbitrator in a decision to consider not only the collective agreement but the legislative context as well.

Here is the government's response to those four amendments, which we received late last Thursday, early Friday. I will go at those four issues one at a time.

First, the government disagrees with the creation of the right to vote through a secret ballot. Second, it agrees with the RCMP commissioner, management rights and amendment. Third, it agrees with the removal of all exclusions. Fourth, it disagrees with the broader interpretation of grievances.

Clearly the government must take action to restore the confidence of the front-line police officers in the RCMP's management and restore the confidence in Canadians in the RCMP. That means ensuring the RCMP pay is in line with the pay of other police forces. It also means working to ensure appropriate recruitment and retention programs.

● (1245)

As mentioned, in January 2015, in the *Mounted Police Association of Ontario vs. Canada*, the Supreme Court said that the labour relations law violated the rights of RCMP members under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The majority ruling stated, "What is required is not a particular model, but a regime that does not substantially interfere with meaningful collective bargaining and thus complies with" the freedom of association.

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I remind the House that in its ruling the court gave the government 12 months to remedy the charter breach.

In January 2016, the government requested and received an extension from the court until April 2016. To be fair, this was not an unreasonable request as there had been a general election in the interim. The government did after all deserve an opportunity to get it right. Well, the Liberals did not get it right.

Again to be fair, the bill in its original form was, for the most part, a reasonable response to the court's ruling. Members on this side of the House did take the time to point that out when it was originally debated almost a year ago. I will discuss how we did that later.

We also expressed our willingness to move this legislation quickly and to work constructively with the government. All of us as members of Parliament represent members of the RCMP in our ridings. Some of us know them closer than others, but we all had heard from them through our constituency offices as to what the issues were with respect to their importance.

In fact, there was some discussion, anecdotally, in my riding of the reason why we was here. It was not because the bill had been delayed even further. It was because of the yellow ribbon campaign of the front-line officers who began to take stripes off some of their uniforms and put yellow ribbons to replace them to express the fact that nothing was happening. Suddenly when they did that, we got action.

We also expressed our willingness to move legislation quickly, but it had a fatal flaw. Specifically, it denied the RCMP members a right to vote by secret ballot. By doing so, it denied those RCMP members with a choice free of intimidation from all sides on whether they wanted representation and who would represent them in collective bargaining negotiations.

The bill was returned to the House amended to include that right to vote secret ballot clause. Let us not forget that. The actual mover of the motion in the Senate on the government side, who happened to be, by the way, an RCMP member at one time, unanimously agreed to send it back to the House with that included. Also, this amendment was supported by the government bill in the Senate.

In June 2016, the Senate returned the amended bill to the House. For months, the government told us it was considering the Senate's amendments "as quickly as we can". Here we are nearly a year later and we are just getting the government's response. It has been nearly two and a half years since the Supreme Court brought down its original ruling. One cannot help but wonder why there is suddenly a rush to get the bill passed after such a long delay.

Perhaps the yellow ribbon campaign was the catalyst, launched in response to an equally long-awaited pay package. Perhaps it is the increasing frustration from more and more RCMP officers who are expressing openly with RCMP management and with the government on a number of issues. Unfortunately, RCMP members had to be brought to the brink before the government finally woke up.

• (1250)

To quote the commissioner, "...I tell you all solemnly: we went to bat and our Minister...went to bat, and there was no better package to be had at this time."

If true, I give the minister full credit. However, guess who was the only person in a position to strike the minister out when he went to bat for those RCMP members? It was the Prime Minister.

As mentioned earlier, the Senate's amendments introduced a secret ballot or right to vote certification process. As well, they confirmed and clarified the existence of management rights for the RCMP commissioner, they removed a number of items excluded as non-negotiable in the original bill, and they enabled an arbitrator in a decision to consider not only a future collective agreement but legislative context as well.

I am glad to see that the government has finally come forward with its response to the Senate, even if it did take nearly a year or so.

We continue to support the general direction of the bill. However, we simply cannot support any legislation that denies employees, especially RCMP members, their right to vote in a secret ballot, free of intimidation from all sides.

Earlier, my colleague rose on a question for the member who had just previously delivered a speech about this issue and how it is a fundamental right in our democracy for that secrecy of our vote. I could give many examples of how we defend this around the world, as a government. Over the years many members from the current government have asked to go to monitor elections in other countries, to monitor the fact that we hold sacred the right to be able to choose without intimidation from any side. One of the members I personally spoke with on this issue expressed to me his deep disappointment in the fact that the Senate amendment for the right to vote has been turned down by the government. As he relayed it to me, as was mentioned in another answer today, RCMP detachments take all forms, in terms of size, scale, and scope. We have many small detachments around the country and we have large detachments as well.

However, he pointed out that in the small detachments around the country that might have five or six members working there, maybe even less, how much of a role intimidation will play, in terms of how those members are asked to vote in this process, because the office has its superiors, it has members at all different ranks of membership in the RCMP and in their occupation. As he said, they really will not have a choice at all; they will have to be falling in line with their supervisors, essentially.

This is a crime that should not have happened, in terms of the government turning down what the Senate unanimously brought back as an amendment.

We are in support of our front-line members and we would like to see them have the direction that the bill is taking, giving them the collective rights.

I would like to make two last points. Number one, it has taken far too long for the government to get off its heels to bring it to the House, and number two, we will always protect the right to free voting.

• (1255)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my Conservative colleague's comments.

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The background to Bill C-7 that we are debating today is that the Conservative Party is essentially against appropriate collective bargaining rights, and those members showed that when they brought in anti-labour bills such as Bill C-525 and Bill C-377. Our government tabled Bill C-4 to put the discretion of certification back with the Public Service Labour Relations Board, where it used to be, to determine whether a secret ballot or a card check is the most appropriate. The board is committed to making sure that members' interests are reflected in the choice made.

That was the system we had until the previous Conservative government made those anti-union changes. When RCMP members were extensively consulted by the previous Conservative government, narrowing down the certification method to exclude a card-check system was not on their list of priorities.

The Conservative member is not reflecting the desire of RCMP members. He is not reflecting the fact that the dual system arbitrated through the Public Service Labour Relations Board has been in place successfully for many years.

Why would the member let this one element convince him to vote against all of the positives, like providing RCMP members with a labour relations opportunity, to be represented by a union, which is what they want and is what the Supreme Court ruled that they deserved to have? Why would he vote against that?

• (1300)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, let me correct the member. The Supreme Court did not say this is a right RCMP members need to have. Let me make that very clear. It is very misleading to say that the Supreme Court decision said that RCMP members should not have the right to vote for the secrecy of their vote. Let me be very clear on that.

Second, the basic fundamental of our democracy is based on the principle of free choice without intimidation. As I mentioned in my speech, we defend this around the world. Canada is a model of democracy and we are asked to go to other countries to make sure intimidation is not happening in those environments.

Constituent as well as RCMP members who are friends and neighbours have spoken to me about this issue. Until we are in that environment, we cannot fully understand the kind of things that can happen to sway our vote, and they are intimidating things.

To the point the member is making, it is a fundamental right, and we will stand on principle for that right.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a number of times from the government that we have had ample time to debate this issue. The Liberals have said that we have had 16 hours of debate on this legislation. What I find interesting about that claim is that it has a presumption buried in it, which is that the conversation that happens in the House is simply for the benefit of the Liberals, and they listen only when they want. They can leave and come up with their answer, and that is what we have to deal with.

The conversation that happens in Parliament is not just for the benefit of government legislative drafters. It is for Parliament, with the idea being that Parliament might want to weigh in and make some changes. The idea that we have been debating the content of

this motion for 16 hours, or whatever number the government wants to use, is false. I wonder if my hon. colleague wants to speak to the veracity of that claim.

I mentioned some issues earlier, and the member has mentioned some others, around how the grievance procedure is going to work, whether it is consistent with the CRCC recommendations that came out yesterday, and how exactly we are going to define the scope of the commissioner's power to maintain effective operations. These are all things we do not know and we are not part of the debate, to my memory. Perhaps the member has a different memory of events. Those were part of the original debate on Bill C-7, so there is genuinely new material for us to study and discuss to make sure we get this right, as the government claims, in the House anyway, that it would like to do.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for giving perspective and context to this, because he is absolutely right. It was a motion from the Senate to bring back these amendments, which have not been debated at all until today. Now, right from the onset, we have been given time allocation, which means the government does not really want the debate but wants to push it through as fast as it can, just as it has done on many other occasions in this House. This is not only a developing pattern, but it is a technique that it looks as if the current government will take from this point forward on legislation it wants to dictate to the rest of Parliament.

I continue to be reminded of how the Liberals arrived in this House early on as a government and tried to stuff Motion No. 6 down our throats to take away our ability to be an effective opposition. It is dictatorial. It is ramming it down the throats of the opposition. This is not what the Liberals were elected on, which was a platform of open debate in this House. This is exactly the way my colleague described it. This is not real debate. Rather, the government is taking something and dictating to the rest of Parliament that this is what it will do, which totally disrespects those of us in the opposition, and Parliament.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I sat in opposition, the Harper government brought in time allocation on well over 100 occasions. On a number of those occasions, I was sympathetic to the government saying that it only takes 12 members of the House to indefinitely delay any piece of legislation, with a little thought to the process. Even back then, when I was in opposition, I argued that we needed a responsible opposition that would sit down and work with the government to try to figure out the best way to advance legislation.

I wonder if the member across the way would recognize, as Stephen Harper did, that at times there is a need to use time allocation, because if the opposition refuses to see legislation pass, it would only take 12 members to cause a whole lot of havoc. I wonder if Mr. Harper was wrong those 100-plus times that he invoked time allocation.

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• (1305)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, what is curious in this whole debate so far today, including the questions during time allocation, is how the current government wants to paint itself by blaming the previous government for all the things it has done. When the Liberals went to the polls, they said they would be different and do things differently. They represented themselves to Canadians, presenting the things they would do to reform our Parliament. It is so unbecoming for the President of the Treasury Board, because the Liberals have come here today with the argument that all of the blame with respect to this bill should be placed on the previous government. It is a narrative that is worn out. The Liberals are doing the exact opposite of what they promised Canadians they would do, during the general election.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Knowing how good the government is at communications in general, since it just made Canadians' heads spin with two great press releases, what reason is there for limiting the time for debate today? Is the government just trying to cover up the fact that it has been asleep at the switch for nearly a year?

[*English*]

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Speaker, the question as to why it took 11 months was never answered. It was danced around by the President of the Treasury Board and everyone else whom we have asked today. The Liberals will not answer the question of why it took so long. Many of the RCMP members think it was the yellow ribbon campaign that pushed them to the brink. That said, it really boils down to what many are saying with respect to the current government, which is that Parliament is really a bit of an inconvenience for it. It is a bit of an inconvenience that it would have to go through the processes and scrutiny of this great Parliament, which is a real shame.

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore.

It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the government's proposed response to amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7. I applaud this bill and the process that has led to where we are today. It is clear that the government and members of the Senate both agree that we need to support regular RCMP members and reservists by creating a labour relations regime that promotes their right to collective bargaining.

Who could be more deserving of such support than the dedicated and proud members of Canada's national police service? These heroic men and women combat organized crime and defend our country against terrorists. They guard us from those who deal in illicit drugs and those who commit economic crimes. They provide contract policing services in eight provinces and three territories. This is by no means an exhaustive list of what these brave individuals do to protect Canadians. These men and women, recognized as a symbol of Canada around the world, deserve our respect.

The motion before us today would give members the respect they are due while addressing the key concerns of the Senate.

[*Translation*]

The first way the motion does that is by removing the RCMP-specific restrictions on what may be included in collective bargaining and arbitral awards.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Second, it would implement a more targeted management rights clause, which focuses on the authorities that the RCMP commissioner needs to ensure effective policing operations.

[*Translation*]

Together, these two amendments would broaden the scope of what can be debated and included in collective bargaining and constitute an effective response to the main criticisms regarding Bill C-7.

[*English*]

These amendments would ensure the employer and any future RCMP member bargaining agent could engage meaningfully in discussions in good faith on subjects of importance to RCMP members and reservists.

Allow me to provide a few examples of subject matter that could be included in a collective agreement or an arbitral award: first, matters commonly associated with harassment and workplace wellness, including, for example, the promotion of a respectful workplace, early conflict resolution, and workplace remediation; second, general aspects associated with the appointment and appraisals of RCMP members; third, criteria and timing for conducting the appraisals of RCMP members; and fourth, measures to mitigate the impact of discharges and demotions of RCMP members, including workforce adjustment provisions.

Clearly, the government has listened to the concerns raised and has expanded on what may be included in a collective agreement or an arbitral award. As is the practice for other negotiations in the public service, a wide range of other matters can be bargained and included in a collective agreement or an arbitral award. These include rates of pay, hours of work, and leave provisions, such as, designated paid holidays, vacation leave, sick leave, and parental leave.

I would also like to take this opportunity to comment on the management rights clause related to the RCMP commissioner's human resources management responsibilities. This clause was first suggested and adopted in the Senate, and we believe there is much merit to such a clause. In fact, it is proposed that the government adopt a more targeted management rights clause to focus on the authorities that the commissioner needs to ensure effective police operations.

The amended and more targeted management rights clause would allow all proposals related to matters that were covered by RCMP-specific restrictions in Bill C-7 as originally proposed to be discussed at the negotiating table. It would also allow the parties to potentially incorporate these matters in a collective agreement, except where the employer considers that they infringe on the authority of the RCMP commissioner to ensure effective police operations. Should the bargaining agent seek to go to arbitration, the chairperson of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board would decide whether the proposal infringes on management rights before the matter could be referred to arbitration.

The adoption of a management rights clause for the RCMP is consistent with the labour relations regime that applies to the rest of the federal public service.

Let me now turn to why it is important to preserve the restrictions that replicate those applying to other areas of the federal public service. Since 1967, matters that are a broad cross-sectional interest, such as pensions, are included for bargaining and dealt with under the legislation to ensure that the public interest is taken into account. Pensions for the rest of the public service are dealt with under the Public Service Superannuation Act. Pensions require a high degree of stability to assure pension plan members that their benefits are secure and will be delivered as expected.

However, the federal government has traditionally consulted with employee representatives on pension issues and is committed to continue this practice. In the case of the RCMP, the RCMP Superannuation Act requires that an RCMP pension advisory committee be established.

The RCMP is a national police service operating within the federal public administration. This is why the proposed labour relations regime for the RCMP was designed to align with the existing federal framework for labour relations and collective bargaining.

Unfortunately, I will not have time to speak to the government's proposed response to the other two amendments, one which concerns the secret ballot votes, and the other which addresses the mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board, but I would like to close with a clear and unequivocal statement.

The government is committed to supporting RCMP members and reservists by providing them with a meaningful process for collective bargaining. Our proposed response addresses the key concerns of the Senate. It also takes into account the RCMP's role as a police organization. Finally, it ensures that its labour relations regime is aligned with the regime that applies to other federal public servants.

● (1315)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give my colleague a chance to address the matter of the secret ballot with my question.

There seems to be a fairly significant contradiction between the Liberal government's defence of the secret ballot in corrupt United Nations commissions and agencies, for example, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights or the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which see secret ballots covering the way

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Canada voted for the election of non-democratic countries to significant positions on these bodies. Saudi Arabia is certainly notable in both of those cases.

How does the hon. member rationalize the objection to the secret ballot amendment before us today at the same time that she talks about respect for members of the RCMP?

Ms. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that we will bring some fairness back to the collective bargaining regime for members of the RCMP.

We are rejecting the amendment for secret ballots because it is at odds with Bill C-4, which would restore a fair and level playing field to labour relations. We believe that the labour relations board should have the ability to decide whether a vote or a card check is the most appropriate and fair method for certification on a case-by-case basis. There is no reason to treat the RCMP differently in this regard.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you were to seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the recorded division on the amendment to the Opposition motion in the name of the member for Beloeil—Chambly, deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions this day, be further deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders later today; and

That, notwithstanding the Order adopted December 1st, 2016, the provisions under Standing Order 45 respecting the length of bells shall apply today; and

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, following Oral Questions on Tuesday, May 16, 2017, a Member from each recognized party, as well as the Member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères and the Member for Saanich—Gulf Islands may make a brief statement.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

● (1320)

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

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Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned that the management rights clause would be consistent with the labour relations approach in the rest of the public service. She specified that means if there were something that management believed is contrary to the effectiveness of police operations, if it were to be bargained, it would then go to the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to determine whether it would be in or out of the scope of the bargaining.

The NDP member who spoke previously implied that these management rights could be akin to reinstating the original exclusions, which would put a lot more power as to what to negotiate or not into the hands of the RCMP commissioner. However, we heard in the member's speech that it is actually the PSLREB that would determine whether something was in or out of the scope of bargaining.

I would ask the member to comment on whether this new management rights clause in what is hopefully the final version of Bill C-7 actually provides a neutral party determining what is in or out of the scope of bargaining.

Ms. Mary Ng: Mr. Speaker, we agree that a management rights clause should be in the bill. The government is proposing to adapt a more targeted management rights clause than that adopted by the Senate to focus on the authorities the commissioner needs to ensure effective police operations.

The adoption of a management rights clause for the RCMP is consistent with the labour relations regime that applies to the rest of the federal public service and with that of other police forces across the country. If there is a dispute between RCMP management and the eventual bargaining agent about what exactly falls within the management rights clause, the dispute would be resolved by the Public Service Labour Relations Board. It is important to emphasize that the management rights clause does not give RCMP management carte blanche to exclude things from collective bargaining.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to offer my support to the government's motion regarding Bill C-7, a bill that provides a new labour relations framework for RCMP members and reservists.

Since its beginning in 1873, when Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald introduced in this very House the act establishing the North-West Mounted Police, the RCMP has been an integral part of Canada's development.

As my talented and tireless legislative assistant, Adrian Zita-Bennett, advises me, we need only read our history books. When it came to bringing law and order to the Northwest Territories, the RCMP was ready and willing with its march west in 1894.

During the Klondike Gold Rush, the RCMP rose to the challenge of policing the stampede of people looking to get rich, and when it came to being the first ship to completely circumnavigate North America, the RCMP schooner *St. Roch* claimed that honour.

In World War I and World War II, the RCMP played vital roles, but despite their long and storied contribution to Canada, these members did not have full freedom of association with respect to collective bargaining. However, that has changed. The Supreme

Court has removed the barriers that RCMP members face in exercising this right.

Bill C-7 provides the appropriate framework of labour laws that would govern the RCMP and ensures that RCMP members and reservists can be represented and bargain collectively, like other police services in Canada.

Bill C-7 has several key elements that reflect the clear preferences expressed by RCMP members during the consultations that occurred in the summer of 2015. Specifically, members indicated that they wanted a labour relations framework that provided for a single national bargaining unit, a union that is primarily focused on representing RCMP members, and the recourse to binding arbitration if a collective agreement could not be negotiated.

Bill C-7 creates this framework. It would do this by amending both the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act to create a new labour relations regime for RCMP members and for reservists.

I rise today to offer my support to the government's response to the amendments of the Senate.

To begin, the government's motion accepts the removal of all restrictions on what may be included in collective agreements and arbitral awards that are specific to the RCMP. This includes matters such as harassment, transfers and appointments, and appraisals of RCMP members.

Harassment in the workplace is an issue that the Government of Canada takes very seriously. Discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, bullying, and harassment are flatly unacceptable. I believe quite strongly that this one concession, in and of itself, addresses the chief criticism of the bill.

The government's motion also accepts the management rights clause adopted by the Senate and proposes targeting it to focus on protecting the authorities that the RCMP commissioner needs to ensure effective police operations. This also goes a long way to meeting the concerns raised by the Senate.

The government's motion proposes retaining the restrictions that replicate those applying to other areas of the federal public service, such as restrictions preventing pensions from being bargained. It does not agree with the requirement for a mandatory secret ballot vote as the only option for the certification of a bargaining agent to represent RCMP members and reservists. Our government believes that there should be choice between secret ballots and a card check system. The issue of secret ballots was not an issue specifically related to addressing the Supreme Court's decision. Moreover, an organization wanting to represent RCMP members should not be subjected to certification processes different from those of other organizations under federal labour relations legislation.

Bill C-4 reflects the principles of fairness and balance, and also gives proper recognition to the role of bargaining agents.

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Finally, the government proposes not proceeding with expanding the mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to hear grievances on a wider range of matters, including many that are outside of a collective agreement. This would be inconsistent with the application of the Public Service Labour Relations Act to the rest of the federal public service, and it would create overlap with the appeal and grievance processes established under the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

• (1325)

I believe that we now have the best possible legislation, given all the competing interests that must be accommodated. It is therefore important that we act now to put in place a new labour relations framework to minimize disruption for members, reservists, and RCMP management.

There is currently an overlap between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and the Public Service Labour Relations Act, which could result in confusion and conflicting interpretations. In addition, members could be represented by multiple bargaining agents, which would make it difficult for the RCMP to maintain a cohesive national approach to labour relations. Also, there would be more uncertainty among RCMP members about their collective bargaining rights.

Bill C-7 would effectively provide RCMP members and reservists with a process that ensures independence and freedom of choice in labour relations matters. The bill would also recognize the specific requirements of a national police service and the unique attributes of the RCMP as set out in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act. It would balance these with the need for consistency with the broader public service labour relations regime of which it is a part.

The government has taken important steps to ensure that workers can organize freely and that unions and employers can bargain collectively and in good faith. Bill C-7 is one part of that, and it honours the right of the RCMP members and reservists to freedom of association with respect to collective bargaining.

The time for talk is over. Now is the time to give RCMP members and reservists the respect they are due. I for one am proud to vote for this motion, which does just that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and his approach.

Of course, I found his speech to be a bit ingenuous. I can understand that perhaps the member lacks experience, but the government is putting on a white hat, as if it were flawless and above reproach. It is acting as if it were royalty, as if it were omniscient and had a divine gift. The truth is that this government has been sitting on this bill for a year now.

Now, all of a sudden, Parliament has to hurry up. We are under a lot of pressure because the government imposed time allocation before sending this bill to the Senate. Our right to speak to this bill has once again been restricted. The government sat back and did nothing for a year and now it is forcing us to quickly debate this bill.

I would like to know what the member thinks about that.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and his commitment to this issue.

[*English*]

Today is a good day. Today is a reflection of the Canadian legislative process at work. We have heard from Canadians. We have heard from RCMP members, reservists, and management. The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security has held hearings. We have also heard sober second thoughts from the Senate of Canada, which in this complex case are very much appreciated.

It is not so much a question of how much time we should spend on it, whether it should be rushed, or whether it should be taken slowly. The most important question is whether the legislation of a quality that Canadians seek. It is my view, in support of the government, that the legislation as it is currently drafted represents the best possible constellation of the various competing factors. It is the best piece of legislation that we can put forward at this time, and therefore, for that reason alone, it is time to act.

• (1330)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to compliment my colleague, the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore, for his comments, for his thoughtful response to the previous question, and for his comment about it being a good day and legislation of good quality. It needs to proceed further.

Another aspect of this being a good day, and the member alluded to this in his speech, is the fact that under this hopefully final version of the bill, RCMP members can bargain harassment through their representatives. Given the context of the situation with the RCMP, the concerns about atmosphere and workplace issues, and the historic challenges with harassment, I would like to hear his comments on this aspect of the bill.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, it is a good day, for the second and more specific reason that RCMP members and reservists are now able to bargain the issue of harassment.

As we all know, this is a tremendous challenge for the organization. There is a culture change that needs to take place, and it has to involve the women and men who serve us through the uniform of the RCMP. The ability to bargain this issue is therefore fundamental.

I will very briefly use this opportunity to highlight my own private member's bill, which is on gender equality week, a bill that I will have the chance to speak to tonight at third reading.

I very much look forward to the RCMP being engaged in this process of looking at gender equality and identifying issues across the country that need to be addressed. Harassment in the RCMP definitely is part of that. I am excited and thrilled that harassment is something that can now be bargained.

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Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I have tremendous respect for the RCMP and appreciate and admire its work. We do not question the wisdom of the Supreme Court when it ruled that the current labour regime for the RCMP needs reform to comply with RCMP members' section 2 charter rights, which is why we supported the bill at second reading when it was first introduced.

What we disagree with is the disregard for democratic governance Bill C-7 contained when passed at third reading. We also disagree with the government's choice to reject important amendments to Bill C-7 wisely passed by the Senate.

This bill would enable RCMP members to unionize for the purpose of collective bargaining if they see fit to do so. This bill is not about whether the RCMP should or should not unionize, and I take no position on that question. Most of this bill is agreeable, but it does contain one pitfall.

As the official opposition's deputy critic for Treasury Board, my opposition to the bill, as passed at third reading, and my support for the amended version, which the Senate has returned to the House of Commons, arises from concern about the working environment it would create for members of the RCMP if passed without amendment.

Bill C-7 would not require a secret ballot to certify or decertify a union to represent RCMP members in labour negotiations. My fellow Conservatives and I cannot support the bill unless the issue is corrected.

I supported the bill at second reading, as did my Conservative colleagues, for one purpose. We wanted to send it to committee, hoping that the majority of members would accept sensible amendments to protect the RCMP members' right to privacy as well as their freedom of association. Conservative members argued that any decision to certify or decertify a union to represent RCMP members must include a secret ballot to protect members from undue pressure or reprisal. I will return to that point in a moment.

The Liberals rejected this amendment at committee and returned the bill for third reading, and now the Senate has sent it back to the House with amendments. Two of these amendments would require a secret ballot vote for certification.

The motion before us today states that the government:

respectfully disagrees with amendments 2 and 4(a) because the government has introduced legislation to repeal secret ballot provisions for other public servants...;

The motion also disagrees with other amendments the Senate made in recognition of the RCMP's unique structure and circumstances, which would require modifications to existing labour laws.

I am going to focus my remarks on the amendments on secret ballots and let other members speak to the merits of the other amendments.

Canadians should never feel unduly pressured when exercising their democratic rights as citizens of a free country. None of us should worry that third parties will keep track of our voting choice or

seek to reward or punish as a result. As members of Parliament, we should know this well. We were all elected by secret ballot. Voters took their ballots behind a privacy screen, filled them in, alone with their conscience, folded them so no one could see their selection, and put the ballot in the box.

It is not too difficult to imagine how different Canada would be if political organizers, neighbours, ethnic or religious community leaders, employers, union leaders, friends, or even family members hovered over a voter's shoulder when voting in an election.

As my friend, the member for Carleton, mentioned on March 22, 2016, the rate of success for unionization drives appears demonstrably higher with a card check system alone than with a secret ballot, as workers who would prefer not to unionize appear to give in to pressure to sign petitions that would not be present under a secret ballot.

When members of Parliament selected Speakers of this House, they did so by secret ballot, in part to shield the Speaker from any appearance of partiality and to remove any doubt Canadians might have when the Speaker rules on any issue regarding a particular member.

Protecting individuals from undue pressure, recrimination, and reprisal should apply to Canada's national police force even more so than to parliamentarians, and certainly more so than at other workplaces.

Decisions to certify or decertify unions or associations significantly affect workplaces. How one votes or how one chooses can determine the course of many relationships if the choice is known.

● (1335)

In a hierarchical organization like the RCMP, which is modelled as a paramilitary force, with a clear chain of command, trust and confidence between ranks is even more important than in other workplaces. Superiors must know that their subordinates will dutifully follow orders. Subordinates must know that their superiors will exercise good judgment and not put them in harm's way without cause. Trust and undivided loyalty to the force is essential to police morale and the safety of its workers.

A card check system for union certification, in which everyone knows who signed the petition, creates rifts within the hierarchy. Such divisions have serious repercussions, especially for police morale. Secret ballots avoid these risks by protecting all members' privacy. Unless members discuss their positions with others or disclose how they voted, no one can be certain what a given member has chosen.

Government Orders

Secret ballots also better fulfill the spirit of the Supreme Court's case that gave rise to Bill C-7. Among other points, the court emphasized the need for meaningful representation, choice, and independence from management. A secret ballot enables meaningful representation by allowing workers to select the union they believe will best protect their interests. It shields them from undue pressure to vote for whoever pushes the hardest.

As my colleague from Carleton discussed when Bill C-7 came up at second reading, the bill gets it right in requiring any union representing the RCMP to do so as its primary mandate. Such a union could not be affiliated with another bargaining agent or association with a different primary purpose, and it could not be certified to represent any other group of employees.

Since the association would be composed of RCMP members representing their colleagues, secrecy at the ballot box would be essential to avoid resentment in the ranks if the association failed and needed to be decertified and reconstituted.

Secret ballots facilitate individual choice as the basis for consent to corporate decisions. They also facilitate representation independent from management by ensuring that members can freely reject a proposed representative if they consider the person to be too close to management.

I understand the reasons behind the government's rejection of amendments 2 and 4(a). I simply disagree. The rule of law demands that laws be consistent and treat similar things in a similar fashion. Since the Liberals are stripping other workers of secret ballot protection via Bill C-4, they say that it is therefore consistent for Bill C-7 to reject the secret ballot requirement for the RCMP.

The Liberals' decision today may be consistent, but it is wrong. They are wrong on Bill C-4, and the reasons they are wrong on Bill C-4 are amplified in Bill C-7 because of the very nature of the RCMP.

Instead of seeking to be consistent by refusing to extend secret ballot protection to the RCMP while repealing secret ballot provisions for everyone else, the government should do exactly the opposite. It should restore secret ballot protection for all federal workers and agree to amendments 2 and 4(a) to extend it to the RCMP.

If the Liberals value consistency, they should not argue that secret ballots for workers are somehow undemocratic. Each of them was democratically elected by secret ballot. Instead, they should acknowledge that secret ballots to certify unions are both democratic and consistent with secret ballots to select union leaders. They should join British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Nova Scotia, which all require secret ballots for certification decisions. They should lead the way in having a consistent standard for workers across provincial and federal jurisdictions.

I conclude by encouraging all my colleagues in this House to protect the democratic rights of RCMP members by voting against today's motion and insisting that the government adopt the amendments from the Senate.

• (1340)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am just wondering about the Conservatives' push for a secret ballot and if they believe there is ever a circumstance where that is not appropriate.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, we believe that certifying a union should be done by secret ballot for the reasons I gave in my speech. That is consistent with the way we elect members of Parliament, and it is consistent with the way we elect you, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, we support a vote by secret ballot. It is the only way to protect the conscience of the voter.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the current government refused to provide in its initial legislation the opportunity in collective bargaining to deal with a number of things that are usually taken for granted in a regime of this sort: staffing, deployment, harassment, and discipline. Today the Auditor General pointed out that the government is failing to meet RCMP mental health needs and is failing to implement the mental health strategy.

We have had a grand total of, I believe, four or five days to deal with this bill, yet the government took 11 months to respond. Does the member think that arithmetic makes sense? Should we have longer to deal with such a complicated, important bill, or should we just get on with it?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria made an important point in his question. The government has been sitting on these amendments from the Senate for almost a year and is now suddenly insisting that this be rushed through with minimal debate. It is doing some tricky math around days and hours of debate and things like giving us an hour and a half on a Friday and calling that a day of debate. It is shameful, it is disingenuous, it is disappointing, and it is unsurprising.

With respect to some of the other issues the member for Victoria mentioned, such as the report on the mental health responsibilities to members, certainly these are things the government will be accountable for, and it will be our job to hold it accountable.

I confined my remarks strictly to the issue of the secret ballot, but there are many other issues here. Time has been lost. I am not sure what the Liberals were doing with the rest of that time over the last year, because they did not pass many other bills. It is very disappointing.

• (1345)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is actually disappointing that the member opposite strictly narrowed his remarks to the secret ballot issue. Is there nothing else important to the RCMP? Wait, in fact, that is not something that was asked for by the members themselves. In fact, the discussion on the secret ballot is well served in the debate on Bill C-4. That bill would put the discretion as to the certification methodology into the hands of the labour board.

Government Orders

How will the member explain to RCMP members in his riding that all the benefits of collective bargaining they would be acquiring through Bill C-7 are being rejected by his no vote because of a matter that is actually being handled under Bill C-4, different legislation?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the member for Vancouver Quadra was disappointed with my speech. She may have noted from the outset that I did broadly agree and support the aims of the bill, but the important issue at stake, the issue of the secret ballot, is such that it renders the rest of the bill, unfortunately, unworthy of support. Bill C-4, as well, is unworthy of support. It is not too late for the government to fix both bills at once.

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be here this afternoon to participate in the debate on Bill C-7, which is about labour relations within the RCMP.

[English]

For those watching at home, if they just joined this mini melodrama involving the bill, we are debating the Liberal government's response to amendments that were made in what we call the other place, in other words, the Canadian Senate.

To begin, I would like to say that Conservatives do accept the Supreme Court decision in the Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada case. It is clear that members of the RCMP, despite the force's paramilitary heritage, have the right to collectively bargain. The key, however, is making sure it is done right. That is where I believe that the Liberal government has failed the test. It is completely unacceptable that we are considering denying RCMP members a secret ballot vote on the decision of whether and how to unionize.

Why could this be problematic? Let us look at the report that was released yesterday from Ian McPhail, the chair of the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP. May I say that I have known Mr. McPhail in various capacities for over 40 years? I know that is hard to believe, but it is true, and he has done a great deal of service to the Canadian public, I should say at the outset. Mr. McPhail and his team reviewed numerous complaints of workplace harassment, intimidation, and bullying within the RCMP. He even found that “the RCMP lacks both the will and the capacity to make the changes necessary to address the problems that afflict its workplaces”.

Of course, this report is of great concern. We believe that the government must take action now to restore the confidence of front-line officers in the RCMP in their management, and to restore the confidence of Canadians in the RCMP as a federal organization. That means a number of things. It means making sure that RCMP pay is in line with the pay of other police forces. It also means working to ensure the appropriate recruitment and retention programs.

There are many ways in which we can work toward this goal. Many ideas have been put forward in this regard. For instance, we could explore separating the RCMP into two forces, one that deals with contract policing on the ground and one that deals with federal policing. We could explore new recruitment methods that allow experts in various fields to move laterally into similar positions in the

RCMP without having to start at the bottom. We could explore new ways of allocating caseload so that the level of burnout is not nearly as high as it is currently.

Unfortunately, the legislation before us today does none of these things. What these amendments will do is to strip the approximately 28,000 members of the RCMP from the right to vote in secret on unionization. As I said before, it is completely unacceptable that rights that serve as the cornerstone of our democracy are being taken away from those who get up every day and go to work to keep us safe.

Why is the secret ballot so important? It is because that is the only guaranteed way to ensure there is no coercion, no intimidation, applied from any side of the argument. It would be to ensure that, no matter the rank and file or the seniority, all members of the RCMP are treated equally and fairly and, most of all, without any fear of repercussions on how they proceeded on collective bargaining.

● (1350)

A report was just tabled on the bullying culture that goes on in the RCMP, and yet the government is moving full steam ahead to deny the secret ballot, which of course guarantees further bullying in the future.

Many members in the House represent constituents who have been or who are currently serving members of the RCMP. In fact, there are currently RCMP members posted to Parliament Hill. They are part of our daily lives while the House is in session.

It seems passing strange to me that we would take action that would limit the rights of these people. There is no particular reason that the government would want to take away this democratic right of these members of the RCMP. It almost causes me to wonder whether there is some sort of ulterior motive, whether the government is using RCMP unionization as a bargaining chip with other public sector unions, which of course would be unfortunate.

Studies have shown that, when Canadians are given the right and the opportunity to choose by secret ballot whether to unionize, more often than not they choose to represent themselves. It seems that this old Liberal philosophy that, because workers may not make the same choice the government-knows-best Liberals in Ottawa want them to, they should not be entitled to make that choice at all.

We have seen this on many different files. From my perspective and the perspective of my colleagues, this is an intrinsic right that should be found in our legislation to make sure that the RCMP members have access to the secret ballot. This is not new law. This is not something that has come out of the mind of the caucus on the Conservative side that has no precedent. This is the precedent to allow the secret ballot on issues of importance that affect people's daily lives as employees, and certainly as people who wake up every morning to protect their community.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***GRANBY VOLUNTEER CENTRE**

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to congratulate the Centre d'action bénévole de Granby on its 50th anniversary.

Volunteerism is vital to our community because it supports the well-being and vitality of our people. For 50 years now, Granby volunteers have patiently and generously dedicated themselves to helping their fellow citizens. Our volunteers deserve our heartfelt appreciation for countless acts of compassion and gratitude toward others. I am so deeply thankful to them.

I would like to congratulate the team at the Centre d'action bénévole de Granby along with chair Mireille Giguère and executive director Nathalie Roberge, not to mention the many people who have been a part of it all over the years.

I wish them a happy 50th anniversary celebration and much success as they continue to make volunteerism an important part of our community.

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● (1400)

*[English]***AGT FOOD AND INGREDIENTS INC.**

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “a compassionate entrepreneur who views success as a responsibility” describes Murad Al-Katib, president and CEO of AGT Food and Ingredients Inc., a Saskatchewan business that supplies pulse crops to more than 120 countries and has facilities on five continents.

Murad is a business owner responsible for more than 2,200 employees, including many in my home province of Saskatchewan.

Murad has been the recipient of many distinguished awards, and today Saskatchewan's “Lentil King” is in Norway to receive yet another prestigious award. He is the first Canadian to receive the Oslo Business for Peace Award, nominated by the Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce.

I congratulate Murad. He is a wonderful role model for entrepreneurs everywhere, someone of whom we are very proud.

* * *

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe and as a former coordinator with the Codiac RCMP, please allow me to sincerely thank all our law enforcement officers across the country for the outstanding work they do in keeping our communities safe.

In Canada, we are surrounded by dedicated public servants who put their lives in harm's way every day to help defend our security and uphold our freedoms.

In closing, while there are some meritorious aspects of this bill—and let me explain again that we accept the Supreme Court decision with respect to the allowing of collective bargaining with the RCMP; we respect that decision; we accept that decision—this is a fatal flaw in the legislation that has been put forward to us, a fatal flaw in the legislation put forward by the Liberal government that denies a simple and well-accepted standard right, that of the secret ballot. This should not be allowed to happen.

I encourage my colleagues to vote against this piece of legislation. I encourage those on the other side to have a last-minute change of heart.

● (1355)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind everyone that debate is taking place. It is nice to see everyone getting along and speaking, but it makes it very difficult to hear the questions and the answers.

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.): Mr. Speaker, one can get very easily disappointed with the Conservative Party when it comes to issues dealing with labour.

Conservatives come to the table with a bias, which is really very much against unions. Whether it is this bill or Bill C-4, once again the Conservatives are the isolated party in the House. The government of the day, the NDP, and the Green Party recognize the value of the legislation, and yet the Conservative Party chooses to try to divide labour and management.

We all recognize the valuable role that our RCMP plays in our society. We applaud each and every woman and man who performs their duty for us day in and day out. Could the member tell us why the Conservative Party continues to play up divisive labour issues as wedge issues? Why does the Conservative Party not recognize that the Canadian economy will work better if we have more harmony within labour, management, and business?

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, I sense that was a trick question. The hon. member has cut me to the quick: he has exposed a bias that I have. My bias is for a secret ballot. My bias is for true democracy within the rank and file of the RCMP. That is my bias, and I stand by that predilection that I have, however bizarre it may seem to those in the Liberal ranks. That people could vote in secret whether or not they are members of a union is a fundamental right and privilege.

Forgive me, but I have to reiterate that the RCMP is in crisis right now. Reports issued just this week indicate intimidation, harassment, and dysfunctionality up and down the line. This is not the time for hon. members to expose the rank and file of the RCMP to further harassment and intimidation because of the lack of a secret ballot. The government is at cross purposes with the needs of a fully reformed and modernized RCMP by presenting this bill.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka will have two minutes and 30 seconds after question period when the bill comes back.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

These individuals work very hard so that we may live in a society where we can enjoy our freedoms and fundamental values. It is very important that we remember to thank our police officers, volunteers, and support staff for the enormous contributions they make to law enforcement and crime prevention and for the work they do to keep us safe.

We can all learn from the dedication and professionalism they exhibit every day in the line of duty.

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RURAL YOUTH GALA

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 11, 2017, some 200 people attended the rural youth gala in Ormstown.

Since 2010, this gala has been a forum for recognizing young people, youth groups, and youth-led initiatives. The jury wants to see their energy, their will, and their ability to follow through on their objectives. I want to congratulate the 13 winners and the five honourable mentions, all of whom made significant contributions in areas ranging from volunteer work to student retention, cultural action, environmental action, and healthy living.

I also want to congratulate Daphné Godin-Lemieux, who won the highest award of the evening, as well as Céline Ouimet, managing director of Saint-Chrysostome, who received an award for being the youth mentor of the year.

I am proud that there are so many young people between six and 24 years of age who are showing leadership, engagement, and generosity in their communities. This gala does credit to the upper St. Lawrence region, and I thank the organizing committee that put so much time and energy into this very popular event.

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*[English]***STUDENTS OF MARKHAM—THORNHILL**

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise today to recognize the outstanding work done by the students in my riding of Markham—Thornhill.

Thornlea Secondary School has partnered with Nubian Book Club and the HarryCares Foundation to support an ethical book drive. This book drive was organized to send much needed school and pleasure reading books to Nigeria. Thousands of books were donated. The students sorted the books to ensure they did not perpetuate stereotypes but instead work to affirm or broaden cultural and social identities and undertakings.

Last Friday, I also had the pleasure of visiting the Middlefield Collegiate Institute's Sikh Student Association's Turban Up Day to promote diversity, inclusion, and co-operation among the diverse communities within its high school.

I am very proud of the outstanding work done by the students in Markham—Thornhill. I congratulate them for their work. It makes me incredibly happy to represent them in Markham—Thornhill.

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Trudy Edgar has served as my executive assistant for the past 11 years. I hired her, having witnessed her dedication to our community in the 12 years she had served as assistant to my predecessor. She agreed to stay on but warned she would not stay long.

Every few years she would bring up retirement and I would agree that someday we should talk, and never bring it up again.

She has been the heart of our office. She is the first to show up and the last to leave, the person who has taught, challenged, and cared for the stream of staff that have flowed through our offices. Through good and bad, she has been the source of wisdom and encouragement for me and my family. She has served my constituents with great care and compassion.

I am thankful for the sacrifices that she, her family, and her husband, Lance, have made so she could serve.

A couple of months ago, Trudy brought up retirement again, and this time she would not let me avoid it. Trudy will be missed. She has been a caring public servant, a teacher, and a friend.

On behalf of my constituents, staff, and family, we wish her good health and many blessings in the years to come.

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● (1405)

MAYOR OF WESTMOUNT

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, inventor, businessman, performer, man of integrity, genius are all words to describe Peter Trent, who announced last month he was stepping down as mayor of Westmount. Peter wrote, "A political career is like a love affair. Any fool can start one, but to end it requires considerable skill."

Peter showed that considerable skill throughout his 26 years on council. He leaves Westmount with no net debt, a world-class recreation centre, and excellent infrastructure. More important, he leaves the Montreal Island with 15 cities instead of one. It was Peter who led the fight against the PQ's forced mergers, and Peter who made the next Liberal government promise a demerger process. The cities in my riding, Côte Saint-Luc, Hampstead, and TMR, owe their existence to Peter's leadership.

As a demerger disciple of Peter's and someone who served with him for many years as mayor, I am proud to call him a mentor and friend.

Peter and his wife Catherine are with us today. Please join me in thanking him for his exemplary public service.

BUILDING TRADES MONUMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I will join the Prime Minister, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, and hundreds of the country's best tradespeople as they unveil the new monument dedicated to those who have built the foundations of our country.

Canada's building trade unions will be across the canal from this chamber, at Major's Hill Park, to celebrate, in monument, the contribution of the hard-working and devoted men and women who do incredible work day in and day out, as well as to pay tribute to those who have lost their lives in doing so.

The monument will stand in the national capital region among some of Canada's most prized architectural achievements, buildings that were constructed by building trades members. It will contain iconic tools of the trade to represent the different skilled trade unions that have helped sponsor the monument.

Our Prime Minister will accept the monument on behalf of the grateful people of Canada.

On this day, let us stand together and celebrate the contributions of the hard-working men and women who have helped build our great country.

* * *

[Translation]

JOCELYNE HARVEY

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are people we meet in life who change the meaning of the word "family". Today, I would like to pay tribute to one of them, a very special person by the name of Jocelyne Harvey.

The Harvey family is well known in La Malbaie business and equestrian circles, especially the Rodéo de Charlevoix, and is a very tight-knit family. Ms. Harvey is the pillar of that family.

Ms. Harvey is a strong and caring woman who passed on her belief in unity to her family members. Today, Ms. Harvey is very ill and fighting for her life. She is presently reaping the rewards of the unity she instilled in her family. She is surrounded by her loved ones, who are supporting her in this battle.

Ms. Harvey, I feel privileged to have met you. You will always have a special place in my heart. I wish you all the best and send my kindest regards.

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[English]

GLENGARRY—PRESCOTT—RUSSELL DAY

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Glengarry—Prescott—Russell day on the Hill. Organized in partnership with the United Counties of Prescott, Russell and the township of North Glengarry, GPR day aims to showcase the amazing local foods, wine, and beer our great region has to offer.

Statements by Members

I know some members want to free the beer, but I challenge them to come drink the beer. Beau's All Natural, Cassel Brewery, Tuque de Broue, and Étienne Brûlé are ready to serve.

[Translation]

Some members are also sommeliers. I invite them to try the wines from Domaine Perrault and Vignoble Clos du Vully.

I am told that cheese should always be served with wine. No problem, as the St-Albert Cheese Co-operative, the Skotidakis farm, and Glengarry Fine Cheese will be serving us their products.

● (1410)

[English]

What about those MPs who are vegans? Can they eat cheese? The answer is yes. Fauxmagerie Zengarry offers tasty options for vegans.

[Translation]

I invite all members to enjoy our local products at the reception that will be held immediately after question period in the Commonwealth Room.

* * *

[English]

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Ellen Gibb was born, Canada was a young nation of seven provinces and Wilfrid Laurier was its prime minister. She has seen 16 more prime ministers come and go since then.

Ellen, who was nicknamed "Dolly" during her teens because of her fashion sense, celebrated her 112th birthday on April 26. According to the organization that tracks the world's supercentenarians, or people who are at least 110 years old, Dolly is Canada's oldest citizen.

Dolly was born Ellen Box in Winnipeg in 1905, where she grew up, married her husband Dave, and they raised two daughters. She spent many years in Thunder Bay and moved to North Bay, Ontario, when she turned 100. She has nine grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, and 10 great-great-grandchildren. She likes to enjoy an occasional glass of Scotch or wine and a bottle of beer every day.

On behalf of hon. members, I would like to congratulate Dolly, an absolutely super supercentenarian. Here is wishing her many more birthdays.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, compassion is a value Canada espouses, yet compassion requires courageous action.

The ruthless authoritarian rule of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro has led to the dissolution of democratic institutions, imprisonment of political dissidents, economic collapse, and societal ruin. Canada must stand with the millions of Venezuelans who are fighting for democracy, for freedom, and for liberty. Canada must take courageous action now.

Statements by Members

With that, I call upon the Government of Canada to condemn the ruthless authoritarian rule of Nicolás Maduro and allow for free, open elections. We should follow the lead of the Americans and the EU Parliament and implement targeted sanctions against Venezuelan human rights abusers and put political pressure upon Guayana, Bahamas, Jamaica, Barbados, Saint Lucia, changed to query answer and Trinidad and Tobago to stop the practice of blocking action to help Venezuela at the OAS.

Actions speak stronger than words and it is up to the Liberal government to take courageous action today.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in September 2015, Venezuelan opposition leader Leopoldo López was sentenced to 14 years on politically motivated charges. Today, his wife and mother, Lilian Tintori and Antonieta Mendoza de López, are in Ottawa to speak about his plight, a fate shared by far too many.

López is held in a military prison by a regime that treats the democratically elected political opposition as criminals. Intimidation and repression are the tragic norm. Freedoms are denied. Venezuelans have been failed by the Maduro government. Protesters, including children and seniors, have been met by extreme and excessive violence.

On April 3, Canada co-sponsored an OAS resolution once again calling again on Venezuela to restore constitutional order and uphold its international commitments to democracy and human rights.

I ask all members of the House to join me in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Leopoldo López, and put an end to the ongoing repression of human rights in Venezuela.

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*[Translation]***LABELLING OF FOOD**

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am the sponsor of a very important private member's bill that deserves the attention of all my colleagues.

I am sponsoring a bill that responds to an oft-repeated request by a vast majority of Canadians. Rarely do issues achieve such consensus among our constituents. I am talking about mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.

[English]

In recent public opinion surveys, 80% of Canadians said they wanted to know if their food contained GMOs. There is no reason to refuse them this information. That is why I have a bill to do just that, and it is up for a vote tomorrow evening.

If the House truly represents Canadians, it should easily pass second reading. If my bill is defeated, then it will be clear that a majority of MPs put corporate interests before 80% of concerned citizens. This would be a failure of our democracy.

I ask all members of the House to put the interests of their constituents ahead of those of Monsanto. Canadians have a right to know.

• (1415)

[Translation]

Canadians have the right to know. I would like my colleagues to support my bill.

* * *

*[English]***MEMBER FOR STURGEON RIVER—PARKLAND**

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remember clearly the day the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland was elected as the interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. She said that we would be the best opposition party that Canada has ever seen, but we have an obligation to hold the government to account, to ask the tough questions, and be a voice for the taxpayers. She has done all that and more with extraordinary ability, integrity, knowledge and understanding.

Our party is strong, incredibly united, and our interim leader has made us all a part of it. She has listened to the concerns of Canadians, whether it is something local like the Arva Flour Mill in my rural riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, or of international importance, such as standing up for our Canadian troops at home and abroad.

She works incredibly hard and she inspires us. Both she and J.P. have made it such an enjoyable trip for us and those we hold dear. She is a champion in our eyes and those of all Canadians. We thank her, and may God bless.

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CANCER

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Gilda Radner once said that having cancer gave her membership in an elite club she would rather not belong to. We all know friends and family who have had membership in that club. I have lost uncles. My wife lost her mom. For years since, Amy has run a health-promoting supper program at Gilda's Club Greater Toronto, an organization dedicated to the idea that no one should face cancer alone.

Others, like Dr. John Dick, are working to ensure that fewer of us face cancer, and that those of us who do will face it successfully. Dr. Dick is well known for his pioneering research as the first scientist to identify cancer stem cells. Among many titles, he is the Canada research chair in stem cell biology, a professor of molecular genetics at the University of Toronto, and a senior scientist with the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. He is also the recent recipient of the Gold Leaf Prize for Discovery from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Oral Questions

To Dr. Dick from Beaches—East York and to all recipients of the inaugural Gold Leaf Prize, we thank them for their work.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government released a report on the future of the National Energy Board. It is the second report in a month, and surprise, surprise, it recommends something completely different. This is creating even more uncertainty in the oil and gas sector and there is a lot at stake. Any changes the Prime Minister makes will affect thousands and thousands of families.

When is the Prime Minister going to stop interfering in the independent National Energy Board process and let it do its job so projects can get approved and people can get to work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to move forward on projects of import to our economy and to our future, Canadians have to have confidence in both the process and in the government. That is why for 10 years under the previous government, Canadians had no confidence, because the Conservatives refused to understand that we need to build a strong economy while protecting the environment at the same time.

Over the past year and a half, we have worked very hard to demonstrate how serious we are about both protecting the environment and creating jobs and growing the economy. We will continue to do that in a way that demonstrates our respect for Canadians and get the confidence of Canadians.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about confidence, because the Prime Minister's latest report recommends that the National Energy Board headquarters be moved from Calgary to Ottawa. Why? Does the Prime Minister not have confidence in Calgaryans to do the job? This is supposed to be an independent group of people. The farther away from Ottawa and politicians it is, the better.

Can the Prime Minister understand why this is such an insult to western Canadians? Will he commit to leaving the National Energy Board headquarters in Calgary on the front lines and not burying it in some government department in Ottawa?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little bit much that the member and that party are talking about meddling with independent processes around the National Energy Board. The fact is that party when in government chose to politicize the National Energy Board in its decisions. It torqued and stacked the deck in so many ways that Canadians have lost confidence in the regulatory frame and withdrew support for building energy projects.

That is why we have worked so hard to restore that confidence, to demonstrate that we are both protecting the environment and building a strong economy at the same time. This government is getting it done when the previous government did not.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has talked about phasing out the oil sands and now we know how he plans to do it. He is going to slowly but surely kill it with red tape. Everything he does is making it harder and harder for energy companies to create jobs. Business investment is at an all-time low and this is at a time when the U.S. is unleashing the oil and gas sector in the United States.

Can the Prime Minister not see that the decisions he is making are costing Canadian workers their jobs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years Canada saw a government that refused to accept that building a strong economy goes hand in hand in the 21st century with protecting the environment. We know that investing in a responsible approach to the environment is not just going to protect our world for future generations, but it is going to create the kind of good jobs, clean jobs, that this generation and next generations are going to need.

We know that the way to grow the economy is to demonstrate both the economy and the environment going together. That is what Canadians elected us to do. That is what we are going to continue to deliver on.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Prime Minister is under investigation by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. We know that the Ethics Commissioner will retire before the investigation has been completed and that the Prime Minister has to appoint her successor. This is a clear conflict and so is asking the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to make the appointment in his place.

This is one of the most important non-partisan appointments that the Prime Minister will make. Does he understand that his party and his caucus cannot be involved in this process?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after having a Conservative government that mishandled the appointment process for 10 years and made nothing but partisan choices, we are proud of the independent process we put in place in order to have merit-based appointments that reflect Canada's diversity.

We will continue to select people of the highest calibre to carry out the duties of this government in Canada. That is what Canadians expect and that is what they voted for.

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[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is likely my last question for the Prime Minister, so I am going to make him an offer. I will call off the attack dogs and nobody on this side will ask the question 18 more times. I think that sounds like a pretty fair deal, so let us end this with a real answer.

Oral Questions

Has he met with the Ethics Commissioner, yes or no, and if yes, how many times?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect every member of this House to co-operate with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. The commissioner has stated at committee, and to my office, that she does not want us discussing the process. However, I can answer the member by saying that in all my years as a parliamentarian, I have met a number of times with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner at both formal and informal occasions. I can assure Canadians that when this—

Some hon. members: How many times? How many times? How many—

The Speaker: Order. If members wish to chant, they can do so outside.

The hon. member for Outremont.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's explanation of his now infamous vacation is so full of holes and contradictions it is starting to sound like a White House press briefing.

Let me recap. The Prime Minister broke the law by taking a private helicopter to the island. He defended this by saying that it was simply a family vacation with a family friend, along with a few senior Liberals. However, now we learn that the island does not actually belong to the family friend.

Will the Prime Minister finally own up to this entire mess and admit that he should never have taken that exclusive holiday?

•(1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, this was a personal family vacation with a long-time friend. I am happy to work with the Ethics Commissioner to answer any questions she may have. That is what Canadians expect of any parliamentarian, and that is exactly what I am doing.

I am confident that Canadians will see at the end of this process that we collaborated and co-operated with the Ethics Commissioner every step of the way, on any question that she might have.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a small problem because the Prime Minister told Canadians that the Aga Khan's private helicopter was the only way to get to the island. However, not only did the helicopter not belong to the Aga Khan, but that is also not the only way of getting to the island.

Will the Prime Minister at least admit that his statement was untrue?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this institution, we have a conflict of interest and ethics commissioner who is responsible for considering such issues. I am confident that, at the end of the process, Canadians will see that my government, my office, and I co-operated with the Ethics Commissioner and answered any questions she had.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of ethics, last year, the Liberals voted to kill the

investigation into KPMG. That same month, a director from KPMG was appointed treasurer for the Liberal Party.

Ending the investigation into KPMG and then hiring somebody from KPMG is what is known as a conflict of interest. The Prime Minister himself approved that appointment.

Does the Prime Minister have the audacity to stand in the House today and say that there is not even a perceived conflict of interest here?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that I have to remind the hon. member that the committees of the House operate independently.

I want to thank the Standing Committee on Finance for the work it has done on this issue, as well as for the great work it does every week for the House of Commons and Canadians.

We take tax evasion very seriously. That is why our 2016 budget included an investment of \$444 million in that regard and budget 2017 adds hundreds of millions of dollars to that amount. We take tax evasion very seriously, and we will continue to work to fight it.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is independent? The Prime Minister's principal secretary sits on the party's national board; the party's constitution states that the Liberal leader must consent to the appointment; this individual worked for the Liberals and KPMG at the same time, but yeah, that is totally independent.

For all this talk about the middle class and those working hard to join it, the Prime Minister has shown time and again that his priority is the Liberal Party and those working hard to influence it.

How many conflicts of interest does it take before the Prime Minister finally drops his talking points and recognizes the ethical problem?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is troubling to hear the member opposite call into question the independent work of committees. The fact is, we respect the work that the finance committee does and thank them for the hard work.

Canadians know that the level of openness and transparency that this government has brought forward, both when it was the third party in the House of Commons and now as government, is essential to maintain the trust and confidence that Canadians have in their institutions and in their democracy.

We will continue to demonstrate the highest levels of openness, accountability, and ethics.

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[*Translation*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about leadership.

Over the course of my nearly four years in the House, I have had the great honour of sitting beside two great leaders. For the past 18 months, I have had the good fortune of sitting next to the interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. Prior to that, I had the honour of sitting next to former prime minister Stephen Harper for more than two years.

Stephen Harper sealed a 10-year softwood lumber deal in a single meeting with President Bush. Not only did he settle the softwood lumber issue, he signed an agreement called the pulp and paper green transformation program, the black liquor program, and took the forestry industry to the next level.

When will this Prime Minister show some leadership—

• (1430)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former Conservative government let the agreement expire. We strongly oppose the U.S. Department of Commerce's decision to impose an unfair, punitive tax. The accusations are unfounded.

We will continue to bring the matter up with the United States, just as the Prime Minister does every time he meets with the President. We want a good agreement, not just any agreement.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the agreement expired in October 2015, while my colleague, like the rest of us, was on the campaign trail. What he is saying is not true, and everyone in Canada knows it.

Now the Liberals are messing around with the employment insurance fund. The last Liberal government helped itself to \$56 billion of that money. The Liberals have done that in the past. Forestry workers want to work, not collect employment insurance. Giving them more employment insurance cheques will not create jobs. Signing an agreement with the Americans will.

It is time to stop talking and settle this issue.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government stands ready to take action on this file and support the workers in the communities that are suffering as we move through this very difficult time on softwood lumber.

Softwood lumber remains a priority for the government. A negotiated deal is a priority, but we need a good deal, not just any deal.

We stand ready to respond to the communities, the municipalities, the provinces, and the community organizations that are suffering during this time. We remain committed to making sure that Canadians receive the benefits they can as we move through these tough times.

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is currently under two investigations by the Ethics Commissioner for breaking the law.

The current Ethics Commissioner is set to retire this July. In an attempt to save face, the Prime Minister has appointed his House leader to choose the person who will be investigating the Prime Minister. What a joke. I am sure the government House leader, who serves at the Prime Minister's pleasure, is so grateful for the opportunity to be entangled in the Prime Minister's ethical mess.

Did the Prime Minister provide the government House leader with a short list of Liberals who are fit for the position, or did he only provide her with a single name?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member would agree that we are elected to this place to serve Canadians. Those are the very people that I work hard for, those are the very people that this government works hard for, and those are the very people that I encourage to apply, because this government has actually brought in a new, open, transparent, merit-based appointment process. When it comes to making appointments, we encourage Canadians to apply because these positions are available online. Exactly what we committed to Canadians, we will deliver on.

I look forward to seeing the merit-based appointment filled. I look forward to handling the work.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner will be appointed in July, which leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth. Transferring responsibility for this appointment from the Prime Minister's Office to the government House leader's office is a thinly veiled sham.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether the selection criteria for the next conflict of interest and ethics commissioner will be the same as the criteria used to choose the new commissioner of official languages, that is, being in the Liberal family and being a generous Liberal supporter?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to emphasize how much support Ms. Meilleur, the new commissioner of official languages, received from various organizations across the country. We hope her appointment will be endorsed by the House and the Senate.

In fact, Sylviane Lanthier, president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, said that Madeleine Meilleur's commitment to the francophonie and to linguistic duality is "well known".

She was very active in the fight to save the Montfort Hospital, and as minister responsible for francophone affairs in Ontario, she created the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario. Many recognize her qualities—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does no one on that side see the ridiculousness of the Prime Minister giving the House leader the job of appointing the person who will be investigating. The House leader was given her job by the Prime Minister. She answers to the Prime Minister, and every day we see her standing up answering for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has acknowledged that there is a conflict with his appointing the next ethics commissioner. It is good that he has acknowledged that. Does he not see that this is not a fix and the same conflict still exists? I hope the Government House Leader does not get up and answer for him, because it would prove my point.

• (1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that we were elected to this place by Canadians. We are here to serve Canadians. They are the very people that we work hard for. That has always been my goal and that is why I always encourage all of us to work better together.

This government put in a new appointment process that is open, transparent, and merit-based. Our aim is always to identify high-quality candidates who will help to achieve gender parity and truly reflect Canada's diversity.

I encourage all Canadians to apply. If the member has a name she would like to recommend, I encourage her to tell her constituents to apply as well.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House leader will be appointing somebody who will be investigating her boss, the person who appointed her. This is nonsense. It would be really nice if we had a Prime Minister who was not always in ethical hot water. Unfortunately, here we are in this position where the man who is leading this country is also under multiple investigations. He has acknowledged that he cannot be the one to appoint the new ethics commissioner.

Will he do the right thing? Will he make the right decision and find a real solution to this problem instead of this farcical fig leaf of a fix?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is doing the right thing, and that is exactly why we put in a new appointment process, an open, transparent, and merit-based appointment process through which all Canadians from coast to coast to coast can apply. Positions that are open are available online. Canadians are welcome to apply so that they also can be a part of the process. We know how important these positions are to the work that the government does.

We will continue to work hard for all Canadians.

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*[Translation]***CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the close ties between BlackRock, the government, the infrastructure

bank, and its profits were not enough. Now KPMG wants to join the closed circles of the Liberal Party and the—

The Speaker: Order. There is no interpretation.

Now it is working. I would ask the hon. member for Sherbrooke to start again.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the close ties between BlackRock, the government, the infrastructure bank, and its profits were not enough. Now KPMG wants to join the closed circles of the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister himself. We also have the revolving door between the Canada Revenue Agency and KPMG and the many public contracts awarded to KPMG. The Minister of National Revenue says that the trap is set for tax cheats.

How does she explain the growing ties between the Liberal government and the KPMG accounting firm? When she says that the trap is set, does she mean that the door is wide open for the Liberal Party of Canada?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the opportunity to tell Canadians that our government is fully engaged in the battle against tax evasion and tax avoidance.

That is why, in the last budget, our government invested the record amount of \$444 million. In the budget we just presented, \$524 million were invested. With our plan we were able to collect \$13 billion last year.

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*[English]***GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS**

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister clearly has a conflict of interest problem. Not only is he currently under an ethics investigation, but his solution to the whole mess is to ask his own House leader to appoint a new ethics watchdog to investigate the Prime Minister. The Liberal House leader, who will likely stand and defend the Prime Minister's ethical challenges yet again, is being asked by her boss to choose an ethics commissioner to investigate her boss. Apparently Joe Volpe made the short list.

The Liberals likely cannot spell “conflict of interest”, let alone understand it, so how in the world can the House leader claim to do this job with any credibility whatsoever?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said time and again, this government has put in a new process, an open, transparent, merit-based process whereby Canadians can apply, and I encourage them to apply.

When it comes to a short list, there is no short list, so if the member has information that he would like to share, I look forward to receiving it. What is important is the work that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner does. This is a serious position. We will always work with the person in that position. I encourage Canadians to apply.

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● (1440)

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you know even better than I how much the Liberals pride themselves on their lofty environmental principles and their transparency, but the reality is something else altogether. The latest example comes to us today from the Auditor General. The Auditor General looked into fossil fuels. In the report tabled today, he did not pull any punches. He wrote: “the Department of Finance Canada did not give us access to the information we needed [and did not provide access to important information]”.

Why is the government saying one thing and doing the opposite? Why did it obstruct the Auditor General's work?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We thank the Office of the Auditor General for its work and welcome its recommendations. Our government has a solid plan to invest in clean growth that will help create middle-class jobs and help Canada transition to a low-carbon economy. We and our G20 partners are committed to progressively eliminating inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by 2025. We are on track to reach that target.

[English]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): This is exactly the problem, Mr. Speaker. It is only when the government was caught that it tried to act correctly. The Auditor General was very straight this morning, very critical of the actions of the government about green policies. The Auditor General said that their office has a dispute with a government department over their office's right to access the information they need to do their work.

We are talking about transparency and we are talking about the environment. Why is the current government always wrong on those issues?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we thank the Auditor General for his work and we accept his recommendations.

Our government has a strong plan to invest in clean growth that will help create good middle-class jobs and get the country on a path to a low-carbon economy. We have made commitments to our partners in the G20 to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by the year 2025 and we are on track to meeting those targets. Eliminating policy measures that subsidize the production and consumption of fossil fuels is an important step in addressing climate change.

Oral Questions

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2009, PPP Canada, a crown corporation, has leveraged over \$6 billion for infrastructure from an initial investment of \$1.3 billion. An internal report advised that putting the infrastructure bank under an existing body such as PPP Canada would be cost-effective, efficient, and less bureaucratic.

Had the Liberals listened, a \$35-billion investment to PPP Canada could leverage nearly \$170 billion for transformational infrastructure. Can the minister tell Canadians why he ignored that expert advice?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me quote the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships on the bank: “The Council is optimistic that the bank will play a significant role in attracting more private capital while growing the pipeline of P3 projects across Canada.”

Our goal is to build more infrastructure that Canadian communities need. We will do that in co-operation with our municipalities and provinces, as well as the private sector, to make sure they have the right type of infrastructure that they deserve.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a serious problem. This week the Minister of Finance said that cabinet would ultimately decide which projects would be funded by the infrastructure bank. At committee, however, the Minister of Infrastructure and his officials said that only the projects chosen by the investors, the ones that would be most profitable for them, would be selected.

My question is simple. Who will decide which projects are funded by the infrastructure bank? Will it be the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Infrastructure, or the investors, based on the profits they can make?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last two weeks, members of the opposition have been criticizing us for being too close to private capital. Now they are saying that we would allow oversight.

We have created the right balance that will allow us to mobilize private capital and build more infrastructure while at same time being accountable to Parliament and making sure the government is there to protect the public interest and ensure projects being built are serving the public interest.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals keep repeating that they are strongly committed to fully protecting the supply management system, today's report from the Auditor General suggests otherwise. He illustrates the government's failure to protect the supply management system for milk, eggs, and poultry.

Supply management concerns all of us. When will the government put words into action and take concrete measures to protect a system that works and that provides sufficient, reasonably priced, quality local products that we consume every day?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in this House, we have supported and will continue to support supply management. With the duties relief program, when I became Minister of Agriculture, I found out it was a big problem at the border. We addressed that problem, and six import companies have lost their certificates to import products into this country, supply management products. We are working on this issue. It is a big issue. We have continued and will continue to make sure supply management is protected.

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FINANCE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General regularly exposes government negligence and incompetence, and today is no exception. The latest report also reveals that the Liberals refused to give the Auditor General the information he requested. The power to access information is crucial to the AG's independence and is, in fact, protected in law. After being elected on promises of openness and transparency, the Liberals have deliberately stonewalled the Auditor General.

Why is the government undermining the Auditor General, and what exactly is it trying to hide from Canadians?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to thank the Auditor General for his report, and we accept his recommendations. Greater openness and transparency in government helps strengthen Canada's truth in public institutions. That is why the government continues to take action to better reflect the values and expectations of Canadians on this important matter.

Going forward, the government will provide budget preparation information and other documents, as defined under existing OICs, to the Auditor General as they become available.

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AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, air travel is essential to Canada's economic growth and prosperity. Canadians, businesses, and tourists all benefit from a safe and efficient air

industry. With recent media reports of denied boardings, lost luggage, and runway delays, the time for action is now.

Can the Minister of Transport please update this House and all Canadians on the steps being taken to protect air travellers in Canada?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. When a Canadian purchases a ticket, sometimes at considerable expense, he or she expects to be treated with fairness and respect. In a sense, a contract has been signed. I was very proud today to table, on behalf of the Government of Canada, new legislation that will ensure that we have passenger rights. People can be assured that, if any of those passenger rights are violated, the passengers will be suitably and properly compensated in a timely manner.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our competitors in the United States are busy cutting taxes and making it easier to get to yes on energy projects, the Liberal-appointed National Energy Board review panel has recommended layering on even more red tape. It wants to double review timelines to over three years, and make it even harder for job-creating energy projects to be approved in Canada. No amount of additional red tape will turn a pipeline opponent into a pipeline proponent.

Why are the Liberals so intent on making it harder for these job-creating energy projects to proceed?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member will agree that the National Energy Board that we inherited was not perfect, and I am sure he might agree that significant reform would be a good thing for Canada's energy industry. He might also acknowledge that, since this government took power, three pipelines have been approved. We will now take the recommendations that have been given to us by an expert panel of five who have consulted Canadians, and we will review that with the objective in mind of creating the greatest regulator in the world right here in Canada.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the world already thinks we have the best energy regulator in the world.

The Prime Minister revealed his true feelings toward the oil sands when he said he would phase them out, and he revealed his true feelings toward Alberta when he said that Canada was not doing well because Albertans were in charge. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the Liberal-appointed NEB review panel would imply that Calgarians cannot be trusted to independently and professionally evaluate energy projects.

Will the Prime Minister condemn this anti-Alberta recommendation and stop pitting one region of the country against the other?

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of being in Calgary last week, and while in Calgary I was announcing projects with the Government of Alberta to incent the industry, which is not only across Canada but around the world, to be innovative and creative. We have all the respect in the world for the entrepreneurship of Albertans. We are working with them as we move gradually to a lower carbon economy.

We wish that the members opposite had as much confidence in the people of Alberta as we do on this side of the House.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the war on terror, Canada most often follows the United States in designation of terrorist entities, such as al Qaeda or successor groupings. The latest incarnation, Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham, is not on the U.S. list because it absorbed a U.S.-sponsored guerrilla body in Syria's multi-dimensional civil war. However, Canada, by also not listing this clearly terrorist composite group, is creating challenges for prosecution of terrorist funding or recruitment of Canadians by this group. Why will the government not act and designate?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that Canada has a framework around which we designate groups around the world as terrorist organizations. We continue to use that robust framework in all of our designations of terrorist groups, while we continue to work with international allies to rid the world of terrorist organizations and make it safer, specifically for the people of the war-torn country of Syria.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the Broadway tickets that the Prime Minister bought for wealthy bankers and diplomats was for the permanent mission of Venezuela to the UN. The permanent representative at this mission has been a man who was the longest-serving cabinet minister under the despot ruler Hugo Chávez, and then he served as foreign affairs minister to the despot Nicolás Maduro.

Could the Prime Minister confirm that the Liberals used Canadian tax dollars to wine and dine this man, while Venezuelans suffer?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is well aware of the deteriorating political and economic situation in Venezuela. Just today, I had the opportunity to meet with the wife of the imprisoned political opposition leader, Leopoldo Lopez, along with his mother, to talk about the terrible situation in Venezuela.

Canada has been a leader on the international stage, co-sponsoring a resolution at the Organization of American States. We continue to work with our regional allies to call on the Venezuelan government to uphold its international commitments, restore order, and respect democracy in Venezuela.

HEALTH

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health confused Vancouver and British Columbia when it comes to the opioid crisis. Clearly, the member for Vancouver Centre was correct when she said her government is ignoring the west.

However, one thing the minister did get right is the horrifying increase in overdose deaths under her watch. Three thousand Canadians will die in 2017, a 50% increase over last year. Does the minister still think she is making progress?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this issue again in the House. Again, we will talk about the fact that this is an unprecedented national public health crisis. We are working determinedly on all aspects of the crisis. Our response is comprehensive. We have invested money in prevention. We are investing money in treatment. We are scaling up access to all ranges of treatment, including pharmaceutical grade diacetylmorphine. We are making sure we are expanding harm reduction sites, including the passage of Bill C-37 in the House yesterday, to make sure people will have harms reduced. We will continue to work at all levels to save the lives of Canadians.

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton is having trouble containing himself. There are often heated discussions in this place, and members know that the rules provide that we are not to interrupt. We need to listen, to hear the questions and the answers.

The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

●(1455)

[Translation]

YOUTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government claims to want to help young Canadians find jobs and improve their lives, but it has a funny way of showing it. While the youth unemployment rate is stagnant at more than double the national average, the number of precarious jobs is skyrocketing, and according to the Minister of Finance, people better get used to it.

The chair of the expert panel on youth employment tweeted that the panel submitted its report at the end of March. However, the government has still not published it.

My question is simple. When will the government publish this report and take action to create good-quality jobs for young people?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing the report right now. We will have more to say about that in the near future.

Oral Questions

However, what I am excited to talk about are the investments we continue to make in youth to ensure they have the skills of today and of tomorrow. That is why we invested unprecedented amounts in this particular budget of 2017 to make access to skills training available to youth across the country.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's first appointment of an officer of Parliament is clearly based on partisanship and loose ethics. Even when an individual is fully qualified for the job, if that person does not donate to or help the Liberal Party, he or she is pushed aside and we are led to believe that another candidate is better.

Getting the job of official languages commissioner is easy: just donate \$5,000 to the Liberal Party, \$500 to the Prime Minister's leadership campaign, and that is it.

What will be the Prime Minister's *modus operandi* for future appointments?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our two official languages are a priority for our government.

After a long, open, and merit-based process, Ms. Meilleur clearly stood out as the most qualified person for the job. As I said earlier, Ms. Meilleur has fought for 30 years for francophone rights and French-language services. She was particularly involved in the fight to protect the Montfort Hospital so that people in Ottawa could have access to health care services in French.

I mentioned earlier how many groups across the country supported her appointment. We believe that she is the best candidate, and we hope that we will have the support of both chambers, the House of Commons and the Senate.

[English]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is taking cash for access to a whole new level. Now, for a \$5,000 donation to the Liberal Party, including \$500 to the Prime Minister's own leadership campaign, he is appointing Liberal friends to be commissioners of the Official Languages Act and officers of this House.

Therefore, my question for the Prime Minister is very simple. How big a donation to the Liberal Party does it take to get appointed as the Ethics Commissioner?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, official languages are important to our party and our government, and after a rigorous open and transparent merit-based process, Mrs. Meilleur emerged as the most qualified candidate for this important position. She has worked tirelessly in defence of the rights of official languages communities. She has been very much involved, especially in the protection of the Montfort Hospital, which was to ensure that Ontarians have access to health care in the language of their choice. We are convinced this candidate is the best

suited for this important position, and I hope that the House and the Senate will support—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to cronyism and appointing friends of the Prime Minister and Kathleen Wynne to plum patronage positions, the lightspeed at which the Liberals move is simply amazing. However, when it comes to replacing the Ethics Commissioner, whose term ends in less than two months, the appointment process is moving at a snail's pace. With the deadline looming, it can cause one to wonder why the delay.

Is the Prime Minister stalling, knowing that the Ethics Commissioner has said she may not have time to complete her investigations into his ethical lapses, or is he hoping the investigation will ride into the sunset along with Mrs. Dawson's retirement?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said many times, he will answer any questions of conflict that an ethics commissioner has.

When it comes to the appointment process, we have introduced a new merit-based appointment process that is open and transparent. All positions to apply for are available online. I encourage Canadians to apply. It is a very important position. We know that they do important work, and we will continue to work hard for Canadians.

* * *

STEEL INDUSTRY

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to helping the middle class in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie and across this great country. Domestic steel operations directly employ more than 22,000 Canadians, while supporting an additional 100,000 indirect jobs. In my riding, a strong steel industry helps support a strong middle class, including the hard-working members of United Steelworkers at Essar Steel and Tenaris.

Will the parliamentary secretary for finance share with us how budget 2017 is strengthening the steel industry in Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie for his continued advocacy for the steel industry.

As part of budget 2016 and budget 2017, our government has taken significant steps to support the Canadian steel producers. Most recently, measures in budget 2017 include important changes to Canada's trade remedy legislation. We consulted with Canada's steel producers, listened to their suggestions, and took action to help best position the industry to address unfair trade practices, grow their businesses, and create good, well-paying jobs for middle-class Canadians.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is that time of the year again when families start making plans for their summer vacations. I am wondering if the Prime Minister can commit to getting an estimate in advance from the Privy Council Office on how much his summer vacation dreams might cost. I am hoping that he will maybe take that into consideration when he chooses what to do and where to go this time.

The Speaker: I would remind colleagues that questions must be regarding the responsibility of the government.

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Speaker: There are no points of order during question period.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the inquiry into murdered and missing indigenous women received a failing grade from the Native Women's Association of Canada. Yesterday, 30 families and indigenous leaders said the process is in "serious trouble". A full and independent inquiry was promised to families, but that is not what they are getting.

I have asked this question before and the minister has refused to answer. Do the commissioners have full access to inquiry funding? If not, who is delaying approval of those expenditures?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The terms of reference of the inquiry made clear that the families should and must be at the centre. I have read the letter from the families. They are making heartfelt suggestions and asking important questions.

I am looking forward to hearing the commissioners' response and to see if our government can do anything to help them. The government has also taken immediate action on root causes with investments in women's shelters, housing, education, and child welfare reform.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Laval is one of the most innovative cities in Canada with strong and dynamic technology, science, digital, and aerospace industries. Laval has several interesting projects on the go in an effort to define itself as a smart, green, and forward-looking city.

How could the smart cities challenge encourage our cities to adopt innovative approaches to urban development and infrastructure that will improve quality of life?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the smart cities challenge will encourage cities to adopt new and innovative approaches to city building and improve the quality of life for residents through the implementation of clean, digitally connected technologies, including green buildings, smart roads and energy systems. This \$300-million program is a great opportunity for Canadian municipalities. I look forward to announcing this challenge in the coming months.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to fail Canadian seniors and their families. On Friday, I asked why they are not making palliative care funding a priority. The parliamentary secretary's response was medical aid in dying. Really? Is the Liberal solution to an aging population assisted suicide?

When will the Liberals get serious about the issues facing Canadian seniors and help those in need of proper home care and palliative care?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his advocacy on behalf of palliative care.

We are very happy as a government that we were able to support the provinces and territories to the tune of \$6 billion of new money to expand access to home care and palliative care. I have had the opportunity now to work with my counterparts in the provinces and territories. I have looked at some of the fantastic programs they are introducing, including an outstanding program in Nova Scotia where paramedics are delivering palliative care. There are wonderful innovations going on to expand palliative care across this country.

* * *

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to recap, KPMG offers its clients ways to cheat on their taxes, the government refuses to cancel its contracts with KPMG, and the Canada Revenue Agency hires people from KPMG. Now we learn that the Liberal Party treasurer, who was appointed by the Prime Minister during the Isle of Man scandal, worked at KPMG.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his dealings with KPMG are dragging his party back to its old ways, the conflicts of interest and cronyism of the days of the sponsorship scandal?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to respond to my colleagues across the way and remind them that last year we invested \$444 million to fight tax evasion and tax avoidance. This year, we invested \$524 million. We got a good return on our investment last year because we managed to recover \$13 billion, including \$1.3 billion through the voluntary disclosure program. We have a plan and we have the means. It is working and we have the numbers to prove it.

*Tributes***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has confirmed what we already knew, that is, that this government is not responsible. No real action has been taken to decrease our reliance on oil, or, if it has, the information is hidden or redacted. Lecturing or providing advice to other countries about the fight against climate change without a plan to reduce our own use of fossil fuels is as hypocritical as lecturing about human rights and then selling armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia.

When will this government start taking the environment seriously and table a concrete plan to fight climate change?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we thank the Office of the Auditor General for its work and we accept its recommendations. Our government has a strong plan to invest in clean growth that will help create good, middle-class jobs and get us on the right path to a low-carbon economy.

We have made commitments to our G20 partners to phase out inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies by 2025. We are on track to meet those targets.

* * *

[*English*]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the 2017 recipients of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Gold Leaf Prizes: Dr. Julio Montaner, Dr. John Dick, Dr. Gregory Steinberg, and Dr. Charlotte Loppie.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, I now give the floor to the official opposition House leader.

* * *

MEMBER FOR STURGEON RIVER—PARKLAND

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and express deep gratitude to someone who is a remarkable leader, member of Parliament, mentor, and friend. The member for Sturgeon River—Parkland has tirelessly led our party and Her Majesty's loyal opposition for the past 18 months.

[*Translation*]

She did it with dedication, passion, energy, and professionalism.

[*English*]

All the while, she has consistently shown her sharp intelligence, keen sense of humour, and her genuine kindness and nurture.

When the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland took over the role as leader of the Conservative Party, it was as interim leader, but never once did she treat this position as a placeholder or merely a fill in. From the outset, she gave everything to the role, and in doing so has led and unified a caucus and party through what many would acknowledge could have been a very difficult time. Her capable and true servant leadership style has led our party to a place of strength, effectiveness, and unity.

You know you are a great interim leader when people are fighting at policy conventions to change all of the rules so that you can run for permanent leader. I think that says it all.

[*Translation*]

Under her leadership, the Conservatives have grown strong. Our party is rock-solid, our fundraising is going really well, our caucus is united, and we are an effective opposition. We are a force for the Liberals to reckon with, and that is due in large part to this woman's leadership.

● (1510)

[*English*]

This actually is not the first time our interim leader has shown and excelled in her role. Whatever she has taken on as an MP or a minister, she has given 110% and delivered impressive results, some of which I am going to speak about momentarily.

What few people know is, like many women, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland, known to most as Rona, never thought she would run for public office. In fact, she never even considered it, which is typical of many women.

After resisting many calls for her to throw her hat in the political ring, she was finally convinced by Stephen Harper to take the political plunge and compete for the nomination to be the Conservative candidate in Edmonton—Spruce Grove, a nomination race which had the unique distinction of having nine candidates, making it one of the largest nomination races in the history of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Against all odds, and in spite of being told that she did not have a chance, she persevered and in 2004 won the nomination against seven men and one woman. She is our example of a strong, competitive “no quotas needed” Conservative woman. Since then, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland has gone on to win her seat in five straight federal elections.

Prior to being elected interim leader of the Conservative Party, the member served in Stephen Harper's cabinet as minister of the environment, intergovernmental affairs, western economic diversification, labour, public works and government services Canada, status of women, and health. Throughout her career as a cabinet minister, she has left a lasting legacy of public service and results. When she was appointed to cabinet in 2006, she had the unique distinction of becoming the youngest woman in Canadian history to be appointed to cabinet.

As minister of state for the status of women, she was instrumental in leading the charge as our Conservative government, in the face of opposition from many sides, fought to ensure that first nations women who live on reserves have the same property rights during a divorce as women who do not live on reserves.

During 2011 she continued that work for women who need a voice by being the champion at the UN for the adoption of a resolution declaring an annual International Day of the Girl. One hundred and twenty-two member states were persuaded by her, and as a result of her efforts, every October 11, we celebrate this important day internationally.

Tributes

As minister of health, she played a leading role in the worldwide response to the Ebola crisis. During this very challenging time, she led the charge to ensure that not only Canadians were protected, but that countries most affected by the outbreak were receiving the necessary support to treat Ebola right there on the ground.

In addition to working to make sure that mobile treatment units were made available in various devastated regions, she moved heaven and earth so that the Canadian-made experimental Ebola vaccine could move quickly through clinical trials. The Canadian vaccine has proven to be safe and effective and will undoubtedly save many lives.

Most recently, as a member of the official opposition, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland has fought tirelessly to advance the rights of victims. Whether it was her diligent commitment to helping Yazidi girls find refuge in Canada or her strong record in advancing legislation to defend the rights of victims, including Wynn's Law, and most recently, successfully passing her private member's bill, more commonly known as the JUST Act, our interim leader has always had a heart to help those who are less fortunate. She is someone who cares deeply about justice and mercy, and her work on so many files in this regard is a testament to her undying dedication to justice being served, but served in a compassionate way, especially for victims, who are too often forgotten.

While the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland's achievements in political life are numerous and known to many, there are certain things that many people do not know about her. A little known fact is that her chief of staff, Garry Keller, and I actually ran against her in an election. Let me explain. In 2004, Garry ran against her in that nomination race, the one where she beat seven men. Garry was one of those men she beat. I tried to run against her for interim leader. Needless to say, Garry and I both lost.

The reason I raise this is not just to highlight the fact that the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland is a tremendous campaigner and an inspirational leader. Those are well-known facts. I raise this to bear witness to the tremendous character of this amazing woman. Her willingness to trust even one-time adversaries to then become some of her closest advisers is a testament to her uncanny ability to see the best in people and her capacity to rise above and beyond the cut and thrust of politics to do what is right and what is for the greater good in each and every situation.

Here, though, are some fun facts about our interim leader. She speaks fluent Portuguese. She loves to hike in the mountains and does so quite often with her good friend Laureen Harper, and just last year, she almost threw up on U2's Bono, but that is a story for another day.

Our interim leader's dedication and love for politics are nothing compared to her love for her family. I think if we were to ask her why she is able to be so successful in life, she would tell us that it is due to the constant love, support, and influence of those who matter most to her.

As a child growing up, around the kitchen table her family loved to talk about current events and happenings all over the world. It was through these conversations that she developed a love and

appreciation for important issues, and a passion to solve problems and to do the right thing.

Ironically enough, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland quite dislikes partisan fights. In fact, I have to say that there have been a couple of occasions, just before she was going to rise in question period to hammer the Prime Minister with a hard-hitting question, that he probably will not answer, when she will look over to one of us and say, "Quick, say something to make me mad so I'll look a little more angry." I think all of us in this House have seen that she really is not especially partisan and that she would rather try to help and solve problems in a collegial way.

The love of her life and soon-to-be husband, J.P., will attest to the member's incredible devotion to her family. At this time, and on behalf of our entire caucus and party, I want to thank J.P. for his incredible support of her through this amazing, but I am sure somewhat exhausting, adventure. I know that J.P. has been Rona's rock: constant, encouraging, and so present through good times and challenging times. I know we all want to thank him for his sacrifice and willingness to share her with our Conservative family.

● (1515)

I also know that she is very much looking forward to having a bit more time to spend with J.P. and her stepchildren, whom she loves so much and is always bragging about: Makena, Garrison, and Shanese.

To her dear parents, Jim and Colleen Chapchuk, thank you for having raised such a remarkable woman. You have so much to be proud of.

To her brothers, James and Morley, I hear that you do not always agree on politics, so your sister got good practice in defending her position, and I am sure winning arguments, with common-sense conservative policies. Thanks for giving her the chance to practice being a strong woman in a political world often dominated by men. I am sure the Prime Minister is not so grateful after what she has put him through in the last 18 months, but on this side, we all are.

Finally, to Rona, my dear friend, thank you so much for your trust and confidence in asking me to be your House leader. Working with you has been one of the best experiences in my time here in Ottawa. Thank you for your example to me of being this amazing blend of both intellect and knowledge coupled with heart, soul, and compassion. Your confidence and strong leadership has been a true inspiration not only to me but to a whole generation of young women striving to make their mark in the world.

On behalf of our Conservative caucus and all members of the Conservative Party of Canada, thank you. You have not only helped our party remain united during a very long leadership race, but you have made sure that our party is stronger than ever.

As you prepare to pass on the baton to our new leader, who will be elected in less than two weeks, my friend, you can be immensely proud of what you have done.

Tributes

The hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland, our interim leader, will be greatly missed as the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition. However, you will always remain close to our hearts, no matter what road you take.

We love you, Rona.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege for me to rise in the House today to express my thanks to a woman who has the respect and admiration of all members of Parliament.

[*English*]

She is someone who for the past year and a half has not merely filled the role of political leader but has truly owned it and made it her own and has dedicated herself fully to one of our democracy's most demanding jobs. I am speaking, of course, of the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition, and interim Conservative Party leader, the hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland.

[*Translation*]

In just 11 days, members of the Conservative Party of Canada will elect a new leader, and the current opposition leader's term will come to an end. Regardless of how she decides to continue serving Canadians, her contributions in this House will stand the test of time. Her contributions are a reflection of her skills and a reminder to all that politicians work hard and can rise above the fray for the good of Canadians.

As a great champion of women and girls, the opposition leader, in her role as Minister of Status of Women, contributed to Canada's efforts in the United Nations to create International Day of the Girl. It is thanks to her hard work that we celebrate this day every year in October.

As an experienced minister, she led by example, serving Canadians elegantly and tenaciously in a number of portfolios, including environment, intergovernmental affairs, labour, public works, status of women, and health.

[*English*]

Serving as an interim leader is a tough job that the Leader of the Opposition has embraced with the confidence and a commitment to service that impresses everyone who has the privilege of working with her, for her, and opposite her.

Throughout it all, she has remained true to her own values, something we saw earlier this year when she introduced a private member's bill that, once passed, will require federal judges to undergo comprehensive training in sexual assault law so that survivors will feel the full support of the law at the time they need it most.

The hon. member and I obviously disagree on a good many things, but no one can doubt that she cares deeply about this country and has always been willing to work hard to make things better for her constituents and for all Canadians. In fact, last year, as part of *Maclean's* Parliamentarian of the Year awards, members of this House voted to declare her the hardest-working member of

Parliament, a great honour indeed, and the one, above all others, that, guaranteed, everyone in this House really wants to win.

The Leader of the Opposition also has a tremendous sense of humour. Her April Fool's gags are always funnier than mine. Her bull-riding jokes are definitely funnier than mine.

● (1525)

[*Translation*]

The thing that probably impressed me the most about the Leader of the Opposition was her determination to speak from the heart. Whether saying a few words following the sudden death of our colleague, Jim Hillyer, or talking about the forest fires that devastated her home province of Alberta, the Leader of the Opposition showed everyone, both in the House and outside the House, the power of sincerity in expressing one's feelings. It is a very Canadian approach, full of goodness and authenticity, just like the Leader of the Opposition.

[*English*]

As we learned this morning, the hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland will not only be leaving her position as leader of the official opposition, she will be resigning her seat and leaving federal politics. I hope the leader understands how keenly she will be missed. I hope she knows that thanks to the leadership she has shown here, she is leaving this House a much better place, a place where the things that matter so much to her, the interests of women and girls, Albertans, and all Canadians, will continue to be supported and upheld.

We will be forever grateful for the heart, humour, and hard work she shared with us these past 12 years and wish her and her family all the very best in the years to come.

Thank you for all you have done, Rona. You will be missed by all of us.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we pay tribute to the extraordinary member for Sturgeon River—Parkland and interim leader of the Conservative Party for her service as a member of Parliament, as a minister, and as leader of the official opposition and thank her for the honour, integrity, and passion she has brought to this House over the years.

We learned last night that not only will the member be handing over the reins to a new leader, she will also be stepping down as MP. That news was met with an outpouring of recognition and tremendous gratitude, and rightly so. She will be missed as an MP and as a great leader of the Conservative Party—my personal favourite, for the record.

In less than two weeks, a new Conservative leader will be chosen. We do not know who that will be, but we do know it will not be Kevin O'Leary. I guess for that, at least, we can be thankful.

Tributes

I thought today I would tell a story that demonstrates why the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland is so widely respected. This House is often filled with passionate debate and disagreement, as it should be. As opposition leaders of often diametrically opposed parties, we frequently have very different perspectives on issues, but sometimes we can find common ground and bypass party differences for the greater good. In March, the leader of the official opposition and I, and ultimately all members of this House, were able to come together and do just that.

[*Translation*]

A series of shocking decisions showed us once again that our legal system does an abysmal job of addressing cases of sexual assault and protecting the victims. The Halifax ruling made it clear that appropriate sexual assault training for judges was not only necessary, but had become urgent.

The Criminal Code stipulates that no consent is obtained where the complainant is incapable of consenting to the activity. This ruling went completely against the Criminal Code and it became clear that it was necessary to act quickly on this.

● (1530)

[*English*]

The member had introduced legislation, Bill C-337, that would require judges to undergo comprehensive training in sexual assault law. I was very impressed with the proposed bill. It is an important step forward for survivors of sexual assault who are struggling in a judicial system that far too often fails them.

It was clear to me that the legislation should receive unanimous support, not only due to the urgency of the problem but also because at that moment in particular, it was critically important that every member of the House come together and say “We believe survivors.”

We reached out to the member and her office and offered to endorse the bill and fast-track it to committee by proposing unanimous consent. That unanimous consent was forthcoming.

It is rare for all leaders of political parties to support each other's legislation and even more rare for leaders to propose unanimous consent for each other's legislation. However, when it comes to how our judicial system handles cases of sexual assault, I am so proud to say that members of the House unanimously agreed to put survivors first.

[*Translation*]

Quite sincerely, I thank the leader of the official opposition for the tremendous work she did for this bill. I know that this goes back to the hon. member's university days when she took part in a project that looked into how sexual assault complainants were treated in the courts. I know how important this is to her and I am extremely honoured that the House passed the bill yesterday.

I thank the hon. member for being so open to working in a collaborative and non-partisan way. That is what made possible this important accomplishment. I will always be very proud of this moment and I hope she will be as well. I can safely say that the leadership that the hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland showed in the House certainly earned her the respect of the entire NDP caucus.

In closing, Catherine and I wish my colleague, the leader of the official opposition, her family and her wonderful spouse, J.P., many years of peace and happiness together.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois hounded the Liberal government to do something about the Rona file. It did nothing, and we lost a vital Quebec business. Now the House is losing another important Rona. The interim leader of the Conservative Party, who, I think, has all the qualities to be an excellent leader, has decided to leave politics.

The House of Commons is losing a great parliamentarian. Obviously, we very rarely see eye to eye, but her class, her energy, and her convictions have always earned our admiration. The Leader of the Opposition is a remarkable woman.

With her mischievous sense of humour, she often managed to make the Conservative Party go viral on social media. Her very funny mannequin challenge comes to mind, along with the time she put Stornaway on Airbnb as an April fool's gag. She managed to give the Conservative Party a new dynamic image that was long overdue.

The Conservative Party is the party of oil, employers, and the moral right-wing base that would have voted for Trump, but it seems more likeable with the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland at the helm. She is like a breath of fresh air. Given her party's agenda, the fact that she managed to accomplish all the things she did is quite a feat. The interim leader of the Conservative Party gave a patina of unity to a party that has been, since time immemorial, in the throes of a leadership race involving some 30 candidates. We have lost count.

She was a beacon of party unity after the last election and has served the party very well in that regard. I would also be remiss if I failed to mention her desire to advance the cause of women, with her bill and her tough stand on gender equality. We have seen her applaud when the Bloc Québécois has asked questions about gender equality. Yes, that does happen. That too is to her credit.

A great parliamentarian is leaving us today, and I do not think that the Conservative Party will be able to find a better leader this weekend than the one it has had to date. Well done, Leader of the Opposition.

● (1535)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my colleague and friend.

I met the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland 11 years ago.

*Tributes**[English]*

I was not in politics yet. I was executive director of the Sierra Club Canada when I first sat down at a table opposite the current interim leader of the Conservative Party. She was then-minister of environment. It is a tribute to her personal characteristics of fairness, kindness and just plain likable that I could not help liking her as we discussed the Kyoto protocol.

I have searched my memory banks and I cannot remember a single time in the last 11 years when I have not thought well of her as a person, even if we disagreed. We share many things, including a love of dogs and hiking in the wilderness, and we also shared much when she was minister of health. I want to pause for that period and thank her once again.

[Translation]

She played a key role in ensuring the quick passage of Bill C-442 on Lyme disease. We are now working together on the national framework that will be implemented under that bill.

[English]

However, it took the minister of health deciding that a private member's bill from an opposition party leader would be okay to support. To have it pass unanimously in the House of Commons and the Senate is not about all the independent decision-making of all the MPs. Honestly, if the minister of health had not supported that bill, it would have died right there. I want to thank her once again for supporting remedies for the people across this country suffering from Lyme disease.

I also want to pay personal tribute to the fact that under her leadership and in the government of Stephen Harper, the strongest legislation ever, taking big pharma to task, Vanessa's Law, was passed. That is solid and it is a tribute I want to pay publicly.

Last, as another woman in politics, leading a teeny-weeny party over here in the corner, everything she has ever done as interim leader of the official opposition has demonstrated that women can do everything just as well as a man.

I saw her earlier today, standing at the podium in the foyer. I do not know how she stands in those shoes. I do not understand how anyone can walk in those shoes. They are phenomenal high heels. They are very gorgeous. It reminded me so much of what was often said of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, that she danced just as well as he did but backwards and in high heels.

Hats off to the leader of the official opposition. We will miss you.

The Speaker: Colleagues, before I call on the leader of the official opposition, allow me to add my words of congratulations on her many accomplishments, on her professionalism, and on her devotion to her constituents and to Canada.

The hon. leader of the official opposition, the hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland

• (1540)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for those kind words.

[Translation]

I want to thank my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House for their kind and generous tributes. It is rare to get compliments in the House, which makes my colleagues' words today all the more meaningful.

[English]

I really want to thank all my colleagues in the House, from all sides of the House, for their thoughtful and generous tributes. It really has been the privilege of my life to serve as the leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and interim leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Before I get to thank you, I wanted to make a point.

As we all know, for this place to function, we also need a good opposition, no matter what party. A great Canadian prime minister, the Right Hon. John Diefenbaker, said once, "If Parliament is to be preserved as a living institution His Majesty's" or as we know now "Her", "Loyal Opposition must fearlessly perform its functions."

When it properly discharges them the preservation of our freedom is assured...It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the Cabinet of the rights of the people...It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and molds public opinion by voice and vote. It must scrutinize every action by the government and in doing so prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.

I hope I have in some small part done my job as Leader of the Opposition.

I am overwhelmed by the kind comments and good wishes from my colleagues. However, for members who are new in the House, if you are wondering how long it takes, or how long they have to be here until people say nice things about you, you actually do not have to wait; you just have to quit.

I really want to thank my good friend and our House leader for her heartfelt words she conveyed on behalf of our caucus and the members of our party. It is truly humbling. Of course I want to thank my caucus, because those members put their trust in me to lead the party for this time. I have loved every minute of it. In large part, that is because I get to work with this amazing group of people every single day, and I am so proud of what we have accomplished together.

I know people say that being the leader of a caucus is a challenge. I am sure the Prime Minister and the leader of the NDP know what that feels like. I hope one day the leader of the Green Party will know what that feels like too.

People say that leading a caucus of politicians is like herding cats, but at least it is better than dealing with the media, which is like giving a cat a bath.

I sincerely want to thank the Prime Minister for his generous words, especially after I just hammered him in question period. In all seriousness, we have had a very respectful working relationship. I want to thank him for supporting my private member's bill and, with all sincerity, I want to wish him the best. To Sophie and the kids, and his whole family, all the best. It must be said that never again will two competitors be so well matched up for the battle of best hair.

Tributes

I want to thank the leader of the NDP for his words, for his friendship and in particular, I want to thank him, and he mentioned it, for his unequivocal support for my private member's bill. I also need to tell him he is on some very good western street cred. He and my spouse J.P. have now become really good friends, which always happens when anyone meets J.P. He found out that the leader of the NDP wore cowboy boots all the time, and not just any cowboy boots. He wears the kind of cowboy boots that real cowboys wear. I want to wish him and Catherine and the whole family all the best.

I also thank very much my friend from the Green Party and my colleagues from the Bloc for their great words. They are truly humbling.

I want to thank my parents who are here. I am so fortunate to have them in my life. They are amazing people who taught us the important things like respect, compassion and integrity, and I want to thank them. I want to thank both my brothers who are here. All these years, we are still good friends, even though one of them votes NDP. Who knows, Mr. Speaker? Maybe they both do. I do not know.

● (1545)

I am also thankful to have my in-laws here and so many friends. I am so incredibly thankful to all of them for being supportive, loving, and extremely patient through these years.

I want to thank my constituents and my volunteers back home who have worked with me over the years on many campaigns and have been especially understanding over the last 18 months while I travelled across the country as leader.

Of course, to all my staff over the years in all the offices—in the riding, here on the Hill, at the Conservative Party headquarters, and the leader's office—I thank them for their commitment, their passion, and their professionalism. We have had a lot of fun.

My staff, even those who have left the Hill, have always referred to themselves affectionately as “Team Ambrose” and the great little group that I travel with now on tour calls themselves the “Rontourage”. They have made work a lot of fun, and truly my success is their success.

I also want to take a moment to give a special thanks to my friend and mentor the Right Hon. Stephen Harper and his wife, Laureen. He gave me his trust and his friendship, and for that I am forever grateful. I thank the two of them because they have just been wonderful.

Last and most important, of course, I want to thank J.P. and the kids because they make my life so great. When they came along, they embraced this crazy life with so much enthusiasm, and I thank them for that. In fact, it is great because it reminded me about how important the little things in life are.

It reminds me of a story. When Garrison was only six, he asked me what I did today. At the time, I was the minister of health, so I proceeded to tell him about the important meetings I had that day, the important people I met, the important decisions I made, the press conference I had, and the millions of dollars I gave away to some stakeholder, and he said “Huh, what else did you do?” That says it all.

Like many members, I have seen that the exposure to this life has really benefited them, and they have thrived on it and loved it. Makena, when she was only eight, did a speech about the International Day of the Girl in front of 1,200 students, to talk about the importance of girls' education.

Garrison was only eight when he actually talked about the importance of science for kids, and this was in front of 2,000 people before he handed the microphone over to astronaut Chris Hadfield. They have done quite well in this life.

One of our favourite memories is when I had to work on a weekend and they had some friends here in Ottawa. We came to Parliament so I could do my job, and a security guard gave them an all-access pass—I hope that is okay—and they literally had the run of the House and played hide and seek. I am thankful that my life has afforded us such fun and lasting memories.

Last, I want to thank J.P., who has been a rock for me since the day we met. He embraced this life and in so doing, he made it a partnership from day one, and we have had a blast together. He always says never would he have imagined, as a former bull riding champion, that he would be hosting tea parties at Stornoway, but he did. He brought his down-to-earth love of life and love of people to everything he did.

It was not just tea parties. He handed out candy to the kids on Halloween at Stornoway, but it was not really fair, because he dressed up as a cowboy. He brought beer pong tournaments for the interns to Stornoway, karaoke for the press gallery parties, great bands, and even a mechanical bull for our caucus party. The truth is that everybody loves J.P. In fact, one of my caucus colleagues actually said this to me: “Rona, the truth is that if J.P. ran against you in a nomination, I'm not sure who I'd vote for.”

● (1550)

Words cannot express our love and thanks to our friends and family for making this such an unforgettable part of our lives. We are excited to start a new chapter of our lives. We will not be far away, and I am still here until June.

I want to say what an honour it has been to serve in this great place. Thank you. I have enjoyed every minute of it.

The Speaker: I must say that I am actually less concerned about this talk of all-access passes than I am about the topic of hair coming up so often.

Best wishes to you, Rona, and to your family in the future. All the best.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

The Speaker: There are two and a half minutes remaining in questions and comments following the speech of the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the tail end of the member's comments just before question period, we were talking about the importance of our RCMP. I think sometimes it is worthwhile to look for where we can find consensus within legislation, and I think there is a consensus from all members of this House recognizing the fantastic work that our RCMP officers do day in and day out for all Canadians. We applaud them on those efforts.

It seems to me that this issue has had a great deal of debate already. Whether it was in second reading or in committee, there has been a great deal of discussion on the issue, and there were even discussions prior to the last national election, quite frankly.

Would the member not agree that it is a healthy thing to see this ultimately go back to the Senate?

• (1555)

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, I believe I prefaced my remarks by saying that we, as a caucus, are not opposed to the Supreme Court of Canada decision. It is a fact that there will be collective bargaining for the RCMP and, of course, there will be a right to organize for RCMP officers.

The issue before us is the amendments that were proposed by the Senate that have been adopted by the Liberal government. Our point on this side of the House is very clear. While we accept certain of the amendments and accept the position of the government on certain aspects of it, a crystal clear point of demarcation is on the right to a secret ballot. On that, we cannot have any kind of compromise. We think it is fundamental to the expression of will by RCMP officers, just as it is in democracy as a whole.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of the government's proposed response to the amendments to Bill C-7.

[Translation]

I will be sharing my time with the member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

[English]

Our proposed response to the amendments is in line with our stated position. In this response, we demonstrate our support for the dedicated and proud members of Canada's national police service. Who could be more deserving of such support than the dedicated and proud members of Canada's national police service who protect Canadians on so many fronts?

Members of the RCMP come to work every day with the goal of serving Canada and protecting Canadians. They are the people who protect the Governor General, the Prime Minister and other ministers of the crown, visiting royalty and dignitaries, and diplomatic missions. They are the people who participate in international policing efforts, who safeguard the integrity of our borders, and provide counterterrorism and domestic security. They are the people who enforce our federal laws against commercial crime, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, and organized crime. They are the people who provide policing services under contract to eight provinces, the three territories, and more than 150 municipalities.

This bill, with amendments, helps support those who protect us, and these men and women who are recognized as a symbol of Canada around the world deserve our respect.

In addition, over the past few years, the RCMP has taken action to promote a respectful and healthy workplace. For example, a new code of conduct was implemented that specifically identifies harassment as a contravention of the code. Harassment in the workplace is an issue the Government of Canada takes very seriously. Discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation, as well as bullying and harassment, is simply unacceptable.

What is more, in February 2016, the Minister of Public Safety asked the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission to undertake a comprehensive review of the RCMP's policies and procedures on workplace harassment, and to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations the commission made in 2013.

In addition, in July 2016, the Minister of Public Safety announced the appointment of Sheila Fraser as a special adviser. Her role has been to provide advice and recommendations to the minister regarding the application of various policies and processes by the RCMP after the filing of legal proceedings against the organization in four specific cases. The recommendations by Ms. Fraser and the commission will be carefully reviewed, and will inform further work on improving the workplace of the RCMP. I would like to thank Ms. Fraser and Ian McPhail for their work, as well as the many individuals who agreed to be interviewed and who provided information that led to the findings and recommendations.

I should also mention that the RCMP has launched the informal conflict management program and a five-year mental health strategy for all employees.

The RCMP has made great strides with the initiatives, programs, and policies it has implemented. These steps are important not only to the RCMP but ultimately to Canadians who rely on them for integrity and effective policing. Our proposed response to the amendments increases the scope of what can be discussed and potentially included in a collective agreement to include issues such as harassment.

Government Orders

●(1600)

Let me turn to the specifics of the government's response to these amendments. As I just stated, our government accepts the amendment to remove the restrictions on what may be included in collective agreements and arbitral awards that are specific to the RCMP. This amendment ensures that the employer and any future RCMP member bargaining agent can engage in meaningful discussions in good faith on topics of importance to RCMP members and reservists. This amendment increases the scope of the issues that could be discussed at the bargaining table, issues that now include transfers and appraisals, and matters commonly associated with harassment, and general aspects of workplace wellness, such as the promotion of a respectful workplace and early conflict resolution.

It is in support of our national police service that we also accept, with some modifications, the amendment to include a management rights clause as part of the new labour relations regime for RCMP members and reservists. We have the utmost respect for the commissioner's authority to manage the RCMP and to ensure the operational integrity of the police service.

What is at stake here is the safety and security of Canadians. Keeping Canadians safe is a serious responsibility, and our government takes this responsibility seriously. We propose a more targeted management rights clause to focus on the authorities that the RCMP commissioner needs to ensure effective police operations. We do this because we also value the rights of the RCMP members and reservists, the dedicated men and women who risk their lives every day to keep Canadians safe.

With these two measures alone, I am confident that the motion before us today addresses the key concerns with the bill. We must preserve the restrictions on what can be negotiated that replicate those that have applied to the rest of the federal public service for over 40 years. We must also maintain the current mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board. Expanding this mandate to include all matters pertaining to terms and conditions of employment would result in two different grievance processes that might lead to conflicting decisions.

Finally, the government cannot proceed with the amendment requiring a secret ballot vote to certify a bargaining agent to represent RCMP members and reservists. The secret ballot amendment is contrary to Bill C-4, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act.

Bill C-4, which was introduced in the House of Commons on January 28, 2016, seeks to repeal legislation adopted in 2013 that sought to undermine unions' organizing efforts. Bill C-4 puts the discretion of certification with the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board. Whether there will be a secret ballot or a card check, the board will make sure the members' interests are reflected in the choice made.

To conclude, as we celebrate Canada's 150 years, let us not forget one of Canada's most venerable police services, which is why our government urges all members to proudly support the proposed response to the amendments to Bill C-7.

●(1605)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member across the way about the government's use of time allocation on this bill.

The use of time allocation suggests that the government perceives some urgency in passing its response to these amendments. However, the Senate provided its amendments in June of last year. The government waited 11 months to bring its response to the Senate amendments to the House and is now using time allocation to limit debate in this House to only a few days.

If this is such an urgent issue, why did the government sit on it for 11 months? If it is not an urgent issue, why is the government imposing time allocation now?

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Madam Speaker, time allocation was explained by the government House leader. I simply reiterate the response that she provided.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the member's speech and I realize that this whole thing came about because of a Supreme Court decision, but the one part that bothers me extensively, and I have spoken on it in the House before, is the secret ballot.

Let us say the member across from us had to vote along with his whole caucus on whether they wanted to remove the Prime Minister for some reason. Hypothetically, as I hope they understand, they have to remove their boss. Would the member like to do it with a private secret vote, or would he like to do it standing up in front of the Prime Minister so he would know who his allies were and who the people against him were?

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Madam Speaker, I state very clearly that I will not answer the member's question as it is so extremely hypothetical.

If I may, I will answer the underlying assumption about secret ballots, which I think is a very fair question and one that should be addressed. I have been a labour law professor for 35 years, and it is certainly an issue that I address in the books that I write and in the classes that I teach. I will even say that what my personal views might be are not necessarily what I am exposing right here, but I have to say one thing. It is that I believe the concept we have of our labour laws was conceived in the 19th century, and the workplace is so dramatically different that the similarities no longer exist.

What I regret is that in 2013 the government of the time did not undertake a fundamental review of all the basic concepts of our labour legislation.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel for his words and for his work on the parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We are aware, and certainly a labour law professor will be aware, of all of the initiatives that have come forward since 2014 to address workplace harassment in the RCMP.

Government Orders

Why does the member believe that, in his own words, meaningful discussion and good faith on issues of workplace wellness and harassment will improve the labour regime in collective bargaining for RCMP members?

• (1610)

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Madam Speaker, the concept that we have of labour relations is one in which we have one certified agent negotiating with the employer on behalf of all the members. The certified agent gets instructions from his or her members, who provide him or her with information. Therefore, there are at the bargaining table the two entities that are best informed on what happens in the workplace and are in the best possible position to craft the most adequate solutions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to participate in the debate on the motion presenting the government's proposed response to Bill C-7.

This bill takes a historic step in labour relations for the RCMP and in Canada. If the bill passes, RCMP members and reservists will for the first time have the same right to collective bargaining as other Canadians. RCMP members have a long tradition of exceptional dedication to their country. We just celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and it is fitting that we point out that many valiant RCMP officers fought in that battle.

In fact, during the First World War, the Canadian government initially refused to send RCMP members overseas. However, a good number of them did not accept this decision. They decided to leave the North West Mounted Police in order to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force. During the Battle of Vimy Ridge, these members fought with the Canadian Armed Forces and many of them served with distinction.

A century later, RCMP members are just as courageous. Whether fighting drug trafficking on the ground or dealing with organized crime in the trenches, they are on the front line of public safety and we must ensure that they are working in a safe environment.

As far as harassment is concerned, I can assure my colleagues that the government is taking this issue very seriously. The government and the RCMP are determined to create a workplace free from harassment. We want to ensure that there are solid processes in place to deal with allegations effectively and safely.

I want to thank Ms. Fraser and the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP for their work on the reports on harassment in the RCMP that were released this week. I also want to thank the courageous people who agreed to be interviewed for these reports. It is important that we all support the work of RCMP members and that we take all the appropriate measures to help them exercise their right to collective bargaining, which brings us to Bill C-7.

The Government of Canada is proposing this bill in response to an important ruling issued by the Supreme Court of Canada in January 2015. In that ruling, the Supreme Court found that the provisions that exclude members of the RCMP from the application of the Public Service Labour Staff Relations Act were unconstitu-

tional because they prevented members from deciding on their own, like all other Canadians, whether they wanted to be represented by a bargaining agent.

I want to thank the Supreme Court of Canada for rendering that important decision, which has given us the opportunity to modernize the labour relations regime for RCMP members and reservists.

Bill C-7 gives members of the RCMP the freedom to choose, if they so desire, to unionize and bargain collectively through that union to make their needs known to their employer. It is the same freedom of choice enjoyed by all other police forces in Canada, which I think is important to point out.

The bill sets out to protect the rights of RCMP members while protecting Canadians and keeping them safe. The bill has been subjected to rigorous scrutiny by experts, stakeholders, and Senate and House of Commons committees, and we acted on their recommendations by making changes very early on in the process to things like how work-related injuries are handled.

In its response, the government accepted some of the amendments proposed by the Senate, amended some, and rejected others. Among other things, the government agreed to strike the RCMP-specific restrictions on bargaining and arbitral awards from Bill C-7 and to adopt a more targeted management rights clause.

These amendments will enable the employer and any future bargaining agent for RCMP members to hold good-faith discussions about issues that matter to RCMP members and reservists. This approach will preserve the commissioner's authority to manage the RCMP and ensure the operational integrity of the police service and the broader accountability of the RCMP for the safety of Canadians.

• (1615)

Certain limitations regarding issues that can be included in collective agreements and arbitral awards have been maintained. They are in line with existing provisions in the Public Service Labour Relations Act that apply to the rest of the federal public service.

The government is also rejecting the requirement regarding secret ballot voting to elect the bargaining agent who will represent RCMP members and reservists.

It is important to point out that Bill C-4 does not deny the RCMP the opportunity to hold this vote by secret ballot. All it does is allow the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to decide what is best based on the circumstances, either a secret ballot or a card check procedure.

In addition, if the bill does pass, the chair of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board must take into account the need to have at least two board members with knowledge of police organizations when making appointments.

Government Orders

Nor does the government want to expand the mandate of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board to have it hear grievances on a broader range of issues relating to working conditions. This would be inconsistent with how the Public Service Labour Relations Act is applied to the rest of the public service and would create an overlap of appeal and grievance procedures that are established under the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

Thanks to the government's proposed response, we have maintained the best bill possible because it takes into account countless hours of debate and healthy discussions. Accordingly, we must not delay any further.

As currently worded, the Public Service Labour Relations Act does not fully take into account the concerns and interests of RCMP members or their operational reality.

That is why we must move forward with Bill C-7 and implement a labour relations regime that provides RCMP members and reservists the freedom to choose to be represented by a bargaining agent and that takes into account the specific needs of a national police force.

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, a member who spoke previously and the member said that labour law has changed significantly since 1900, but we are perhaps in some archaic times. One of the things the Liberals had proposed for the House was electronic voting, rather than standing to vote. They were preferring to see electronic voting, even in our offices. That seems counter to what they are proposing under this legislation. Instead of standing up and voting, they are proposing for us to vote electronically, which would be very invisible, compared to card-holding voting.

I wonder what the member's response would be. His party had proposed something significantly different with electronic voting, while the previous speaker from his party was saying we need to get updated. It seems a little different.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his question. I know that the issue of a mandatory secret ballot seems to be important to the official opposition.

However, after hearing from many witnesses and taking the time to reflect on everything that we read and heard, after analyzing the Supreme Court of Canada decision and the Senate's recommendations, and after hearing from the main party involved, the RCMP, which is not calling exclusively for a secret ballot, the government is rejecting this amendment or proposal because it runs counter to Bill C-4, which would restore fair labour relations.

On the contrary, we believe that the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board must decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether a vote or a card check is the most appropriate and fair method in the certification process. There is no reason to treat the RCMP differently in that regard.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I certainly do not have the legal knowledge that he does, however, what really struck me with respect to Bill C-7 was the report that the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP released on May 15 concerning workplace harassment in the RCMP.

According to the report, the RCMP does not have an appropriate appeals policy. Unlike public service employees, who have the right to appeal a decision on a harassment complaint in accordance with the procedure established in their collective agreement, RCMP members still do not have access to an impartial and independent appeal body.

The motion being studied would reject a Senate amendment making all grievances subject to the Public Service Labour Relations Act rather than the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.

Does the member disagree with the commission's findings?

Mr. René Arseneault: Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to point out that my colleague, with whom I had the opportunity to work on the joint committee on physician-assisted dying, is remarkable. Her general knowledge allowed her to make an important contribution to the committee's recommendations. It was very appreciated.

We are firmly resolved to support any measure necessary to help RCMP officers, recruits in training, and employees feel safe and respected in the presence of their colleagues and supervisors. The two reports describe similar serious, long-standing concerns regarding harassment within the RCMP.

The problems raised can have a major negative impact on the health and well-being of victims, on the reputation and credibility of the RCMP, and on all Canadians. The recommendations will be carefully examined so that any measures taken will help make the RCMP work environment safe and respectful.

As all Canadians know, members of the RCMP play a vital role in our communities across the country. As this report clearly indicates, we can and must do better.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am sharing my time today with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

I am very pleased to be following the wonderful speeches made earlier today honouring our colleague, the Leader of the Opposition.

I am pleased to speak to the government's motion respecting amendments brought forward by the Senate to Bill C-7.

I want to acknowledge, in the same manner that my colleague from Brandon—Souris did, that the Conservative Party respects the Supreme Court's decision that RCMP officers are entitled to organize and bargain collectively. We recognize the great work of the men and women of the RCMP.

Government Orders

In much the same manner as Bill C-4, which is currently back before the House, the Senate has demonstrated a willingness to apply democratic principles to flawed legislation. I welcome this attention to democracy from the Senate and I am pleased to speak in favour of the Senate amendment regarding secret ballots, which the government has chosen to ignore in practice and attack in debate.

I have to openly wonder why it took the government 11 months to respond to amendments from the other place. The amendments from the Senate are substantially similar to the amendments to Bill C-7 last year when it was before committee. Last year, the government ignored the amendments as this legislation was deemed, in its words, too critical, so critical, in fact, that the government invoked time allocation to rush it through this House. Now, though, it appears that every bill is critical, of course, as time allocation seems to be used on every bill that the government bumbles through the House.

Upon receiving amendments from the Senate on this so-called critical bill, the government then promptly sat on the bill for almost an entire year. The Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board claims the government was “doing the thoughtful, careful analysis required to explore the whole portfolio of amendments made by the other place and to come forward with our response to have a robust regime for collective bargaining for the RCMP.”

I was personally shocked that she missed mentioning a whole-of-government approach and helping the middle class and those working to join it as an excuse for the delay. Let us rush the bill through because it is absolutely critical and then sit on it for an entire year because the government needs to carefully and thoughtfully consider the analysis. Why the government did not do that originally when drafting the bill or when similar suggestions were made in committee is beyond me.

Funnily enough, though, in spite of the government's odd stalling, Bill C-7 was, for the most part, a reasonable response to the Supreme Court's ruling on RCMP officers' rights to collectively bargain and organize. I cannot, however, endorse any bill that refuses to grant union members the right to vote in a secret ballot on whether to unionize.

I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board if she could tell us specifically why she thinks a card check system is better than a secret ballot system. In my question, I noted that secret ballots are used to elect members in this place, all the way down to simple acts like choosing high school student councils. On a question as important as whether or not workers want to join a union, why should those workers not be given the same priority?

In response, the parliamentary secretary criticized me for comparing the critical work of the RCMP to high school student councils. I do not take offence to such inane criticism from the member as it was evident she did not have a response to the uncomfortable reality that the government is endorsing anti-democratic principles.

In a follow-up question from my colleague from Calgary Rocky Ridge, the parliamentary secretary claimed that it is fairer to “restore the choice...for the Public Service Labour Relations Board to ensure

whether the secret ballot or the card check system is in the interests of the members in a particular situation.” She also questioned why the RCMP should be “singled out for a more restrictive certification process than all the other groups that bargain with the government in labour relations.”

I have two responses to that. First, it is a poor justification for maintaining an anti-democratic system. It is an argument for keeping things the same because nothing else is changing. It is, frankly, a remarkably nonsensical excuse for denying democratic rights to workers and prospective union members. Second, we are not trying to single out the RCMP. We have consistently argued for the rights of union members and for the transparency of unions. Bill C-7 is one in a long line of examples where Conservatives have argued for greater transparency enshrined in law, which unions must follow.

Unions are like any employer organization. By virtue of their position, they necessarily have coercive power over their members and workers in a workplace. There is no logical reason why members opposite should argue that employers, through their scale and resources, possess undue power and influence over workers, but that unions, with their scale and resources, do not. Secret ballots balance out the power structure and ensure that workers come first.

The government has provided no indication that it recognizes the power imbalance and heavy entrenchment of unions, nor has it demonstrated any indication that it supports transparency in unions. On this side of the House, we believe in transparency, and we believe in legislation that strengthens the rights of individuals to make a choice free from intimidation.

● (1625)

When the parliamentary secretary asks why Conservatives want to single out the RCMP, the simple answer is that we will happily single out any organization for greater individual rights and greater transparency. RCMP members would be a good start, but all workers should know that this side of the House will stand up and defend their rights.

In a speech to the House last week, the member for Brandon—Souris reminded the House as follows:

...that in a briefing presented to the public safety committee, it was told that all previous certifications of public sector unions were done by secret ballot. By accepting this amendment, [the government] would actually treat the RCMP equally in terms of certification or decertification, as other public sector unions.

The parliamentary secretary is wrong for trying to justify anti-democratic legislation because current unions do not use secret ballots. She is wrong to argue that Conservatives are trying to single out the RCMP, because we have long argued for greater democracy and transparency. She is wrong to single out the RCMP because previous certifications of public sector unions were done by secret ballot, meaning that the Liberal government is actually singling out the RCMP for non-democratic treatment.

Government Orders

This is the second union-related bill that the Senate has sent back to the House with amendments calling for protection of the secret ballot certification process. It might be because the Senate has a point. Secret ballots are the only way to ensure union members can choose their future free from intimidation. The excuses put forward by the Liberal government do not justify denying democratic rights to workers.

I want to quote my friend and colleague the hon. member for Durham, who stated:

...my friends in the other parties are in Parliament not through a card check of their voters and their constituents but by their secret ballot vote, which is a fundamental tenet of our democracy.

It bothers me that we would suggest the federal government and the federal government's unionized work environment would have the same sort of intimidation stories you hear in relation to some private sector unionization efforts from years ago with unfair labour practices...

He is correct. The importance of the secret ballot cannot be understated, and must be upheld.

In researching some of the history of the secret ballot, I was reminded of the history of voting in the U.K., reading about the People's Charter written by the London Men's Working Association. As late as the mid-19th century, voting was still done by public show of hands at hustings. Given the prevalence of intimidation of voters, the demand for a secret ballot was one of the six key points of the People's Charter and the chartists' 1838 petition that "suffrage, to be exempt from the corruption of the wealthy and the violence of the powerful, must be secret." The charter's points were not passed into law at that time. Unfortunately for all, the voting process was not made secret until the Ballot Act was passed in 1872. Voters in the U. K. fought for decades for secret ballots because it was the only method to protect their votes from intimidation. That the Liberal government is stuck in the mindset of the 19th century is quite disheartening.

In closing, I want to reiterate the comments made by my colleague from Brandon—Souris in quoting the hon. member for Carleton, who originally spoke on the legislation. He said that, in removing the right of a secret ballot, it was important to be very clear on what this meant. It meant that a union could take over a federally regulated workforce without there ever being a vote by a member from that workplace, and that thousands of employees from any number of federal employers could be forced to pay dues and be represented by a union for which they never had a chance to vote.

He noted that this would be particularly alarming when it related to the RCMP, an organization composed of members who put their lives on the line each and every day, in part to defend our democratic lifestyle. Therefore, it is great irony that members of the RCMP would be deprived of the most basic democratic right, which is the right to vote in secret on whether to certify a union, while they stand and defend our democratic rights.

I will reiterate my support for the Supreme Court's decision, and I firmly believe that RCMP members should be given the right of a secret ballot. I cannot support legislation that removes the ability of workers to choose their future, of their own volition and without fear of intimidation from anyone.

● (1630)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member posed a question asking why our side of the House believes that card check is a better approach. In fact, we have been very clear that it is important there be a card check method and a secret ballot method. Each has its place, and there is a board that can determine the appropriate place for fair and effective certification.

I actually find it very puzzling that the Conservatives are now so opposed to allowing the Public Service Labour Relations Board to have the discretion to choose the certification method it thinks is the most fair. When the previous Conservative government introduced Bill C-43, its RCMP labour relations bill, did it make secret balloting mandatory? No, it did not. It actually left the choice to the Public Service Labour Relations Board, just as we are doing.

I would like to know why it was fine for the board to have the choice of appropriate methodology under the Conservatives' previous Bill C-43 but it is not now.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, we are not here to debate Bill C-43 from years ago. We are debating a bill before the House today on whether to allow members of the RCMP to enjoy the same rights as any other Canadian, which is a secret ballot, the same right to be free of intimidation, free of coercion, and free to choose on their own whether they wish to join a union. It is silly to be arguing debates from years ago when the bill in front of us today is on the important democratic rights of RCMP officers to enjoy a secret ballot on whether they decide to unionize.

● (1635)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Edmonton West is quite correct to point out the incoherence between the government sitting on these Senate amendments for 11 months and then applying time allocation to this bill responding to those amendments.

I appreciate that the member for Edmonton West was not part of the previous Conservative government. The position that the Conservatives put forward in this debate is that they support the ability of RCMP members to form a union and to bargain collectively, but they believe that process should require a secret ballot.

I wonder if my colleague from Edmonton West could shed any light on why the previous Conservative government did not extend collective bargaining rights to RCMP members when it was in power and when the Canada Labour Code did require a secret ballot as opposed to card-check certification.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I do enjoy the time I spend with my colleague from Regina—Lewvan on the committee on operations and estimates.

I will be honest. I cannot answer to something that happened in the past when I was not here.

Government Orders

The bill before us today is specifically about whether we should allow secret ballots for certification. We on this side of the House strongly believe at this time that it is important for RCMP members to be free of coercion and free of intimidation and that it is their right to have a secret ballot vote on whether they wish to unionize.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, everybody brings up the past, so let us just deal with the past. I will go back to the seventies and early eighties when the RCMP had a different rep program. Unlike what the Liberals said earlier, that members never had the opportunity to bargain, the div rep was voted in by members by secret ballot. That rep negotiated for the members. During that tenure, the RCMP ranked usually within the top three police forces in Canada. Now that the government and public service have become involved, it is ranked 56th. I wonder if the member could tell me what he thinks about that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I think it is probably due to the fact that my hon. colleague is no longer an RCMP member. The fact that he has now left is probably why the rankings have dropped so much.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: That's a good answer.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There is a lot of work to be done with the RCMP, Madam Speaker. There are thousands of wonderful members. There is obviously work to be done, and we look forward to members on both sides of the House working with the RCMP and moving forward to improve the force.

[*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 Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Indigenous Affairs; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to once again congratulate my colleague on his very relevant speech regarding our position on Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures, currently before the House. This title may not mean much to most people, but I will be talking about the bill for the next few minutes.

I want to begin my speech by talking about respect, because once again, the government has decided to trample the rights and privileges of parliamentarians to speak freely in the House on a particular bill. This Liberal government has made a habit of shutting down the debate as quickly as possible when the debate is not to its liking.

When the government has nothing to gain by allowing the debate to continue, and it realizes that the arguments made by the opposition and the senators are relevant, it uses time allocation instead of allowing us to present our arguments and speak in the House. This is not the first time. In fact, it is the second time this week. The Leader of the Government said herself that the government would use time

allocation even more often from now on to muzzle the opposition members.

Still, I heard some excellent speeches today. In fact, I want to acknowledge the excellent work done by the House leader of the official opposition for as long as she has been here. She has given the official opposition a real voice and a real sense of direction. This is my first term as an MP, and I am proud of our leader. She is the one who has shown me how to be an effective opposition.

Back when the Liberals were in opposition, they probably subscribed to those same ideals about effective opposition. Without going so far as to say that power corrupts, I would suggest that, what with everything that has been happening, that might not be far off the mark. Those in power do not welcome opposing views.

There is no leadership without respect. If the government wants the respect of Canadians and parliamentarians, it should not assert its power; it should express its ideas and opinions to prove to other parliamentarians that it is on the right track.

Instead, this government opted for Motion No. 6. It chose a rather heavy-handed approach to changing the rules of the House. It has invoked closure a number of times, and considering how many times it has done so this week, I get the impression it is just getting started. We are likely to see more time allocation motions in the weeks to come. This shows a lack of respect for the House.

I will now talk about Bill C-7. The government promised real change on how the House operates and holds discussions. The Prime Minister appointed new senators from across Canada and, according to him, made the Senate more effective and “independent”.

Even if an appointment is made directly by the Prime Minister's Office, which is essentially independent, the Prime Minister has the final say and can choose the most like-minded candidates.

This is what the Prime Minister said about appointing certain senators:

Once appointed, these six exceptional candidates from Quebec, together with the other recent nominees, will be able to contribute to a Senate which is reflective of our great country.

This is what he said when he appointed senators from Ontario:

I am pleased today to put forward six exceptional candidates as new Senators representing Ontario. These men and women were selected using the Government's new merit-based system, a real example of democracy in action....

● (1640)

When he appointed senators from elsewhere in Canada, he said:

It is a privilege to be putting forward the names of nine new senators to the Governor General who have been selected using a new merit-based and open process. It is part of our ongoing efforts to make the Senate more modern and independent and ensure that its members have the depth of knowledge and experience to best serve Canadians.

Those are the words that were used by the Prime Minister when he appointed senators to apparently make the Senate more independent.

Government Orders

What do we have before us today? We need to discuss the amendments proposed by these senators, who were appointed to take a second look at the legislative measures that we studied here. What is the government's reaction? It simply wants to cross out any of the recommendations of the Senate that it does not like. In the end, all of the work done by the Senate was for nothing. This is not the bill that was sent to the Senate. It did not come back the way the government wanted it to, so now the government must ensure that the changes proposed by the Senate are not incorporated into the new version of the bill. The bill will therefore be sent back to the Senate, and the Senate will be told that it did not do its job properly because what it came up with was not what the government had in mind. That is what is happening right now.

The government wants to send Bill C-7 back to the Senate after crossing out everything coherent about it, everything that made sure that Bill C-7 could give RCMP officers certain rights, including the right to unionize and to not be subject to intimidation during the union certification process. Since that was not part of the government's agenda, it decided to send the whole bill back to the Senate.

I mentioned respect. What respect is the government showing senators when it acts like this? What message is the government sending to the new senators who are being asked to spend hours and hours examining a bill? They did their work and met with people in committee and then sent the bill back with amendments. The government is telling them that they did not understand and that the bill is now not what it wants. The government is therefore going to return the bill to the Senate in the hopes that this time the Senate will understand what the government wants. That shows lack of respect for the Senate.

Let us come back to Bill C-7 in particular. I will be clear: in the case of this bill, the official opposition respects the Supreme Court decision concerning the possibility for RCMP officers to be unionized and to engage in collective bargaining. We must recognize that RCMP officers do excellent work and that all of us should appreciate their efforts. These men and women put their lives on the line every day and face all kinds of dangers to protect Canadians.

In its original form, Bill C-7 was a good response to the court's decision and the Senate amendments even improved the bill. However, once again, the government has decided to not respect the Senate and, consequently, not respect the right of RCMP officers to make their own decision about unionizing.

I was speaking with my colleague earlier. He was asking me whether we would we want to vote in private or by a show of hands if we were to vote, for example, for a change in leadership. If we were to lose, we certainly would not be in our leader's good books. It is the same thing for RCMP officers. This element is absolutely vital and we must keep this amendment.

Once again, the government has invoked closure. This is a lack of respect for the Senate's amendments and a recurring lack of respect for the House. For that reason, we will be voting against the proposal to return Bill C-7 to the Senate.

• (1645)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question

for the Conservative member who just spoke. I would also like to tell him that it would be disrespectful towards RCMP members to vote against Bill C-7, because this is about creating working conditions that meet the needs and address the rights of RCMP members.

I would add that, in Bill C-43, which also pertained to labour relations and was introduced by the previous Conservative government, secret ballot voting was not mandatory. That was not all that long ago, and the decision was left to the discretion of the RCMP labour relations employment board.

Why was having all these choices the right thing for Bill C-43 but so unacceptable now? Why vote against Bill C-7 when it contains the conditions requested by RCMP members?

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that I do have a clock in front of me and I am very well aware of the time.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, the question was very long, and I do not understand why the Liberals are hiding behind the past.

If the Liberals miss the Conservatives that much, they can just step down, and we know what will happen. People will put us back in power pretty quickly because the Liberal government has been around long enough for people to really miss us. At least, in my part of the country, they miss us a lot.

This is about the future. This is about the debate on Bill C-7. This is about a bill that will prevent RCMP members from choosing their union by secret ballot. This is about a card check system that will make it so that three RCMP members can ask a fourth if he wants to sign. Those circumstances give people no choice; they have to sign. That is called bullying, and that is what Bill C-7 was supposed to prevent.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that taking 11 months to respond to the Senate's amendments and giving the opposition parties and all MPs five days to speak to this motion indicates a lack of respect on the part of the government.

We know that RCMP members are stationed in remote rural areas and even abroad. My understanding is that my colleague supports the secret ballot certification method.

I would like to know if the Conservatives also support the government providing the resources for an independent and inclusive voting process that will ensure all RCMP members can exercise their voting rights at any time.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I assume so. That is a very good question.

Government Orders

I want to come back to the 11-month delay. It is quite impressive to see that the government shelved a decision like this for such a long time and then suddenly realized that it forgot a legislative process somewhere and is going to force the opposition to move quickly to avoid hearing these types of remarks and speeches. They want to prevent opposition members with good arguments from making them and convincing even more Canadians and RCMP members that the opposition is right.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and speak on labour legislation. It not new for me, in that one of the very first speeches I gave as an elected official was during a fairly hot debate in the Manitoba legislature in 1988 on final offer selection. One of the issues back then that I picked up on relatively quickly was the importance of labour laws and how important it is for government to take an approach that promotes harmony within the workplace.

We have seen this government take this issue very seriously. It dates back to when the Prime Minister became the leader of the Liberal Party and we made the appointment of our labour critic. I often saw him stand in the House to criticize the government of the day for some of the anti-labour legislation that was being introduced through the back door, legislation that the government was quite eager to get behind and support. If I reflect on my early days of being a parliamentarian, what I witnessed while I was in opposition was an attitude that did a disservice to labour harmony in our country. We saw the Harper government try to use the politics of labour as a wedge issue, and it was very much anti-union. There is a substantial cost for that.

We need a national government to demonstrate leadership on that file, and that is why I was so glad that the Prime Minister took this issue very seriously as the leader of the third party of the House. He brought it into the election campaign, and we all know what happened in the last election. It is important to highlight that the first pieces of legislation we brought in were what we are debating today, Bill C-7 and Bill C-4. I choose to believe that Bill C-4 rectified some of the problems that Harper created.

Bill C-7 originates from a decision from the Supreme Court of Canada that indicated we should be providing a mechanism to allow our RCMP and reserves the opportunity to be associated as a labour group. That was an excellent ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada, but ultimately the Conservatives were quite content just to sit on the issue.

An hon. member: And you waited 11 months for this to come to the House, seriously?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: They took very little action on the issue. We will get to the 11 months shortly, but the Conservative government did not take it seriously because they did not agree with the principle of unionization for the RCMP.

There was a great deal of research done to canvass the RCMP members and reserves in regard to what they wanted to see. During the consultations for the bill, it was very clear that a vast majority of RCMP officers clearly indicated to the government three things. The first was that a national union to represent them was something in

which there was a great deal of interest. This is what the membership conveyed both directly and indirectly to the House. The second was that the union should be focused on representing RCMP members. Third, the right to binding arbitration was expressed throughout the many consultations.

• (1655)

Bill C-7 does all three of those. Our government has listened to the women and men of our RCMP and reserves. The legislation is all about that.

I have heard member after member talk about the time allocation. Members across the way know this is not the first time we have had the debate in the House. In fact, if we review what members across the way have been saying all day, it is about one issue, the secret ballot. They want to champion the secret ballot as the reason why they oppose the legislation itself.

Ms. Dianne Watts: That's not true.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: We know in reality that is not true. There is more to it, but they have emphasized that. In the debate on Bill C-4, which we have somewhat concluded, what did the Conservatives talk about? The secret ballot once again.

If listened to the debates in the other House, once again it was about the secret ballot.

Ms. Dianne Watts: With your independent senators.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: If we went back to second reading, the Conservatives, again and again, talked about the secret ballot.

• (1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I understand this is a very passionate debate. I want to remind the member for Surrey—White Rock that there will be a chance for questions and comments. I would ask her to take the information being provided now by the parliamentary secretary and feel free to stand during the questions and comments period.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That is okay, Madam Speaker. I have what people call selective hearing, so I am okay with heckling.

I want to emphasize that the discussion on the secret ballot was better served during the debate over Bill C-4. That bill put the discretion of the secret ballot or a card check process for certification back with the labour board. The board will ensure that the interests of RCMP members are reflected in the choice made. Why is member after member from the Conservative Party insisting on limiting that choice?

In fact, as a government, it is important we promote, encourage and put into place a uniform approach to labour relations. That makes sense. One group should not be different than another group, but the Conservative members consistently demonstrate they do not understand that principle. Why do they not understand the value of having a uniform approach on union certification across the public sector? I anxiously await an answer from any one of my Conservative colleagues.

Government Orders

I started by speaking to the issue of time allocation. I was here during questions and answers with regard to time allocation. I made the suggestion that when I was in opposition, it did not take very much for any group of 12 members of Parliament to in essence tie up legislation for quite a long period of time. If they are creative, it does not take much for 12, let alone 20, 30, or 40 members to do that. In fact, I remember sitting in the opposition benches when I indicated we needed a responsible opposition to assist in passing legislation, and *Hansard* is wonderful because we can find the quotes. We do not pat ourselves on the back because we can hold up legislation. Any opposition can do that.

What is the purpose of what the Conservatives are attempting to do here? They have made their position very clear. They do not like unions and their mission is to continue to delay indefinitely. They will argue that every member not only should be entitled once but twice, possibly even three or four times, to speak to the legislation because they do not want the legislation to pass. Therefore, when the Conservatives say that the government has put in time allocation, the first thing I would remind them is that Stephen Harper used it over 100 times. Even when the Harper government brought in time allocation, I often said that at times I felt sorry for the government. I recognized that one opposition party would talk about anything and everything, and that could frustrate the system.

When we bring in legislation, I respect the fact that we want to ensure there is an adequate amount of time for debate on issues. I like to consider myself a parliamentarian first and foremost in being able to contribute to debate and ensure there is, at the very least, an appropriate amount of time. On the issue of labour and labour relations and the whole certification, there have been many hours of debate inside this wonderful, beautiful chamber, inside our committee rooms, in the other place, not only in the last 18 months, under this government, but in the last couple of years of the Stephen Harper government. No one is saying anything surprising or shocking on the issue. It is a lot of rehashing of what has been said already.

• (1705)

The Prime Minister has been very clear in recognizing that if a standing committee comes up with ideas that can improve on the legislation and those improvements can be incorporated into the legislation, the government is open to that. That same principle also applies for the Senate of Canada.

I am pleased to reinforce that once again we have another piece of legislation in which the government has recognized some changes to it. That is a strong and positive thing.

However, let us not kid ourselves. The government House leader tries to fulfill her responsibility in getting the legislation through the House. Without time allocation or the goodwill of opposition members, it is virtually impossible to do that unless members are prepared to see the legislation pass in an appropriate time.

We have a limited amount of time for debate. Mid-June is coming really quickly and there is so much more we want to debate. There are opposition motions to debate, and I always find them interesting. Even in opposition, there are limitations in passing things. A number of Conservatives, and even some New Democrats,

ask about time allocation. That is the essence of why we have it today.

The government has listened to members of the Senate and members of the House on other aspects of the legislation and has allowed changes to Bill C-7, for example, more issues can now be collectively bargained, such as harassment issues. That was expanded upon because the government listened to members of House and Senate.

The bill provides an appropriate labour regime for our RCMP members to stand up for their rights. We wanted to achieve that, not only because of the direction given by the Supreme Court of Canada but because it was important to recognize that other law enforcement agencies were unionized, and things continue on relatively positively.

If we take a look at the men and women in the RCMP, who serve as officers or are in our reserves, and the incredible work they do, not only in Canada but abroad, I cannot understand why someone would oppose affording our law enforcement agency the opportunity to organize. That is a strong positive. We can reinforce that positive message by passing this legislation. I would encourage members, particularly in the Conservative Party, to send that positive message by voting in favour of the legislation.

It is important to recognize that the Senate offered five key amendments, and consequential amendments. Some of the amendments have been accepted by the government and others have not. However, the department has been very thorough in reviewing all the suggestions from the other House.

Some concerns have been raised by the New Democrats with respect to Bill C-7. Our response to the Senate amendments gives labour relations and collective bargaining regimes to allow our RCMP members to stand up for their rights.

• (1710)

We listened to the Senate and the members of this House by expanding the issues I pointed out earlier dealing with bargaining.

The idea that RCMP members can only collectively bargain pay and benefits is just not correct. That is an impression my friends in the New Democratic Party are trying to give out, and we know that it is not correct. They can collectively bargain a host of different issues, such as the terms and conditions for grievances and procedures for classification and workforce adjustments.

They can also bargain on issues such as harassment, something that is very topical. When we sat in opposition, one of my colleagues from Toronto often talked about harassment that was taking place and the desire to see something happen on that issue. I am glad it is being incorporated. I am sure all members are happy to see that.

There are issues the Conservative Party raises. It is no surprise that the Conservative Party is against the collective bargaining rights, *per se*. As the government, the Conservatives brought in anti-labour bills, which I made reference to, Bill C-525 and Bill C-377.

Government Orders

Bill C-4 deals with the issue of mandatory secret ballots. Bill C-7 was initially silent on this issue, because there should be a uniform approach across the public service. That is something the Conservatives need to recognize.

I want to recognize the agreement reached between the RCMP and the Government of Canada on April 6, 2017, which saw a significant increase in pay for our RCMP, which I think will go a long way in demonstrating the respect we have for the fine work they do.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to share a few thoughts and words.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, a number of my colleagues from across spoke about harassment and intimidation in the RCMP and the new legislation correcting harassment. The hon. member for Don Valley East talked about a safe, respectful, healthy environment in the RCMP. He said that is why the Liberals were insistent on making the changes, against the direction from the Senate.

I said this quite a while ago, but I will say it again. Let us say the son of my colleague across the way in the back chair is in the force. He is very new to the force. He is stationed at Dawson Creek. He has a staff sergeant for a boss. He has two sergeants for supervisors. He probably has four corporals as supervisors, plus four or five members below him or above him. He has to vote and put up his hand. Do members not think the staff sergeant, the two sergeants, and the corporals would not intimidate him in the way he should vote as a young, junior member of the RCMP? Do members not think that is overstepping? That is harassment, in a sense, which they are trying to protect members from.

The environment of the RCMP, and I spent 35 years in it, has gone downhill. Against what that member says, I believe they should unionize, but if they are to unionize, give the respect to the members to say so in a private, secret vote.

I would like the hon. member to comment on that.

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I will try to be concise in responding to the member's question.

The labour board will make sure that RCMP members' interests are reflected in the choice made. Why does the Conservative Party believe there should be one system for the public service and another system for the RCMP?

I do not call into question whatsoever the fine and important work the women and men of the RCMP do for us every day. They are individuals of great strength and integrity. I do not believe they will roll over and take something because they are too timid to be bold.

I choose to believe in the labour board and how important it is that there is uniformity in labour relations. One thing we need to recognize is that this is a fantastic step forward.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the member opposite say that all opposition members simply want to discuss two things: the card check system and time allocation. We on this side of the House, for one, think the card check system is the way to go. It is a feature of modern Canadian labour legislation, and

we support that entirely, so we reject the categorical characterization of the opposition the member provided.

On the issue of time allocation, is it not the case that the government has sat on this bill since June 2016, when the other place reported its amendments back to this House? It has taken the government 11 months to bring the bill back here, and it is giving us four or five days to discuss it. Is that not the time we should be talking about? Why did the government dither for 11 months, causing uncertainty among RCMP members who have a constitutional right to collective bargaining and have had it thwarted all this time by the government?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is not fair to give the impression that for one year the House has been sitting every day and dithering. The government has done a great deal in the last year, and there have been a very limited number of days on which we have had the opportunity to have the bill before the House to debate it. The member across the way knows that. It is not like in the last year we had 300 sitting days, all of which were for government orders, and we could have called it on any one of those days. We are talking about well under 100 days. The opposition has had 22 of those days.

We spent seven days talking about the privilege of a couple of members' access to the chamber. That is okay. That is what we wanted to talk about, so we talked about it, but the member should not give the impression that the House sat for 300 days and that this was on the back burner. This is important legislation. That is one of the reasons we brought it in as early as we did. We want this legislation to pass.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government listened to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and accepted the amendments put forward by members of Parliament that were supported by various parties. Our government accepted the appropriate amendments from the Senate and has been willing to make changes accordingly. I would like my colleague to comment on what that speaks to in terms of our openness and the democratic process in the House under our government.

• (1720)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, what I appreciate about the question is that the member for Vancouver Quadra and I sat on the opposition benches, and we recall quite well that when we went to committee under Stephen Harper, we never had the opposition co-operating and getting amendments through to legislation.

This is one bill on which we have once again witnessed a different approach, a more open and transparent approach, to legislation. If we can make it better, whether the idea comes from a government member or an opposition member, let us talk about it and allow the standing committees to do the fine work they can do if we enable that to take place. We have a government that is prepared to allow standing committees to do that. Whatever the legislation or budget matter, I would encourage all members who sit on standing committees to take advantage of what the government is providing and to look at ways we can improve it.

Government Orders

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he can clarify some of the contradictions I have heard. The work in committee is something that is very aspirational. Bill C-4 was supposed to address many shortcomings and some regressive moves on the part of the previous government. This is now coming back and we are seeing more contradictions as the changes are explained. For instance, there was a Senate amendment to move all grievances under the Public Service Labour Relations Act instead of the RCMP Act. Does the member disagree with the report on workplace harassment in the RCMP, as recently as May 15, and if so—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, in order to give the parliamentary secretary an opportunity to answer, I will have to cut the member off at this point.

The hon. parliamentary secretary. A very brief answer, please.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I believe it is the RCMP Act that deals with grievances.

I will conclude on a positive note and indicate that we listened to members across the way in committee and during second reading, and even in the other chamber. As an example, I would cite that where the Senate and members of this House wanted us to expand the issues that could be bargained, we did just that. There is a reason to be optimistic. We just want to see the legislation pass.

* * *

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill to which the concurrence of the House is desired: S-232, An Act respecting Canadian Jewish Heritage Month.

* * *

•(1725)

[*Translation*]

ROYAL ASSENT

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

May 16, 2017

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 16th day of May, 2017.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Wallace
Secretary to the Governor General and Herald Chancellor

The schedule indicates that the bills assented to were Bill S-208, An Act respecting National Seal Products Day, and Bill C-30, An Act to implement the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union and its Member States and to provide for certain other measures.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

I want to extend more than anything my sincere thanks to members of the Nanaimo, Ladysmith, and Gabriola detachments of the RCMP for the work they do in the riding that I am honoured to serve. There are 159 sworn members of the RCMP who form the ranks in my riding, and they join 18,000 members across the country. As we talk today about Bill C-7, I am reminded that it does not only affect officers in my riding and across the country, but it also affects their spouses, grandparents, children, classmates, our entire Canadian community.

To remind us of what it is we are debating today, I have an email that was sent to me by Robyn Buchanan. She writes:

As you know members of the RCMP have waited a long time with lower than fair wages due to both conservative and liberal governments. This past weekend they are banding together by removing the yellow stripes from the side of their uniforms. This peaceful protest is to speak to the government and let them know that they are dissatisfied with safety issues and wage issues. Plainclothes members and members of the public are showing their support by wearing yellow ribbons. Often these ribbons are made from the very stripes that are removed from the uniform.... I can make you a ribbon myself, as my husband is an RCMP officer on Vancouver Island.

I am wearing one of those ribbons today, as are many members here in the House.

I also have an email dated April 4 from David Buchanan who said:

The Treasury Board's stance is that as an RCMP member I am just another federal employee. I assure you we are not just average federal employees. I was one of the first police on the scene at the Nanaimo Mill Shooting. I ran towards the gunfire and not away. I also arrest countless impaired, unlicensed and dangerous drivers. I am not just another federal employee, I am a police officer. We should be compensated as police officers. I put my life on the line. RCMP members have the added stress of feeling undervalued and unsupported by our government. We are watching police officers falling to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder on a daily basis; yet we are considered "just another federal employee".

I am just one police officer attempting to make things right for my other police brothers and sisters.

These fine men and women do dangerous work on our behalf. Collective bargaining is about fostering respect for workers and their rights, creating a safe working environment, and rewarding workers for their dedication and growth. It allows employees to have a voice and enables employers to listen. The cornerstone of collective bargaining is that respect. This is a right that is enjoyed by a vast majority of federal workers and those rights generally allow workers to be part of the conversation about staffing levels, deployment, relocation, and sexual harassment, except for the RCMP. That is what the court ruled in 2015 and it ruled that it must change.

Government Orders

We appreciate that the bill in front of us today does include those elements, that workplace safety and sexual harassment issues be allowed to be collectively bargained. We heard that loud and clear from RCMP members over the last year and a half that they have been writing us letters.

The extent of sexual harassment in the force has been widely documented and widely covered in the media. What makes it especially troubling to me is that it was explicitly excluded from the first version of the government's bill, which we debated a year ago.

On workplace safety, rural officers have special concerns. I think in particular of the terrible tragedies in Mayerthorpe and Moncton, where there was a terrible loss of life of RCMP members. There remain issues as to the extent to which they were protected. These men and women stand up for us and we should stand up for them.

● (1730)

A letter was sent to me by Thomas Trachsell, in which he said:

The RCMP has fallen so far behind almost every other police force in Canada in almost every area that we are literally on the verge of breaking. We are near the bottom of pay in Canadian police forces, our training opportunities now routinely lag far behind that of most other police forces, and our equipment is often years out of date or decades behind schedule being deployed.

If the government restricts us to negotiating pay and benefits alone, that may help us recruit more people, but it won't stop our members from dying because they are working alone in remote places without radio communications or proper backup because local managers creatively interpret backup policies or ignore them altogether.

It won't stop over-worked people from descending into depression, losing families and committing suicide. It won't stop abusive managers from bullying and intimidating the men and women that they supervise. It won't fix our broken promotion system. It won't promote any change in the imbalance of power between management and employees in the RCMP that has bred a culture of fear and distrust of management among many members, a culture which actively opposes innovation and creativity.

Tell the government that RCMP members deserve to be given the dignity of being free to bring all matters relevant to our working conditions to the bargaining table, a freedom that every other police force in Canada enjoys, so that we can begin to fix our own problems from within.

How did the government embrace this plea for support and this call to action? The government bill that we were debating a year ago excluded staffing, deployment, harassment, and discipline from collective bargaining. Most witnesses at the committee that studied Bill C-7 expressed great concern about what was left out of this collective bargaining agreement. In the New Democrats' view, this meant that the bill failed to live up to the court's direction, but the government members voted down our amendments at committee which would have brought those vital topics into collective bargaining and would have amended the bill at that time.

The government then shut down debate last May, a year ago, because it was so urgent that we move forward. Then the Senate did its work and did it quickly. It removed those exclusions from collective bargaining. It allowed those matters to be included in the legislation for the purposes of collective bargaining. It reported to the government in June 2016 and the government sat on those Senate changes for 11 months.

I still feel that if the government had taken the opposition's advice a year ago, it could have incorporated those amendments early and could have given RCMP members some satisfaction that they were being heard. I am glad that the government members are listening to

the Senate's advice on this matter, but still the government only told us this five days ago, and stakeholders did not hear before then, and it is shutting down debate tonight. I believe I am the second-last speaker. We have had closure on debate twice on a bill that is still not perfect. With respect to the Senate amendments the government is going to receive, we cannot tell entirely whether the government is going to accommodate all of the supports that our men and women on the front line need in order to be safe themselves while they keep our communities safe.

I will end by noting what Corporal Clover Johns from Nanaimo reminded me. He said that members of the House have what RCMP members do not now have. We hold the power to listen and to voice their concerns when they were not afforded an opportunity to do so. We have the power to enact just laws that enhance the national police force, to treat its members fairly, and to advance public safety in Canada. We should do that today and we should guarantee members of the police in Canada equitable, open, and harmonious labour practices.

● (1735)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words of my NDP colleague across the aisle and the personal stories that she mentioned.

Bill C-7 and our response to both the House committee and the Senate amendments would give labour relations and collective bargaining a regime that would allow RCMP members to stand up for their rights and to address issues of workplace well-being and harassment which, as the member has pointed out, are so critically important. Our government listened to the Senate, listened to members of Parliament from all parties, and expanded the issues which are now available for collective bargaining.

Will the member support this important piece of legislation?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I note that it took a year for the government to hear the advice from the opposition members. We only heard five days ago that the government was going to take the advice that the Senate had delivered to the government 11 months ago, so we are really in a crunch here.

Government Orders

I have had a few messages from people within the RCMP community that they do not understand the government's new language around management rights being inserted into the legislation. We have not had time to study this. It is a new idea. It looks like it gives power to the RCMP commissioner to ensure that police operations are effective, but that might just override all of those other pieces of collective bargaining, depending on how that is interpreted. Just before the vote, I will be talking with my colleagues in the opposition lobby to find out if they have had any more satisfaction during debate today on this matter. I am glad to see the new language we asked for a year ago, and that RCMP members asked us to advocate for a year ago at committee gravitated as of five days ago into the government's legislation. However, I do not know how the police associations and the members themselves are feeling about that, and whether they think this is actually going to protect their interests.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe that meaningful collective bargaining on a wide range of issues is beneficial not just to the members, but also to the institution. I wonder if my hon. colleague would comment on that and what her insights are in regard to the RCMP.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP provide the majority of policing services in British Columbia. In my riding, there is no police force other than the RCMP, so I see them on the ground. They have bicycle control. They have a canine unit. They are part of the homelessness task force. They do fantastic outreach. They are receiving training on domestic assault. They are very connected with the grassroots front-line organizations around prostitution and around women's safety. I cannot say enough about them.

I cannot reconcile that community image of the RCMP with what I read in the headlines and in the Auditor General's reports. The dysfunction at the top seems to be so extreme. With the sexual harassment allegations, no wonder women have a hard time complaining to the police when they see headlines like that.

I can only believe that a progressive piece of legislation, such as what was ordered by the courts, could only improve the force. It is up to all of us in Parliament to make sure we give that the very best chance.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise here once again to discuss Bill C-7, which would give RCMP members, at long last, the right to collective bargaining.

I spoke to this bill last spring when it was first put before us here, and I must admit disappointment has been expressed by others at how long the government took to bring this measure back to the House. The Supreme Court gave Parliament a year to create this legislation. That deadline was May 2016. The Senate sent its amendments to the bill in June 2016, but it has taken the government 11 months to come up with a response.

In that time, the morale in RCMP detachments across this country and certainly in my riding has declined significantly, and the delay has needlessly created significant legal uncertainty and confusion for the certification process.

The RCMP is one of the best-known police forces in the world, with their red serge at ceremonies and the musical ride. Many young

men and women have joined the RCMP to be part of that proud tradition, but now many are increasingly disappointed with their position.

Morale is so low that some members are removing the yellow stripes from their pants in protest. The ribbons that some of us in the NDP caucus are wearing today were made out of those stripes by RCMP members.

As a member from British Columbia, I am grateful for the dedicated work of the RCMP in protecting citizens across most of our province and indeed across the country. I make regular visits to RCMP detachments in my riding. Usually I meet only the officer in charge of the detachment, but in the last few meetings I arrived to find almost all the members and civilian support staff as well waiting to meet me.

They are so concerned about deteriorating morale, understaffing, poor equipment, and other issues that they took the time to tell me in no uncertain terms that the situation had to change, and it had to change quickly. They were extremely frustrated with the government's foot-dragging on this issue. These members were speaking out in contravention of orders not to speak, even amongst themselves while on the job, about these serious issues. The only way that they were allowed to communicate with other members was through Facebook, since they could not speak at the office and they could not use work emails to discuss these issues.

What are they concerned about? To start with, they are concerned with the dramatic decline in pay that RCMP members receive for their work relative to the other forces in Canada. Only a few years ago, the RCMP was in the top three forces in Canada when it came to pay, and of course that was to be expected. RCMP members face difficulties that other police officers in Canada do not. They spend their early years on the force serving in small and often remote communities across the country. They are moved regularly, causing hardship within families and relationships.

In fact, their pay was calculated with the assumption that the rate put them in the top three forces in Canada. That is not the case today. Now the RCMP is 72nd out of 80 police forces across Canada in terms of pay rates. I have heard other numbers today, such as 54th or 78th. The number does not matter; they are at the bottom of the pile.

It is not only that. While the government refuses to act on a pay council report entitled "Fair Compensation for the RCMP" that recommended significant wage increases for members, the RCMP top brass were given \$1.7 million in bonuses this year. Front-line members received nothing.

Unfair pay levels have an immediate and significant effect on everything else in the force. Members are leaving the RCMP in large numbers to take positions with other police forces. Why should they stay, when they could make 20% more with another force?

Government Orders

It is easy to see why so many members are leaving and why many detachments are chronically understaffed. In one of the biggest detachments in my riding, I heard that on a recent Friday night there were only three members on duty. One was a brand-new rookie and one was a 67-year-old retired member. It was just because other members did not want to work yet another weekend overtime shift. There were just not enough staff members to do the work required.

That said, I am encouraged that the government has more or less accepted the amendments put forward by the Senate that removed the exclusions on the issues that can be discussed in collective bargaining. The most important exclusions in the original bill were staffing, deployment, harassment, and discipline. What good is bargaining about pay if there are no discussions about work hours or staffing levels?

We asked in committee for the government to remove those exclusions, but we were voted down by the Liberals and Conservatives.

• (1740)

I have some concerns around the management rights section that replaces these exclusions. It is not clear those provisions are necessary and they risk obstructing the right of RCMP members to bargain solutions to significant problems in the workplace.

The RCMP members who I have—

• (1745)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will have to interrupt the hon. member. He has about 30 seconds. If he would like to wrap up, that would be fine.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP members who I have talked to want collective bargaining. Several have mentioned they did not necessarily see unionization of the RCMP as a priority when they joined the force, but now they clearly see the advantages.

RCMP members simply want to be treated with respect and they deserve that respect. They want to be proud once again to be part of the best police force in the world. They want to wear the red serge and yellow stripes with honour. They deserve the same right enjoyed by all other police forces in Canada, the right to free and fair collective bargaining.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:45 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-7 now before the House.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Call in the members.

• (1810)

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

(*Division No. 277*)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|---|---|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Alleslev | Amos |
| Anandasangaree | Arseneault |
| Arya | Badawey |
| Bains | Baylis |
| Beech | Bennett |
| Bibeau | Bittle |
| Blair | Boissonnault |
| Bossio | Breton |
| Brison | Caesar-Chavannes |
| Carr | Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) |
| Casey (Charlottetown) | Chagger |
| Champagne | Chan |
| Chen | Cuzner |
| Dabrusin | Damoff |
| DeCoursey | Dhaliwal |
| Dhillon | Di Iorio |
| Drouin | Dubourg |
| Duguid | Duncan (Etobicoke North) |
| Dzerowicz | Easter |
| Ehsassi | El-Khoury |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking |
| Fergus | Fillmore |
| Finnigan | Fisher |
| Fonseca | Fortier |
| Fragiskatos | Fraser (Central Nova) |
| Fry | Fuhr |
| Gerretsen | Goldsmith-Jones |
| Goodale | Gould |
| Graham | Grewal |
| Harvey | Hehr |
| Holland | Housefather |
| Hutchings | Iacono |
| Joly | Jones |
| Jordan | Jowhari |
| Kang | Khera |
| Lambropoulos | Lametti |
| Lamoureux | Lapointe |
| Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | LeBlanc |
| Lebouthillier | Lefebvre |
| Lemieux | Leslie |
| Levitt | Lightbound |
| Lockhart | Long |
| Longfield | Ludwig |
| MacAulay (Cardigan) | MacKinnon (Gatineau) |
| Maloney | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) |
| May (Cambridge) | May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) |
| McCrimmon | McDonald |
| McGuinty | McKay |
| McKenna | McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) |
| McLeod (Northwest Territories) | Mendès |
| Mendicino | Mihychuk |
| Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs) | |
| Monsef | |
| Morrissey | Murray |
| Nassif | Nault |
| Ng | O'Connell |

Business of Supply

Oliver
Ouелlette
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Rioux
Rodriguez
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Schiefke
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Simms
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Trudeau
Vandenbeld
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Robillard
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Tootoo
Vandal
Virani
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Zahid — 162

Stubbs
Thériault
Trost
Van Loan
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Wong
Zimmer — 125

Sweet
Tilson
Van Kesteren
Viersen
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Hochelaga is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue did not hear her name. Was her vote counted?

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Hochelaga. The vote was not counted, but we will add it now.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE BANK

The House resumed from May 11 consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion of the member for Beloeil—Chambly relating to the business of supply.

● (1820)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 278*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Ambrose
Aubin
Barsalou-Duval
Benson
Bergen
Bezan
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Boulerice
Brassard
Brown
Carrie
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Davies
Diotte
Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk
Fortin
Garrison
Genius
Gladu
Hardcastle
Hoback
Jeneroux
Julian
Kent
Kusie
Lake
Laverdière
Liepert
MacKenzie
Masse (Windsor West)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Moore
Mulcair
Nater
Paul-Hus
Plamondon
Quach
Rankin
Reid
Richards
Sansoucy
Schmale
Shipley
Sorenson
Stewart

NAYS

Members

Albas
Allison
Arnold
Barlow
Beaulieu
Benzen
Berthold
Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Cannings
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cullen
Deltell
Doherty
Dreeschen
Dusseault
Egliniski
Finley
Gallant
Généreux
Gill
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Kelly
Kmieciak
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lebel
MacGregor
Malcolmson
Mathysen
McColeman
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nantel
Nicholson
Pauzé
Poilievre
Ramsey
Rayes
Rempel
Ritz
Saroya
Shields
Sopuck
Ste-Marie
Strahl

Aboultaif
Albrecht
Ambrose
Aubin
Barsalou-Duval
Benson
Bergen
Bezan
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Block
Boulerice
Brassard
Brown
Cannings
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Cullen
Deltell
Doherty
Dreeschen
Dusseault
Egliniski
Finley
Gallant
Généreux
Gill
Gourde
Harder

Albas
Allison
Arnold
Barlow
Beaulieu
Benzen
Berthold
Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Calkins
Carrie
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Davies
Diotte
Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk
Fortin
Garrison
Genius
Gladu
Hardcastle
Hoback

Business of Supply

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Hughes | Jeneroux |
| Johns | Julian |
| Kelly | Kent |
| Krniec | Kusie |
| Kwan | Lake |
| Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry) | Laverdière |
| Lebel | Liepert |
| MacGregor | MacKenzie |
| Malcolmson | Masse (Windsor West) |
| Mathysen | May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) |
| McCauley (Edmonton West) | McColeman |
| McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) | Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) |
| Moore | Motz |
| Mulcair | Nantel |
| Nater | Nicholson |
| Paul-Hus | Paupé |
| Plamondon | Poilievre |
| Quach | Ramsey |
| Rankin | Rayes |
| Reid | Rempel |
| Richards | Ritz |
| Sansoucy | Saroya |
| Schmale | Shields |
| Shipley | Sopuck |
| Sorenson | Ste-Marie |
| Stewart | Strahl |
| Stubbs | Sweet |
| Thériault | Tilson |
| Trost | Van Kesteren |
| Van Loan | Viersen |
| Warawa | Warkentin |
| Watts | Waugh |
| Webber | Weir |
| Wong | Yurdiga |
| Zimmer— 127 | |

NAYS

Members

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Alleslev | Amos |
| Anandasangaree | Arseneault |
| Arya | Badawey |
| Bains | Baylis |
| Beech | Bennett |
| Bibeau | Bittle |
| Blair | Boissonnault |
| Bossio | Breton |
| Brison | Caesar-Chavannes |
| Carr | Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) |
| Casey (Charlottetown) | Chagger |
| Champagne | Chan |
| Chen | Cuzner |
| Dabrusin | Damoff |
| DeCoursey | Dhaliwal |
| Dhillon | Di Iorio |
| Drouin | Dubourg |
| Duguid | Duncan (Etobicoke North) |
| Dzerowicz | Easter |
| Ehsassi | El-Khoury |
| Erskine-Smith | Eyking |
| Fergus | Fillmore |
| Finnigan | Fisher |
| Fonseca | Fortier |
| Fragiskatos | Fraser (Central Nova) |
| Fry | Fuhr |
| Gerretsen | Goldsmith-Jones |
| Goodale | Gould |
| Graham | Grewal |
| Harvey | Hehr |
| Holland | Housefather |
| Hutchings | Iacono |
| Joly | Jones |
| Jordan | Jowhari |
| Kang | Khera |
| Lambropoulos | Lametti |
| Lamoureux | Lapointe |
| Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) | LeBlanc |
| Lebouthillier | Lefebvre |
| Lemieux | Leslie |
| Levitt | Lightbound |
| Lockhart | Long |
| Longfield | Ludwig |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| MacAulay (Cardigan) | MacKinnon (Gatineau) |
| Maloney | Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia) |
| May (Cambridge) | McCrimmon |
| McDonald | McGuinty |
| McKay | McKenna |
| McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam) | McLeod (Northwest Territories) |
| Mendès | Medicino |
| Mihychuk | Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Socurs) |
| Monsef | Morrissey |
| Murray | Nassif |
| Nault | Ng |
| O'Connell | Oliver |
| O'Regan | Ouellette |
| Paradis | Peschisolido |
| Peterson | Petipas Taylor |
| Philpott | Picard |
| Poissant | Rioux |
| Robillard | Rodriguez |
| Romanado | Rota |
| Rudd | Ruimy |
| Rusnak | Sahota |
| Saini | Sajjan |
| Samson | Sangha |
| Scarpaleggia | Schieffe |
| Schulte | Serré |
| Sgro | Shanahan |
| Sheehan | Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon) |
| Sidhu (Brampton South) | Simms |
| Sohi | Sorbara |
| Spengemann | Tabbara |
| Tan | Tassi |
| Tootoo | Trudeau |
| Vandal | Vandenbeld |
| Virani | Whalen |
| Wilkinson | Wilson-Raybould |
| Wrzesnewskyj | Young |
| Zahid— 161 | |

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.*[English]*

The next question is on the main motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (1825)

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

(Division No. 279)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| Abouttaif | Albas |
| Albrecht | Allison |

Business of Supply

Ambrose
 Aubin
 Barsalou-Duval
 Benson
 Bergen
 Bezan
 Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
 Block
 Boulterice
 Brassard
 Brown
 Cannings
 Chong
 Christopherson
 Clement
 Cullen
 Deltell
 Doherty
 Dreeschen
 Dusseault
 Eglinski
 Finley
 Gallant
 Généreux
 Gill
 Gourde
 Harder
 Hughes
 Johns
 Kelly
 Kmiec
 Kwan
 Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
 Lebel
 MacGregor
 Malcolmson
 Mathysen
 McCauley (Edmonton West)
 McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
 Moore
 Mulcair
 Nater
 Paul-Hus
 Plamondon
 Quach
 Rankin
 Reid
 Richards
 Sansoucy
 Schmale
 Shipley
 Sorenson
 Stewart
 Stubbs
 Thériault
 Trost
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watts
 Webber
 Wong
 Zimmer — 127

Arnold
 Barlow
 Beaulieu
 Benzen
 Berthold
 Blaikie
 Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
 Boudrias
 Boutin-Sweet
 Brosseau
 Calkins
 Carrie
 Choquette
 Clarke
 Cooper
 Davies
 Diotte
 Donnelly
 Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
 Duvall
 Falk
 Fortin
 Garrison
 Genuis
 Gladu
 Hardcastle
 Hoback
 Jeneroux
 Julian
 Kent
 Kusie
 Lake
 Laverdière
 Liepert
 MacKenzie
 Masse (Windsor West)
 May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)
 McColeman
 Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
 Motz
 Nantel
 Nicholson
 Pauzé
 Poilievre
 Ramsey
 Rayes
 Rempel
 Ritz
 Saroya
 Shields
 Sopuck
 Ste-Marie
 Strahl
 Sweet
 Tilson
 Van Kesteren
 Viersen
 Warkentin
 Waugh
 Weir
 Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Aldag
 Alleslev
 Anandasangaree
 Arya
 Bains
 Beech
 Bibeau
 Blair
 Bossio
 Brison
 Carr
 Casey (Charlottetown)
 Champagne
 Chen
 Dabrusin
 DeCoursey
 Dhillon

Alghabra
 Amos
 Arseneault
 Badawey
 Baylis
 Bennett
 Bittle
 Boissonnault
 Breton
 Caesar-Chavannes
 Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
 Chagger
 Chan
 Cuzner
 Damoff
 Dhaliwal
 Di Iorio

Drouin
 Duguid
 Dzerowicz
 Ehsassi
 Erskine-Smith
 Fergus
 Fimmigan
 Fonseca
 Fragiskatos
 Fry
 Gerretsen
 Goodale
 Graham
 Harvey
 Holland
 Hutchings
 Joly
 Jordan
 Kang
 Lambropoulos
 Lamoureux
 Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
 Lebouthillier
 Lemieux
 Levitt
 Lockhart
 Longfield
 MacAulay (Cardigan)
 Maloney
 May (Cambridge)
 McDonald
 McKay
 McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 Mendès
 Mihychuk
 Soeurs
 Monsef
 Murray
 Nault
 O'Connell
 O'Regan
 Paradis
 Peterson
 Philpott
 Poissant
 Robillard
 Romanado
 Rudd
 Rusnak
 Saini
 Samson
 Scarpaleggia
 Schulte
 Sgro
 Sheehan
 Sidhu (Brampton South)
 Sohi
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Dubourg
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Easter
 El-Khoury
 Eyking
 Fillmore
 Fisher
 Fortier
 Fraser (Central Nova)
 Fuhr
 Goldsmith-Jones
 Gould
 Grewal
 Hehr
 Housefather
 Iacono
 Jones
 Jowhari
 Khera
 Lametti
 Lapointe
 LeBlanc
 Lefebvre
 Leslie
 Lightbound
 Long
 Ludwig
 MacKinnon (Gatineau)
 Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
 McCrimmon
 McGuinty
 McKenna
 McLeod (Northwest Territories)
 Mendicino
 Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-
 Morrissey
 Nassif
 Ng
 Oliver
 Ouellette
 Peschisolido
 Petipas Taylor
 Picard
 Rioux
 Rodriguez
 Rota
 Ruimy
 Sahota
 Sajjan
 Sangha
 Schiefke
 Seré
 Shanahan
 Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
 Simms
 Sorbara
 Tabbara
 Tassi
 Trudeau
 Vandenbeld
 Whalen
 Wilson-Raybould
 Young

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

It being 6:27 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

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

●(1830)

[English]

GENDER EQUALITY WEEK ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-309, An Act to establish Gender Equality Week, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in at report stage.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Sven Spengemann moved that Bill C-309, An Act to establish Gender Equality Week, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure for me to rise today to once again speak in support of my private member's bill, Bill C-309, An Act to establish Gender Equality Week, as it is read a third time. I would like to thank my colleagues in this House for their interest in this bill, for their important contributions to the debate at second reading and at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and for their support. I would also like to thank once more the members of my incredible team for their tireless efforts and the stakeholders, community organizations, and Canadians from all walks of life who shared their views with us. In particular, I would like to thank the Strength in Stories team for the ideas and inspiration that helped bring us to where we are today.

Gender equality week would provide us with a critical opportunity to engage and address areas in which gender-based disparities persist. As my colleagues in this chamber are aware, my team and I elaborated on these disparities in the preamble of this bill.

Importantly, gender equality week is not an occasion to celebrate accomplishments, but, as reflected in the preambular paragraphs, it is an initiative that seeks to raise awareness of the most profound remaining challenges and it offers a platform to work collectively on concrete solutions.

The resounding vote of 287-1 in this House to send the bill to committee at second reading, in my view, revealed that acknowledgement of these challenges goes far beyond partisan affiliation. All of us bear individual and collective responsibility in a society that categorically and systematically treats and values genders differently.

In short, if we truly seek to address these challenges, the pivotal steps are to recognize them frankly and to ensure that they are understood. The federal government cannot solve these issues and problems by itself. Gender equality requires awareness and engagement on the part of all Canadians.

To be absolutely clear, I am very proud of what we are already doing to achieve gender equality and equity. I applaud the leadership of our Prime Minister and of the federal government, who are working to address systemic gender-based gaps that have permeated Canadian society since Confederation.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister formed Canada's first cabinet with female and male parity. He also appointed a woman to be the government House leader and a minister who would focus exclusively on gender issues. These were also firsts in Canadian history.

The Government of Canada also launched an inquiry into Canada's missing and murdered indigenous women.

What is more, the Minister of Status of Women is developing a federal strategy against gender-based violence. The government also announced the implementation of gender-based analysis, or GBA+, in all federal government departments to ensure that gender issues are taken into account in all government policies and legislation.

In early December 2016, the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Status of Women announced that Nova Scotia businesswoman and civil rights activist Viola Desmond will be the very first Canadian woman to be featured on a Canadian banknote.

The Government of Canada introduced Bill C-16, which is currently before the Senate. It protects Canadians of minority gender identity and expression by adding gender identity and expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

I would also like to thank my colleague, the member for Edmonton-Centre, and the special adviser to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 issues for his tireless work as an advocate for Canadians of minority gender identity and expression.

As my colleagues know, in budget 2017, the federal government has committed to allocating \$3.6 million over three years, starting this year, to establish a LGBTQ2 Secretariat within the Privy Council Office.

I believe that this initiative is important to the development and implementation of government-led initiatives for the LGBTQ2 community, and I hope that gender equality week can contribute to these efforts.

On the international stage, Canada has seized the opportunity to serve on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, and is a strong supporter of the UN HeForShe campaign.

●(1835)

As a Canadian delegate at the 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was held in New York last March, and together with the representatives of such countries as Pakistan, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon, I committed to making the kind of efforts that Canada and parliamentarians have made to promote gender equality.

Private Members' Business

I was pleased to hear positive feedback on Bill C-309 from representatives and other delegates. In Canada and abroad, there is definitely a will to eliminate the gender gap. I have no doubt that if we continue to work together to eliminate gender disparities in our respective societies, we can find constructive, long-term solutions.

Once again, I wish to acknowledge the leadership of our Prime Minister and the Government of Canada in promoting the equality of men and women.

[English]

Important as these and other actions are, more work remains ahead of us than behind us. To close the remaining gaps, the government will need the advocacy, support, and commitment of Canadians.

Bill C-309 recognizes this need and it issues a call to action to all Canadians to become involved: men, women, Canadians of minority gender identity and expression, children, students, educators, civil servants of all levels of government, young and established professionals, new Canadians, our indigenous peoples, Canadians in law enforcement and our armed forces, and seniors.

Involvement in gender equality week could take a wide range of forms, and some of these forms include town hall discussions, university and college colloquia, music, plays, literature, film projects, workplace round tables, formulation and presentation of academic research, public rallies, fundraisers, social media, radio and television events, and campaigns.

[Translation]

Our consultations with various groups, organizations, and levels of government helped us draft a substantive preamble that gives Canadians a clear idea of the challenges we face. Gender-based violence and the gender wage gap are particularly critical obstacles that we, as Canadians, must tackle and eliminate. Active engagement will lead to real progress on both those fronts.

[English]

Now that I have had the privilege of hearing different perspectives and working with colleagues from all parties in this chamber on Bill C-309 for the past several months, I look forward to engaging with our counterparts in the Senate in the months ahead.

I encourage fellow members to once again support this bill, as the time to act is now. Canadians want us, as parliamentarians, to address the most critical issues facing our country. Through gender equality week, we would build a platform through which we can generate momentum to resolve a major multi-faceted issue that faces our country today, gender inequality.

This House has the opportunity to send a powerful message to Canadians that their elected representatives in concert seek to engage and work with civil society to address gender-based disparities.

I look forward to continuing to work toward establishing a national annual gender equality week, and I look forward to working on this project with colleagues from this House and the Senate.

• (1840)

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I note that in the preamble of my hon. colleague's bill, there is the following statement:

Whereas Indigenous women, be they First Nation, Métis or Inuit, are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and sexual exploitation;

I commend my colleague for introducing Bill C-309, an act to establish gender equality week. It is clear from recent history that such a week is long overdue.

My hon. colleague obviously believes that Canada still has a long way to go to achieve gender equality and to achieve justice for indigenous women and girls.

Could my colleague tell us how we could best address and identify the underlying causes of violence toward women, especially indigenous women and girls?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an opportunity to look at the deeper causes, the root causes, of gender inequality and gender inequity across our country. To do that, we need to engage all Canadians. This bill is an opportunity to pivot to all of civil society, to leaders in our community and to Canadians who have never thought about this issue or about becoming involved. It would give them the opportunity and the platform to do that.

I made reference to a number of different forms in which gender equality week could manifest itself. One of those is in academic research. When we look at the sociology of root causes, gender equality week could direct national attention to that issue and really give us an opportunity to acknowledge the root causes and to then formulate solutions to address and resolve them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a sense of awareness from designating a day, a week, or a month. On this particular issue, it would be wonderful, not only as the national government demonstrating leadership by designating the week but in how it could have an impact at different levels in our communities, such as in our schools. Using schools as an example, if teachers take an interest in what has been proposed by Ottawa, we would get a higher sense of gender equity, because the issue would be talked about more in our schools.

I wonder if my colleague could comment on the educational benefits of having a week of this nature.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned a group called Strength in Stories, which is a local organization in my riding. The very first conversations on this bill were exactly in the area my colleague points to, which is the field of education. The idea was to pull together a project that would address gender-based disparities or inequities at the level of education. The federal government cannot reach into other levels of government to prescribe educational programs. However, it could certainly offer this week as a platform for teachers to take advantage of it and to do the very important teaching not just at the graduate and post-graduate level, which would give us an opportunity for research and some data, but all the way down to the elementary level, where cultures and attitudes are shaped early on. We really look to education as probably the foundational opportunity for this week to manifest across the country.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore for his speech and his leadership on this issue. I wonder if he would offer us a few reflections on the first gender statement in the budget we just passed and how this is consistent with the spirit of this private member's bill.

• (1845)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to gender analysis, of course it is fundamental to connect it to the budgetary process and to put our programming through a gender lens. In using gender-based analyses in the bureaucracy in the planning and execution of programs, the two really come together. I am very proud that this budget is the first budget developed in Canada with a gender-specific lens, and we look forward to much more along these lines in the years to come.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague, looking at gender equality week and all the things that we can do to promote women and young girls. I have listened to the gender equality budget, the quota system, being tokens, and being put on boards. I have to say that I and many women with whom I have had the honour of serving politically or in the private sector would suggest that teaching young girls that just because they are female they can get any position really is offensive to many, and certainly to me, who has really gone through the trials and tribulations in my life to get to where I am today. One has to make the sacrifices and to live those sacrifices to really understand what that journey looks like. To suggest that we have a token—that a person is a female so she gets this position, or she is female so she gets on this board, or they are a minority so they can have this—I think does considerable disservice to all of us. I really think it is incumbent on each and every one of us to do what we can do in terms of empowering people around us, especially young girls.

I go back to my time of almost a decade as mayor of the City of Surrey. Since 1996, we had a majority of women on council. We had a majority of women making decisions for the city. Was it a token position? No, it was not. Was it gender equity? No, it was not. It was because they wanted to participate, they wanted to be part of the community, and we wanted to encourage other women to join in having a say on the issues that were really relevant to our community. In that context, it really was self-empowering, in terms of what we were able to accomplish as a collective. If we are short

on the quota, not having enough women in politics, or not having enough women on a board, then it is incumbent upon us to do a better job.

I have two daughters. I would never, from the day they were born, let them know that they were a quota, that they were a token, that they could get a position because they were female. That is not the way I brought up my daughters. I brought them up to be strong young women who were empowered. I taught them to make sure they empower the people around them, that we work collectively together, we go through trials, we go through tribulations, and we get to where we go because the journey is the lessons of where we get to.

That in itself gives me satisfaction, as a woman of my age. It demeans everything that I have done, everything that I have taught my daughters, when I sit there and I listen to people say we have to have a token representation here and a token representation there. That is totally offensive, and I do not think that is what we should be teaching our children.

Furthermore, I would just suggest that what we can do—because it is not about what we cannot do, but rather what we can do—is really come together as a community, as parents, mothers, fathers. There are single moms, single dads, and children who need to be brought up in a community that has resiliency. We need to make sure that they have all the tools, all the education, and all of those things; that we have resilient communities; that we have empowered children; that we ensure that our kids know that they need to look after and give their hand out to somebody who is less fortunate than themselves. That is where we make a difference, and that is where we have empowerment within our communities, within our families, and that is what makes us stronger.

While I honestly appreciate my colleague, and I sit on many committees with him and respect him to the utmost degree, I would suggest that when we do not have gender equality week will be a good day in this House.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, achieving gender equality is non-negotiable. There is no doubt about it. That is one of the NDP's core principles, actually. It is always at the heart of our work on the ground and the legislative measures we put forward. Can the same be said of the government? Unfortunately not.

I have no doubt about the sponsor's intentions. I have been keeping tabs on his interventions in the status of women committee. However, if one truly believes in as fundamental a principle as gender equality, one must be consistent and non-partisan about it.

Private Members' Business

It is a shame that the sponsor of the bill before us voted against the NDP's Bill C-237, the candidate gender equity act, which was designed to increase the number of women in federal politics. It was actually an excellent and very well-documented bill.

How can anyone support gender equality and yet vote against a measure that would put more women in Parliament? I, for one, will be consistent and vote in favour of this bill. I do not think it goes far enough or actually does anything concrete, but I do think there is no such thing as paying too much attention to gender equality.

In addition, my NDP colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith will work tirelessly in committee to propose amendments in order to make this bill even more action-oriented, and I fully trust and support her.

When I first saw Bill C-309, an act to establish gender equality week, I thought that we would finally see some real progress and concrete measures for women and girls. Unfortunately, that is not the case. This bill proposes declaring the first week of October gender equality week, but nothing more.

There are no measures to tackle economic disparity, there is no money to fund shelters for women and children, no action plan to end violence against women, no funding restored to organizations that work with women and girls and that, quite frankly, do an excellent job with very little funding, there are no measures to increase the number of women in the House, and I could go on.

What does the bill propose? Its preamble has 21 points. Here is an excerpt: “Whereas there is a wage gap between men and women in Canada”. What does the bill propose to address that problem? Does it include any actions, plans, or measures? Well, no, it proposes to establish a gender equality week.

No one here is against apple pie, but how will a gender equality week truly change anything for women and girls? If legislative measures are proposed, then action must follow. Unfortunately, this bill proposes no such action.

As the House probably knows, the disparity between men and women is glaring. For every dollar earned by a man, a Canadian woman earns only 74¢. That is unacceptable, and measures must be taken to address this gap.

Last March, Oxfam published a report on the measures taken by the Liberal government on gender parity. This government received the worst score for its policies on the work of women and pay equity. The Oxfam report noted that while the Liberal Party campaigned on a promise to improve the economic situation of women, this government has put very few measures in place to that effect.

In other words, once again there are more words than action. I feel like I have been saying that all day. Women need tangible measures from this government. Women have been waiting for pay equity for 40 years. It is all well and good to promote it, but proposing concrete measures is better, and women need these measures now, not later. This government must immediately draft proactive legislation on pay equity in order to reduce the wage gap and achieve economic equality for women.

● (1855)

Because this is 2017, we should do things differently. Because this is 2017, women should have equal pay for work of equal value. It is time for this government to back its claims that equality counts and to take immediate action.

Another point highlighted in the preamble is the following:

Whereas poverty and inequality disproportionately affect Canadian women, particularly elderly, disabled, transgender and visible minority women, leaving them isolated and vulnerable;

That is so true.

With respect to my Bill C-245 to establish a poverty reduction strategy, I heard many stakeholders, several organizations, and many women's groups talk about this reality. These organizations are waiting for real measures and actions to continue helping women.

Women's groups in my riding do extraordinary work. I am thinking, for example, of the Centre Ressources-Femmes de la région d'Acton; the Centre de femmes L'Autonomie en soiE; La Clé sur la porte, a shelter for victims of domestic violence; the Centre d'aide pour victimes d'agression sexuelle or CAVAS; Les 8 Marskoutaines, which organizes activities on March 8 every year; the Cercles de fermières in various communities; Afeas, which does work to raise awareness; the Syndicat des agricultrices de la région de Saint-Hyacinthe; and the Coalition des femmes de la MRC Les Maskoutains. These groups expect more. They expect better. They expect this government to walk the talk.

In our ridings, 63% of low-income seniors who live alone are women. The median income for seniors in Quebec is \$20,200 for those aged 65 to 74, and for those 75 or over it is less than \$20,000. There are real people behind the statistics. They need action and measures.

When women live in poverty, so do their children. That is completely unacceptable. By not dealing with this problem, the government is abandoning thousands of women, girls, and children who are in desperate need. How is a week of celebration going to help them to get out of poverty?

I am already at the end of my speech. We must adopt concrete measures to make gender equality a reality. Feminism means more than just believing in a philosophy and lofty principles; it means taking actions that are consistent with those principles. Appointing a gender-balanced cabinet and doing nothing else for the next four years is not enough. Dedicating a week to gender equality is not enough. This bill has to be the first of a great number of steps.

Oxfam gave this government the worst grade. New Democrats know that action is key to true gender equality. Words are not enough. We can never stop fighting for gender equality and women's rights, and we never will.

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate on Bill C-309, a bill to establish a gender equality week in Canada each year.

Private Members' Business

I want to congratulate the hon. member for Mississauga—Lakeshore for his leadership in advancing gender equality in this country.

It is fitting that as we mark 150 years since our nation's founding, we are discussing a bill that asks Canadians to pause over the course of the week, reflect on the progress we have made toward gender equality, and recommit to taking actions that will help to make that equality a reality.

One of the key challenges we face is the myth that gender equality already exists and that feminism is no longer necessary. That is simply not true. That is why I want to underscore my strong support for the intent of the bill, because the more we do to advance equality, the more inclusive Canada will be and the better off all Canadians will be.

I also agree with the goal of the bill, which is to encourage all sectors of society to mark this week with events and initiatives that address the challenges that Canadian women, as well as individuals of minority gender identity and expression, continue to face. It is just as important that we encourage men and those who do not identify as women to become involved and remain engaged in achieving greater inclusiveness and full gender equality in Canada. These goals need to be pursued not just during gender equality week, but throughout the year.

I also want to take a moment to say that I agree with the amendment that was made in committee, which would have made this week occur in the fourth week of September rather than in October. It makes sense to me, because the month of October is already designated as Women's History Month in Canada, a time when Canadians celebrate the achievements of women and girls as trailblazers throughout our history.

In addition, Women's History Month includes two important commemorative dates for women and girls, the International Day of the Girl on October 11 and Persons Day on October 18, so holding gender equality week in September means it will not overlap with events that are part of Women's History Month. This will give Canadians an additional opportunity to understand gender equality in all its facets, help close the gender gaps that still remain, and increase awareness of some of the emerging issues.

The need to raise awareness is clear. Despite all of the progress we have seen among women and girls since Confederation, our journey toward equality is far from complete.

Consider these challenges. One area where action is needed is in closing the gender wage gap, and I will very much agree with my hon. colleague from the NDP. The fact is that women earn 87¢ for every dollar earned by men, largely as a result of wage inequality between women and men within the same occupation.

A record number of women, a total of 88, were elected in Canada's 2015 general election. This means that women held 26% of the seats at that time. We can be proud of the fact that four women were recently elected to this House, but we still have much work to do to achieve parity in this House.

The most recent statistics from the Board Diversity Council's 2015 report card indicate that women hold only 19.5% of FP500 board

seats. I disagree respectfully with the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock that this status quo should remain. We need to be active on this front.

The bill before us today, by creating a gender equality week, will allow us to shine a bright light on the actions we must take to close these gaps. There is always more that we can do to make progress in creating a more inclusive country that benefits everyone, regardless of their gender identity. That is why I am proud of the fact that the Prime Minister is leading by example on the goal of gender equality. The Prime Minister recently broke new ground by appointing a special adviser on LGBTQ2 issues, who will advise him on the development and coordination of the Government of Canada's LGBTQ2 agenda. This will include working with organizations from across the country to promote equality for the community, protect the rights of its members, and address discrimination against them, both historical and current.

● (1900)

The Prime Minister appointed the first gender-balanced federal cabinet in history and the first ever minister fully dedicated to gender issues. Thanks to the commitment of the Prime Minister, we are having a renewed conversation about gender equality and feminism in this country at an elevated level and in many places around the world.

The federal government is also taking strong actions to help deliver on its commitment to equality, including developing a strategy to address gender-based violence, enhancing the gender-based analysis that the hon. member spoke about to ensure that decisions about policies, programs, and legislation advance gender equality, and many other measures.

We also cannot ignore the tremendous step forward that budget 2017 represents for openness and transparency by including a groundbreaking gender statement, something I mentioned earlier, not as an annex but as a full chapter in the budget itself. The gender statement raises the bar in our understanding of how public policies affect men and women differently.

These are all important actions, but as I said earlier, having a gender equality week on the calendar each year would help to accelerate our nation's journey toward equality through greater awareness, understanding, and action.

That is why I encourage all members to support the bill before us today. It will provide us with one more tool to mobilize support for gender equality by engaging the hearts and minds of all Canadians.

● (1905)

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak in support of Bill C-309, which would designate the fourth week in September as gender equality week.

Equity, social justice, and compassion for all individuals are core values shared by all Canadians. At every level of government, we as a nation have legislated gender equality, yet women and people of marginalized gender identities and expressions continue to be victims of violence, hate, and discrimination.

Their lived experiences speak to a very different reality than the ideals of gender equality we as Canadians aspire to achieve.

We know, for example, women are more likely to be among the poor. We know indigenous and aboriginal women are disproportionately represented in jails and prisons. We know there is unequal pay for women who do equal work, with equal education. These are just a few reasons why we all have a responsibility to address the challenges that women continue to face in our society.

Allow me to illustrate the importance of establishing gender equality week.

In my riding of Scarborough North, a one-of-a-kind shelter has been in operation for more than 25 years. Juliette's Place, also known as Homeward Family Shelter, provides temporary refuge for women and their children who are escaping from domestic violence. The women assisted by this wonderful organization often face multiple points of oppression. They are women of colour, as well as indigenous and aboriginal women. They are members of the LGBTQI2-S community. They include immigrants, as well as undocumented workers. They come from all backgrounds and socio-economic classes.

Regardless, Juliette's Place is there to help these women and their children, providing them a place to stay upon fleeing from horrific situations of domestic violence.

They also help the women secure longer-term housing, as well as find work, and access other social services. For those with children, Juliette's Place can provide resources for legal custody arrangements. The incredible staff, volunteers, and board members of the shelter serve to advocate for these women and their children.

Juliette's Place is the only shelter of its kind located in north Scarborough, but there are many such organizations in all parts of our country. This is unfortunate. I say it is unfortunate because there is, and continues to be, a need. All too often, organizations like Juliette's Place are just around the corner from where we live, yet they are deemed invisible, invisible until we find out a family member or friend is affected by domestic violence, or we find ourselves as victims.

Gender equality week is a designated time each year for us to highlight the reasons why organizations like Juliette's Place exist, to shine light on the work before us that is unfinished. As Canadians, we must talk about domestic violence, about the barriers to equality that women and people of marginalized gender identities and expressions continue to face.

Juliette's Place also does important outreach work, speaking to businesses and faith groups, and running workshops in schools. It teaches children that violence in the family is unacceptable. This empowers students to approach their teachers and guidance counsellors to talk about abuse in their own homes. School social workers may then have an opportunity to provide specific

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information to families in need, linking them with supportive resources in their community.

Education can be a first step to prevent violence from occurring or recurring. That is why gender equality week is so important.

There remains much work for us to do with respect to gender equality, as women continue to face barriers in all facets of life.

With that said, some trends are indeed positive. For example, women today are achieving higher levels of education than ever before. Studies by Statistics Canada showed that in 1990, only 14% of women aged 25 to 54 held a university degree. By 2009, this figure had increased to 28%. In fact, today more women than men have earned a university degree.

The 2011 national household survey released by Statistics Canada said that 53.7% of university-educated Canadians aged 25 to 64 were women. Despite these trends, women continue to face tremendous barriers in the workplace.

● (1910)

Women are under-represented in certain fields, most notably in jobs related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Not only are women under-represented, but their average earnings are also considerably lower compared to those of men. Achieving gender equality is a monumental task, one that requires all Canadians to have a better awareness and understanding of the issues at hand.

Indeed, our government is committed to growing the middle class, investing in Canadians, and creating a fair and just society. If we are to work toward achieving these goals, then we must also achieve gender equality. To effectively grow the middle class, we must eliminate the wage gap faced by women. To invest in the success of Canadians, we must address the reality that women and their children continue to be victims of domestic violence. To achieve a fair and just society, we must ensure that all women are treated fairly and justly.

The creation of gender equality week highlights the challenges before us to achieving a society free from violence, hate, and discrimination. It encourages all three levels of government to work together with stakeholders to achieve this goal, stakeholders like academia, the private sector, the media, not-for-profit organizations, and social service agencies like Juliette's Place.

Gender equality week compels us to think about the ways in which inequality affects not just women in general but especially women of colour, indigenous and aboriginal women, members of the LGBTQI2-S community, poor women, and women of minority faith groups.

It makes us realize that achieving gender equality is just as much about achieving social equality for everyone. I stand with women and people of all gender identities and expressions in the fight for equality for all Canadians. I stand in support of Bill C-309 as an important step in the right direction, knowing full well that change is neither quick nor easy, but it begins with courageous conversations.

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Through gender equality week, I hope that all Canadians will take a moment to reflect on the progress we have made, the challenges before us, and the change we all want to see. This is a national conversation that we must have, one that recognizes the importance of furthering the project of gender equality for a fairer and more just society. I implore all my colleagues in this House to support this important legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say I was really impressed with my colleague's comments on the issue.

Whether it is in the comments of my colleague or the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, the way they articulate the issue shows it is something which they genuinely believe in. In good part, there are issues that will come and go in terms of debate in this chamber, but there is a genuine appreciation that we can do much better on the file of gender equity. Over the years, we have seen significant progress.

Sharon Carstairs was a very important woman in my life, someone who was quite inspirational. I had a big decision to make back in the mid to late 1980s regarding the direction in which I was going to go and putting it in the perspective of a time frame. Sharon Carstairs played a significant role in my making the decision to get involved in politics. At the time I was in the military, trying to determine whether or not to go into politics. We had this wonderful leader who was elected for the Liberal Party in Manitoba. It was something very different. Back in 1988, Sharon Carstairs was the first female to be elected as leader of one of the three main parties, at the provincial or national level.

If we were to canvass members of the House for their opinions, we would find that all of us have had individuals who have impacted our lives.

When I look at this whole issue of gender equality and the amount of inequity that is out there, this is a very powerful motion that we are talking about today. Designating a week could lead to all sorts of things being talked about in classrooms, in the business community, at corporate tables, in union rooms, in different levels of government, in non-profit organizations, or in individual homes. There are many stories that need to be told.

I have talked about Sharon Carstairs because of the profound positive impact that she had on me, but there are other women in my life who have had a huge impact also. We owe it to all to move forward and advance the issue of gender equity.

I am very proud of the fact that we have a Prime Minister who is a feminist. The types of actions he has taken since the last federal election have been very significant. One of the first initiatives he announced was that he was going to have gender parity in the cabinet. That was a first in Canadian history. Governments around the world recognized that particular initiative.

The Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women talked about that gender lens. Those are two words that we often use now. I have seen the term "gender lens" being used more in the last year than in the previous 20 years. There is a heightened sense of awareness

when developing public policy, whether it is a budget or a piece of legislation, that we need to apply that gender lens.

I know our Prime Minister pushed heavily on this. We have seen the cabinet respond to that. The Minister of Finance, as the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women indicated, applied the gender lens to the most recent budget, which we have been debating for the last couple of months. That in itself will have a significant impact on the types of decisions we are making.

● (1915)

Quite often we hear criticisms about the government's appointments, from opposition members. I am actually quite happy with the way in which the appointments have been taking place. The other day, when I was responding to a question from the opposition in regard to appointments, I made reference to the fact that, of 122 appointments, 60% were females. I do not have at the top of my head the number of appointments and the actual gender breakdown with Stephen Harper's government, but I suspect we would find that, through this Prime Minister, this is yet another initiative that does not just talk about it but actually is a tangible action toward gender equity. We have the cabinet, we have the gender lens, and we have the appointment process. Through that appointment process, we talk about the importance of transparency and accountability; we talk about the level of expertise among the individuals who are out there. The government needs to make that extra effort in ensuring that we take down some of those barriers, because there are barriers in place. Some of them are more difficult to recognize than others, but the bottom line is that barriers are in place. I appreciate those individuals who have brought us to the point where we are today.

Now, my colleague brought in a motion that ultimately would see recognition being given on an annual basis for a duration of one week. The question I posed for him was in regard to how we can incorporate it into school classrooms, possibly. When we have awareness bills, resolutions, or motions that come to the floor, one of the primary reasons for them, I would argue, is that they allow for all the different stakeholders that we could possibly imagine to take advantage of the sort of leadership that is coming out of the House of Commons on an issue such as this and to actually utilize it. The example I used for my colleague is that a progressive teacher would say, "In Ottawa we have recognized a national gender equity week, and we want to talk about that in our classroom." Those are the types of actions that I believe we will see take place.

I also believe that, as members, we will often talk about the different issues, and this is one of those issues on which we have the opportunity to do so, whether through ten percenters or householders or just discussions we have with our constituents, where we can actually promote some of the good work that is done inside the House of Commons. By doing that and by raising this around different individuals and groups whom we meet, we can in fact influence and ultimately, hopefully, raise the profile of the issue. The bottom line is that it is about education; it is about looking for barriers and coming up with creative ways to take down some of those barriers, so that there is a more equal playing field.

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We have heard some statistics even in this evening's debate in terms of the percentages in education and the types of marks and different types of professions. Earlier today we heard the leader of the Conservative Party, a very bold leader who has done so much and no doubt has inspired many women to take hold of what has been accomplished, knowing full well that they can be just as engaged and that women play an absolutely critical role, an equal role, and some would argue, even a larger role. If members talk to my daughter, she will tell them about that.

I appreciate the opportunity to share a few of my thoughts on this important issue.

• (1920)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean. I want to remind the hon. member that she will have about six minutes before we end the debate.

• (1925)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Mississauga—Lakeshore for bringing this incredibly important bill to the House. I had the privilege of sitting on the status of women committee when the bill came before our committee. I want to thank our colleagues on committee who worked hard on this as well.

When we talk about a gender equality week, what we are really talking about is bringing people together across the country, whether it is civil society, parliamentarians, researchers, or other groups to be able to multiply the conversation, to start a real engagement on gender equality in Canada.

We know from many studies that women and men in Canada are not equal today. We can see it here in the House where 27% of elected members are women. We see it in other kinds of leadership bodies and on corporate boards. I am very pleased at what our government is doing in Bill C-25 about women on corporate boards to make sure that companies have a comply or explain model. They have to have diversity policies.

I am particularly pleased at what the Minister of Science has done in the past week regarding women in research. Universities that do not have a diversity policy within the next two years and reach their targets will no longer get federal government research funding for Canada research chairs. We have tried many other ways. This is the kind of thing that is needed, because we have not seen significant increases in gender equality in Canada in several decades in many different fields.

We on the status of women committee right now are studying women's economic security. We have had a number of different groups come before us. We know that women in Canada today are not making the same amount of money as men do for the same kind of work.

I chaired the committee on pay equity. We came out with a very proactive report which calls for proactive pay equity legislation which recognizes that pay equity is a human right. I am very proud that our government has responded positively to our report and is going to be bringing in pay equity legislation. This is the kind of

thing that will help in terms of people who are working in similar fields.

We also know that the wage gap includes a number of different factors that are not necessarily just about pay equity, for instance, precarious work. There are more women working in minimum wage jobs. There are more women working in part-time jobs. Today we heard in the status of women committee that in the bottom seven deciles, that is zero to \$70,000, there are more women earning that amount and as soon as we get over \$70,000 there are more men. It is clear that we have a long way to go, particularly when it comes to women in the STEM professions.

When it comes to the jobs that pay good money, when it comes to the kinds of good jobs that create Canadian prosperity, women are not choosing those jobs because of socialization or because of a lack of role models. There are a number of things we need to do to improve the situation for some of the young women in our communities.

I am very proud to have had the opportunity in my riding of Ottawa West—Nepean to meet with several girls in projects that allow girls to reach their full potential. I am speaking of projects like Girls World at the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, or the Girl Guides, whom I met with. It was quite inspiring. These young girls are so articulate. They believe that they can be anything and do anything. This is something we need to make not just an aspiration for these young women, but an actual reality.

Later, one of the young girls, a 12-year-old, wrote to me and asked if I could create a junior youth council. Apparently, when she is playing with her dolls at home, she pretends the dolls are in Parliament. This is the kind of thing we need to promote. A young 12-year-old girl is dreaming of being in government, of being a member of Parliament, but at what point is that aspiration lost? At what point does that young girl think it is not something for her? We still do not see as many women winning nominations and being elected to this place as we ought to see.

I will use myself as an example. When I was in grade 10, I joined the science club. I decided I wanted to be an astrophysicist. I did an entire report on how to become an astrophysicist. I signed up for calculus and all of the science courses, but somehow between grade 10 and grade 12, I lost my interest in science. I received my highest mark in math, but I was telling people at that point "I hate math. I am terrible at math." It is something that I continued to repeat over and over for decades, that I am terrible at math. I saw my report card. I had 93% in grade 12 math.

• (1930)

Somewhere along the way, young girls are socialized to think that science is not something they want to do. I am very pleased to have studied history and to now be in politics, but we need to create a world where young girls and young women have the same opportunities. We need to ensure that the barriers are no longer there so they can achieve the kinds of things they dream about when they are 12 years old and that somehow, along the way, we see that inequality end.

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When I talk to young students and tell them that men make \$1 for every 73¢ a woman makes, they gasp. They look at me and ask how that is fair. Even young children know that it is not fair.

I thank my hon. colleague for bringing this incredibly important bill before the House. I hope it will receive support across all party lines, because this is an opportunity for us to really make sure we are doing something about the gender gap in Canada.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of a successful national inquiry into the tragedy of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people. Canada needs this inquiry to succeed. We need to get to the bottom of why so many women disappeared. We need to support their families. We need to fix our social institutions to make sure we are doing everything we can to prevent further tragedies like this.

It is in that spirit that I asked both on Friday and this afternoon if the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs is doing everything she can to have the inquiry succeed. Do the commissioners have full access to inquiry funding, and if not, who is delaying approval of those expenditures? The minister refused to answer. On Friday, she also answered, “We are confident that the commission has the tools, the resources, and the networks to ensure that voices of families are heard and that they have the support they need”, but that is not what the families and survivors are saying.

Yesterday the inquiry received a failing grade from the Native Women's Association of Canada, and also yesterday, 30 families and indigenous leaders wrote an open letter to the chief commissioner. They said that the process is in serious trouble due to delays and a lack of transparency and communication. Both reports issued yesterday suggested that the approval of the budget, as well as the lack of access to funds, may have contributed to those delays.

That is the question I am repeating tonight, because that is wholly within the realm of the Liberal government. It is not the independent inquiry but the government that has the responsibility to make sure the resources it promised are flowing to the commissioners and to the inquiry so they can do their vital work.

In the Native Women's Association of Canada report card, it said, “It is likely that outside factors, such as the approval of the budget as well as a lack of access to funds, may have contributed to the delays”. In an open letter published yesterday, an entire section was dedicated to the question of the independence of the inquiry. It says,

We were promised an independent inquiry, but it appears that many questions remain about the role of the Privy Council Office (PCO) in decision making.

These are the questions I put on the floor again tonight, the same questions. These are the exact words that were written in the open letter:

1. Does the [Privy Council Office] approve expenditures or does the Inquiry?
2. Has the Inquiry been hampered in its ability to support families or its work because of the [Privy Council Office]?
3. Has any of the budget for the Inquiry been spent to support [Privy Council Office] offices or civil service staff?
4. Can you demonstrate that the [Privy Council Office] has not or is not impairing the independence of this Inquiry?

● (1935)

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, it is incredibly important to remind one another, and indeed all Canadians, why we launched the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. It is because for far too many families, a mother, sister, daughter, niece, or friend has gone missing, and they need answers.

The terms of reference for the inquiry make it extremely clear that families should, and must, be at the centre. They are the families that fought so hard to get this national inquiry in the first place. It was their voices, their strength, their courage, and their well-being. The point of this national inquiry is not only to produce a report. It is also about helping families heal and have their voices heard, and through them, the voices of all the women and girls we have lost.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report lays out three main stages on the path to reconciliation. First is truth telling, second is healing, and third is reconciliation. If we are to advance reconciliation in Canada, we must never forget to help one another heal.

What we have heard to date is raw and intensely personal. It has left no doubt in our minds about the urgent need to examine the underlying and deep systemic challenges of violence, including racism and sexism, and the sustained impact of colonialism.

We also know that we cannot wait for a national inquiry to make recommendations before we act, which is why our government has already taken immediate action on root causes, with investments in women's shelters, housing, education, and child welfare reform. This includes expanding the network of shelters to include five new centres for families fleeing violence on reserve, and \$2.6 billion over five years for kindergarten to grade 12 education on reserve. It includes \$554.3 million over two years from budget 2016 to address urgent housing needs on reserve plus an additional \$4 billion over 10 years from budget 2017 to build and improve housing and other community infrastructure.

This national inquiry was purposely developed to be independent so it would be free from political interference and so the voices of families would be heard. That is what is happening now, and it is up to the commission to take the feedback it is receiving and incorporate it.

Adjournment Proceedings

As the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs has said, we look forward to hearing from the commission, and we are ready to continue supporting it. Again, I want to reiterate that our government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I agree with absolutely every word the member just said, but none of them has anything to do with my question, other than my very first line that said that, yes, we want the inquiry to succeed and we need it to succeed. None of that says anything about the government's responsibility to make sure that the inquiry has the money it needs and that the government funding approval process is not starving and emasculating the commission.

Maybe the member has good reassuring answers for me, but this was all over the press yesterday. It is an extremely high-profile issue. I cannot believe that the minister's representative is not ready to answer these questions.

Does the PCO approve expenditures, or does the inquiry? Has the inquiry been hampered in its ability to support families or its work because of the PCO? Can the member demonstrate that the PCO has not or is not impairing the independence of the inquiry? It is time for truth telling.

Ms. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, again, let me reaffirm that our government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This government has taken immediate steps and action on root causes with investments in women's shelters, housing, education, and child welfare.

The terms of reference for the inquiry make it extremely clear that families should and must be at the centre, the families that fought so hard to get the national inquiry in the first place. We have stated that the commission must also ensure that the voices of families are heard in a culturally appropriate and trauma-informed way. We made the national inquiry independent so it could be free from political interference and so the voices of families will be heard.

That is what is happening, and it is up to the commission to take the feedback it is receiving and incorporate it. We look forward to hearing from the commission and are ready to support it and to continue to support it.

• (1940)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 3, on behalf of the women and men who serve their country in uniform as members of the Canadian Armed Forces, I asked the Prime Minister a question. I asked him how many more times the Minister of National Defence has misled Canadians before the Prime Minister will force him to resign. The response I received on behalf of our women and men in uniform was an insult to the service they provide to our country. It is time for the Prime Minister to understand that Canadians expect him to do more than just show up for question period one day a week and endlessly repeat mindless talking points prepared for him by his handler, Gerald Butts—the same mindless talking points, I might add, that I should not have to expect to hear during this adjournment debate.

I challenge the Prime Minister's unethical support for a member of his party who misled voters in the 2015 election concerning his service record and who continues to mislead Canadians by repeating false claims when he thinks he can get away with doing so.

Having grossly inflated his role in one of the largest Canadian military operations in recent history, the Minister of National Defence should have resigned. After he failed to do the honourable thing and fall on his sword, the Prime Minister should have fired him.

The Minister of National Defence has lost the confidence of the women and men he was appointed to serve. The Prime Minister, by refusing to fire the Minister of National Defence, has lost the confidence of our NATO allies. Defence expenditures are now at their lowest level since the end of the last great war.

These are the facts.

As the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I have Garrison Petawawa in my riding. Petawawa is home to the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. During operation Medusa, in the war in Afghanistan, it was the Royal Canadian Regiment that bore the brunt of the fighting. Members of 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment were honoured with the Commander-in-Chief Unit Commendation, which is only awarded for extraordinary deeds or activities restricted to war or warlike conditions in an active theatre of operations.

Out in the field during operation Medusa, the battle group was commanded by then major general Omer Lavoie, the commander of the 1st Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment.

The Canadian component of his force comprised the 1RCR, a complement of 2 Combat Engineer Regiment, 2nd Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, medics from 2 Field Ambulance, all from Petawawa, and various support staff in undetermined roles, including the self-proclaimed architect of the operation, a reservist with no military training, with an assigned rank, for a total of about 1,050 Canadians.

What is known for sure is that five soldiers in that fight received Canada's third-highest award for bravery, the Medal of Military Valour, while another, Corporal Sean Teal, received the Star of Military Valour, Canada's second-highest award, just beneath the Victoria Cross. One other soldier was mentioned in the dispatches.

This is how the Minister of National Defence chose to inaccurately describe his role in Operation Medusa: "On my first deployment to Kandahar in 2006, I was...the architect of...Operation Medusa where we removed...1,500 Taliban fighters off the battlefield. And I was [proudly] on the main assault..."

Much has been written about this effort to take credit for whatever minor role the minister may or may not have played; however, what is particularly outrageous for the soldiers doing the actual fighting was the claim by the Minister of National Defence to being on the main assault.

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Claiming to be on the main assault is an insult to every member of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. Charlie Company of 1RCR is the most decorated, most bloodied company in the serving Canadian Forces. They earned their reputation by being on the main assault.

• (1945)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

As I had the opportunity to emphasize Monday, May 8, 2017, in the House, I have spent the past few months working with the Minister of National Defence, and I have been a privileged witness to his integrity and the determination with which he discharges his mandate.

The primary responsibility of the minister, and of our government, is to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces have the training, equipment, and support they need to carry out the missions they are assigned here in Canada and around the world.

Over the last year and a half, our minister has sought to achieve this very objective. It is what he strives to do every day. The Minister of National Defence is working to discharge that mandate with the greatest respect for our men and women in uniform.

That being said, the member opposite is questioning his expertise and his role during Operation Medusa. The minister has admitted that he made a mistake in describing his role. He retracted that statement and apologized in the House.

The minister's comments were in no way meant to diminish the role of his former senior officers and comrades-in-arms. He gave them a heartfelt apology. The minister is proud to have served as part of an extraordinary team of Canadian, American, and Afghan soldiers who successfully carried out Operation Medusa. His commanding officer in Afghanistan, General Fraser, considered him to be one of the best intelligence officers he ever worked with.

He said:

He was the best single Canadian intelligence asset in theatre, and his hard work, personal bravery, and dogged determination undoubtedly saved a multitude of Coalition lives. Through his courage and dedication, [the minister] has single-handedly changed the face of intelligence gathering and analysis in Afghanistan.

He went on to say:

He tirelessly and selflessly devoted himself to piecing together the ground truth on tribal and Taliban networks in the Kandahar area, and his analysis was so compelling that it drove a number of large scale theatre-resourced efforts, including Operation Medusa...

Retired Colonel Chris Vernon of the British army said:

You know, without [the minister's] input as a critical player, major player, a pivotal player I'd say, Medusa wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have the intelligence and the tribal picture to put the thing together.

The Minister of National Defence made a tremendous contribution in his deployments to Afghanistan and is currently making an even greater contribution within our government.

Over the past 18 months, he has contributed to significantly changing our mission in Iraq, and this mission is producing solid

results. He launched the most ambitious defence policy review in the past 20 years. He established solid and effective ties with all our allies, including within NATO and especially with our American neighbours, our most important military and economic partner.

With the help of his cabinet colleagues, he made major improvements to the procurement process.

I am proud of what he has accomplished and I am happy to work by his side. With the help of the minister's vision, leadership, and hard work, I am confident that our government will ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces have the tools and funding they need.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, it is also an insult to Bravo Company, which joined the main assault after Charlie Company was nearly decimated. The Minister of National Defence's claim of being on the main assault is an insult also to the five members of Charlie Company who lost their lives, and the 40 wounded comrades.

What is clear is that the decision by the Minister of National Defence, on more than one occasion, to mislead Canadians about something so important as the most significant battle fought by Canadians since the Korean War means the minister, and by extension the Prime Minister for refusing to fire him, cannot be trusted to do what is right and honourable. When the minister makes another public pronouncement, how will Canadians know whether he is telling the truth or merely making a mistake?

On behalf of all Canadians, the House deserves real answers to the questions Canadians would like to have answers for and not for the mindless talking points that characterize the Prime Minister's question period.

• (1950)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, the minister apologized in the House for what he said, but I get the distinct impression that, even if he apologized 10 or 100 times, it would never be enough for the members opposite.

As I mentioned earlier, I have the privilege of working with the minister on a regular, if not daily, basis. Last Friday, I had the opportunity to accompany him on an extended tour of Quebec's flooded areas. I saw him talk with many members of our Canadian Armed Forces. Everywhere we went, the minister was greeted by our troops with respect and enthusiasm. The connection between them was obvious.

I know that the minister has a good understanding of the needs of our troops and the challenges they face. I also know that the members of our military trust him because they know that, like them, he served our country. They know that they can always count on him to help them better carry out their missions.

The minister has the support of our troops, his colleagues, and the Prime Minister, and he has promised to do great things for our country and the armed forces.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*English*]

(The House adjourned at 7:51 p.m.)

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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