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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

HEALTH

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the federal framework on Lyme disease in Canada, pursuant to the Federal Framework on Lyme Disease Act, which will now be referred to the Standing Committee on Health in accordance with Standing Order 32(5).

[*Translation*]

I would like to begin by stating that our government recognizes the impact that Lyme disease has had and continues to have on Canadians and their families and appreciates the hard work of all who contributed to the framework.

[*English*]

Through last year's conference to develop a federal framework on Lyme disease and the recent public consultation period for the initial draft of the framework, we have heard very clearly that there is a desire for action. We considered the perspectives and feedback and have developed the federal framework on Lyme disease in Canada. It is now available online at canada.ca/lymedisease.

[*Translation*]

The framework sets out the federal government's role with respect to surveillance, education and awareness, and guidelines and best practices. The Government of Canada is also committed to investing in research to better understand the causes and transmission of Lyme disease.

[*English*]

Over the coming days, I look forward to providing further information about the actions we will be taking under the federal framework on Lyme disease in Canada.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure and honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Health in relation to Bill C-211, an act respecting a federal framework on post-traumatic stress disorder. After some incredible testimony and impressive witnesses with emotional stories to tell, the committee has studied the bill and decided to report the bill back to the House with amendment.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, entitled "Report 4, Oversight of Passenger Vehicle Safety, of the Fall 2016 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada".

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

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, entitled "Main Estimates 2017-18".

* * *

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-356, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (donations to food banks).

He said: Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise to introduce an important bill to Canadians. This legislation would reduce food waste and hunger in our communities by creating a tax incentive to encourage food producers, suppliers, and retailers to donate food to charities. I would like to thank the hon. member for Vancouver East for seconding this bill.

Routine Proceedings

This bill is a result of the vision of two thoughtful high school students from my riding of Vancouver Kingsway, Gaelan Emo and June Lam from Windermere Secondary. June and Gaelan are this year's winners of my annual Create your Canada contest held in high schools across Vancouver Kingsway. They identified the need to reduce the 31 million pounds of food wasted in Canada every year and lend a hand to the 13% of Canadians who live in food insecurity. This is a smart economic policy and a progressive social initiative.

I hope that all parliamentarians will help them realize their vision for a better Canada and support this excellent bill.

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

* * *

•(1010)

[Translation]

MAIN ESTIMATES 2016-17—CANADIAN HERITAGE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The following motion in the name of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is deemed adopted:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(b), consideration by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage of all Votes under Department of Canadian Heritage in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2018, be extended beyond May 31, 2017.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you would find agreement for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the debate pursuant to Standing Order 66 on Motion No. 12 to concur in the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, be deemed to have taken place, and that the said report, presented on Wednesday, June 15, 2016, be deemed concurred in on division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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)

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I move that the third report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform presented on Thursday, December 1, 2016, be concurred in.

At the outset, Madam Speaker, I will let you know that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who has done excellent work on this file and is joined by tens of thousands of Canadians who have also contributed their hearts, their ideas, and their hopes and aspirations into this issue, into this most fundamental idea that, when we vote for something, we would get it; that when we put our ballot in the ballot box expressing our wish for the future, which is what a vote is, and there has been a promise made, the promise will be kept.

We have watched the long and somewhat tortured saga of the story around electoral reform in the government for many months, 18 or 20 months or more, in which we had the opportunity to do something. We still have that opportunity to do something quite remarkable in restoring the hope and trust that Canadians have in their politics, in their governance, and in their way of doing things here in Parliament.

Perhaps what we are attempting to do here today with this vote on the electoral reform committee's work is to have Liberals keep their promise. Some have said that is one of the trickiest jobs in politics. The evidence is quite strong that this is a hard thing to do sometimes, yet I have a great amount of hope, shared by many Canadians, that this can be done. The reason many of us got into elected office in the first place was to be able to lift up our communities, to keep our word when it is made, and to not break promises casually.

That has not so far been the case with this particular issue, but let us walk through the timeline, because it is quite a story and it takes a bit to get through. The Prime Minister, as a candidate and then as Prime Minister, made a very clear commitment again and again—hundreds of times, in fact—that the 2015 election would be the last election under the first-past-the-post system. He made it so many times that Canadians can recite it themselves, and it was not just the Prime Minister, but every Liberal who stood for office, and every Liberal who was elected was elected on that promise.

We in the New Democrats, the Conservatives, the Bloc, and the Green Party moved in good faith forward on this exercise not out of any sense of naïveté or lack of information, but simply because a promise so clear, so black and white, repeated so often by the leader of a country, ought to mean something. This issue is clearly about electoral reform itself, about the idea of making every vote count from all Canadians regardless of where they live in the country. That is an essential part of this conversation, so that people do not have to vote strategically or cynically or out of fear, but simply vote for what they want, vote for the candidate they want and have that vote mean something.

We know that virtually all successful democracies around the world have evolved their way of voting over time to make votes more effective, to not have situations like we did in the last election where 18 million votes were cast, but less half of them actually went toward electing anybody in this place. The average vote required to elect a Liberal MP was 38,000, another 20,000 to elect a Conservative, more than 20,000 to elect a New Democrat or Bloc, and 600,000-plus votes to elect a single Green member. Clearly, with a range of 38,000 to 600,000, even a small child can understand the unfairness of that system.

Routine Proceedings

We moved ahead and struck the electoral reform committee, made up proportionally, by the way, of how Canadians actually voted in the last election. The committee worked well. It toured every province and territory in the country. It held open microphones and town halls, listening to every expert we could call here in Canada and around the world about the best way to move Canada forward to make that promise a reality, the promise the Prime Minister made, the campaign commitment that New Democrats had, that the Green Party ran on, that 63% of the members in the House ran on, a solemn commitment to Canadians. We produced the most comprehensive report on our democracy in this country's history. That is not bad.

Unfortunately, the government's first response to it was unbecoming, if we can say that, yet we persisted. Suddenly with a cabinet shuffle and a new minister, there was somehow a mandate letter delivered from on high, breaking that promise, as if somehow mandates come out of the Prime Minister's Office as opposed to where they really come from, which is the electorate, which is voters. That is the only place, and it should only ever be that place. For all my friends in the Prime Minister's Office, it is good to remember that. It is good to remember who this place actually works for—not some unelected adviser to the Prime Minister, however long they have been friends, but the people who actually elected people to the House.

•(1015)

The evidence was overwhelming in support of proportional representation. Everybody on the committee could understand that because it was so clear. Ninety per cent of the experts who testified said that if we wanted to make every vote count, if we wanted to make the will of voters properly expressed in the House of Commons, we needed a proportional system.

There are many choices under that rubric of different systems that would work for Canada, rural and urban, making sure that our various geographies and our orientations as a country are respected. Eighty-eight per cent of Canadians who came to those open mikes, wrote to the committee, or filled out our online survey, also expressed support for a proportional system. Ninety per cent of experts and 88% of Canadians who came forward expressed support, yet when the promise was broken, quite cynically, the excuses that the Prime Minister then rolled out on the forthcoming days were extraordinary and somewhat disturbing.

First, there was the fearmongering. "Hope and hard work" was a slogan in the election. Now, the Prime Minister chooses to use more of a fear tactic on this, that extremists would get in if we allowed for a proportional system. The Dutch just proved that not to be the case. An extremist was running for the leadership of their country and it was proportional representation in that vote that kept him from seizing power in that alt-right fashion.

Then it was the global instability. Donald Trump, I think, is what he was referring to. I will remind my Liberal colleagues that Americans use first past the post.

Then there was this notion that there was not a broad consensus, because 90% of experts and 88% of Canadians was not enough. Then a fellow from Kitchener decided to start an e-petition, no. 616, which I sponsored and brought forward to the House. It contained 132,000 signatures, making it the largest petition in Canadian history

to come forward, and it said that this was critical and needed to move forward.

After all this, a cabinet shuffle, a broken mandate, and a broken promise, the Prime Minister said, finally, "It was my choice to make and I chose to make it." In an effort to, I think, appear strong, the Prime Minister proved himself to be fundamentally wrong. It is not his choice to make. It is Parliament's choice to make.

I know from my Liberal colleagues that many of them sent apology letters to their constituents, wrote op-eds in the local newspaper, saying, "It breaks my heart that we had to break this promise. I'm very sorry. I really wanted to see this happen." I know my Liberal colleagues never had a vote on this. I do not think they ever stood in caucus and said, "Who's in favour of betraying this promise? Who wants to keep it?" Parliament has never had a vote on this. Parliament has never had the opportunity to weigh in on this initiative, on this effort, on this ability to keep a promise of the 63% of us who are in the House, and to make every vote count.

By moving this report, we allow that vote to take place. We allow the conversation to move ahead. We allow, finally, hopefully, a table to be established at which we can negotiate with the government, as negotiations have gone on in British Columbia recently, maybe successfully. We will find out in a few hours about the idea that when 60% or more of the electorate want to go in a certain direction, politicians who are smart and have that core ethic understand that they should listen.

Hope springs eternal. I was coming up the steps of Parliament today, passing all these school groups that are coming in, the thousands of young people who come to this place. We just saw a bill introduced through the "Create Your Canada" process from my colleague, the member for Vancouver Kingsway. The Prime Minister, in the last campaign, I think very effectively, spoke to young people. He also spoke to Canadians who had grown cynical and tired with the last government. He said that we should hope for more and we should expect more.

I was on liberal.ca this morning, seeing if the promise to make 2015 the last election under first past the post was still there. There it is, under the title of "Real Change". It says that the Liberals would use evidence-based decision-making and that the Conservatives had lost the faith of Canadians because they had broken their promises.

Routine Proceedings

Here is the opportunity for the government to make good. I held more than 20 town halls and events in the last six weeks, all across the country, coast to coast. We talked to Canadians. They are not as cynical as some of the people in the Prime Minister's Office. They are more hopeful. They expect and want more from their government. They want this to happen. They support the evidence that we, as a committee, heard: that we can make every vote count, that we can have integrity in our politics, and that we can hold ourselves up to a higher standard.

I look forward to the support of my Liberal colleagues because I know in their ridings that I visited over the last number of weeks, their constituents want this as well.

• (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the member across the way visited Winnipeg North and his report might not necessarily be fully accurate. I too had a town hall in Winnipeg North on this very important issue, and what I have come to believe is that I can count on my hands the number of individuals over the last two years, even during that election period, who actually approached me on this issue.

I can assure the member across the way that the residents whom I represent see the priorities of government as being dealing with the issues this government has brought forward to the House. I will cite, for example, the importance of a health care accord, the importance of retirement programs, the tax breaks, and the Canada child benefit program.

Would the member not at least acknowledge that there was no consensus achieved on this issue?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Only, Madam Speaker, if “by consensus” he means that the Liberals have to agree, and that the Prime Minister's Office has to agree. That is what consensus seems to be. Consultation is a very important thing, but it must be done with integrity. We did the consultation in the member's riding. More than 70% of his constituents answered a poll saying that they wanted this promise to be kept. Twenty Liberal ridings were polled, and this was the answer. We also know, by the way, that proportional voting systems around the world deliver better policy on economics and on the environment.

Here is a piece of gum. Let us go for a walk. I bet the Liberals can do both at the same time. They can move and advance forward policies that are important to Canadians and keep their promises at the same time. It is as if one excluded the other. It is as if working on housing or health care meant that the Liberals had to break these other promises. What kind of twisted logic is that? Canadians want them to keep their word. It is simple, plain; that is all.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech and his ability to tell it like it is.

I also took part in this extensive consultation process. I heard the minister repeat time and time again that Canadians had given the

Liberals a clear mandate on this matter. I heard the Prime Minister and the minister repeat more than 1,000 times that this would be the last election under the old system. That said, we nevertheless had some concerns. We suspected that the government's sole objective was to put in place whichever system would benefit it the most. That is why we wanted a referendum, in order to make sure that whatever was proposed, whether a proportional voting system or otherwise, it would be what Canadians want.

Since my colleague took part in all the consultations and has already heard all this, I have a question for him. After hearing the comments made in response to the question previously posed, and after all the other comments made by the government, do you think the government is being hypocritical, considering how it is handling this file?

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

The hon. member of Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for the work that he did in committee.

After holding consultations and hearing the testimony, the Prime Minister said that he preferred a system that works very well for the Liberals. It is incredibly unbelievable.

I believe, as do all the intelligent Canadians who cheerfully participated in the consultations, that the government is being hypocritical and cynical. That is why I am asking my Liberal colleagues to make the right choice when it comes time to vote. We heard from many witnesses over the course of this process.

The fact that the Prime Minister said he had a personal preference, which was not supported by the experts, shows just how cynical he is.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley for the wonderful work that he has done. He has been doing an excellent job on this file for some time now, since this was a fairly long process.

I am very pleased to rise today in the House. It is a real honour to talk about this issue because no issue is more important than the foundation of our democracy. Voters can participate in the election process, which makes it possible to have a Parliament that reflects the diversity of views in society and a democracy that reflects the choice of the people as fairly as possible.

That is the promise that the Liberal Party of Canada made during the last election. That was not a small promise involving a change to a rule or an administrative change. The Liberals promised a historic change that would improve our democracy and make Parliament more representative and more consistent with the message voters are sending.

Routine Proceedings

This promise was repeated hundreds of times, maybe even a thousand times, and people believed it. We, too, took the Liberals at their word. When the Leader of the Liberal Party, who became Prime Minister of the country, tells us that the 2015 election will be the last one under the current voting system, we have every reason to believe it. What is more, when he specifically mandates the minister responsible for democratic reform to make that change, we again believe it. When it is in the throne speech, we continue to believe it. When the parliamentary committee is tasked with making that change, we continue to believe it. Unfortunately, today, the Liberal Party is telling us and all Canadians that we should not have believed it. In fact, perhaps even the Liberals themselves never believed it.

Coming from a government whose platform said that it would restore the public's trust in democratic institutions, it is a slap in the face. It is extremely serious because it deepens the cynicism of the people we meet in our ridings, communities, cities, and towns.

After the Liberal promise was broken by the Prime Minister, many people asked us what needed to be done for politicians to keep their promises. This is serious, because the Liberals have just sown doubt in many people's minds or confirmed the doubts they already had.

We uphold the principle of hope and keeping one's word. What is the word of a Liberal politician worth today? It is difficult to go on saying that we can trust them. Let us remind people that the Liberal Party has not kept its word on an issue that goes to the very heart of our democracy.

The current system, first past the post, is almost no longer used at all by other western democracies, because it creates very serious distortions between the people's choice on election day and the representation in the House, in Parliament. In 2011, with 40% of the votes, the Conservative Party was able to form a majority government with 55% of the seats. This means that a minority can form a majority government that, for four years, can practically do whatever it wants. We saw what that bulldozer did.

At the time, the members of the NDP, the Green Party, the Bloc Québécois, and the Liberal Party said that it made no sense and that the system had to be changed. In addition, 63% of Canadians voted for parties that wanted a more proportional voting system.

● (1030)

Once in power—with, guess what, 39% of the votes and 55% of the seats—and once the whole process was over, the Liberal Party pulled a 180, broke its promise, and said things are just fine as they are.

That has consequences, and we think that a proportional voting system makes for better government. That is how it is done in 85% of OECD countries. It is not a hare-brained idea or so complicated that people will not understand how it works. It is simple, it works, and the principle is one that any elementary school child can understand. If a party gets about 20% of the votes, it should have about 20% of the seats. That seems logical to me, and it is what the people want.

A parliamentary committee was created to study the issue. Thanks to the NDP's proposal, the committee makeup reflected how people voted in 2015. The committee was given a mandate to study possible changes and alternatives to the voting system. We heard a lot of

things. As my colleague said earlier, roughly 90% of the experts were in favour of a proportional voting system. About 87% or 88% of the citizens who came to see us were in favour of a proportional voting system.

The committee conducted an online survey that received 23,000 responses. Some 72% of respondents said they were in favour of a proportional voting system. The Liberals created their bizarre little website, MyDemocracy.ca, with completely convoluted and planted questions with no science behind them whatsoever, and people still said that they wanted a proportional voting system.

At the end of the process, the four opposition parties involved in the study had a discussion. We all put some water in our wine. We accepted the principle of a referendum, which was important to two other opposition parties, the Bloc and the Conservatives. The committee produced a majority report, which, guess what, argued in favour of a referendum on a proportional voting system.

Quite frankly, the Liberal government has a lot of nerve. I do not want to use unparliamentary language, so let us just say that it is resorting to a premeditated inaccuracy or planned misrepresentation in saying that there was no consensus. What a bunch of nonsense. This is the Liberals' way of getting out of a broken promise that was extremely important to thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Quebeckers and Canadians all across the country.

There was a consensus. The only problem is that this consensus was not in the Liberal Party's interest. That is what is happening today. Now, with this vote in the House, in Parliament, on the majority report of the committee on electoral reform, all Liberal members present have the opportunity to rise, keep their word, and respect the will of their voters. We are being generous by giving them the opportunity for democratic redemption. They should keep their word and respect the choice of voters and the consensus of society. People overwhelmingly said that they no longer want this old inequitable, unfair, and archaic system. They said they wanted real change, a system where their vote is respected and every vote counts.

In the House tomorrow, we will have the opportunity to respect the will of the people, to keep our word, to fulfill the election promise, and to move forward with a new proportional voting system.

● (1035)

[English]

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleagues opposite for their remarks today and for their dedication to this matter.

Routine Proceedings

Mention has been made of election promises, and absolutely, our government made a promise during the election campaign to look at a whole range of issues that would affect our democratic institutions, and yes, one of those was the way we cast our ballots. However, again and again, emphatically, repeatedly, and with tremendous emphasis, we said we would also consult with Canadians on these questions to find out the best way to proceed with Canadians.

We did that. We spent just about a year engaging Canadians, hearing what they wanted to do. We got about 0.1% of Canadians engaged in the first round. We worked hard on the website and we managed to get about 1% of Canadians engaged the second time.

I wonder if the member might be able to enlighten me on why he thinks it is a good idea now to change the fundamental nature of our democracy based on less than 1% of Canadians having weighed in on this topic, and when even among that 1% there was no clear consensus about which direction to go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I believe it would be a good thing to change fundamental aspects of our democracy because that is what you promised.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask the member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I know you promised that.

We must not show contempt for the choice that Canadians and Quebecers made during the last election. A total of 63% of voters voted for parties that supported a proportional voting system.

We consulted with people. That was the job that the parliamentary committee set up by the Liberal government was given to do. The broad consensus was in favour of a proportional voting system. That is what we heard from experts, ordinary Canadians, and the results of the online survey. One would have to be wilfully blind not to see the will of the people behind this fundamental change.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague on his speech.

As I already said, I attended various meetings with him in this regard. I too have been very frustrated because there is indeed a consensus. I am very pleased that his party agreed to hold a referendum.

There was a real danger because the Prime Minister had already announced that he wanted a preferential ballot system, which would put him at an advantage. We are really worried that the Liberals will change the voting system in a way that will benefit them.

I would like to know what the member thinks about this dramatic about-face. The Prime Minister had already announced that he was going to change the voting system and go with the one that he wanted but that did not reflect the will of Canadians.

What does he think about how the Prime Minister broke his promise and his way of going about it?

● (1040)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, my thanks to my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for his question, but also for the work he did on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

My answer is that it is a mix of cynicism, manipulation and hypocrisy on the Prime Minister's part. It is quite an unbelievable mix. In fact, let us not forget that, even after the election, when he did his media tour in December 2016, the Liberal Prime Minister was still saying he was going to change the voting system.

This is not just one small aspect of our democracy; it is a critical issue. He was with Patrice Roy on the *Téléjournal* in 2016, and he kept repeating that, when he makes a promise, it is serious business, he believes in it, and he will not back down just because it is difficult. If that is not laughing in everyone's face, I do not know what is.

In 2019, voters will remember the Liberal way.

[*English*]

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to discuss the motion moved by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

I want to begin by thanking all the members of the special committee on electoral reform for their excellent hard work in producing this report.

The committee held 57 meetings in every province and territory, listened to the testimony of 196 witnesses, collected and considered 574 written submissions, reached more than 22,000 Canadians through an online consultation process, and received 172 reports from members of Parliament who had hosted their own town halls to gather opinions from their constituents, my own among them.

Their report, entitled “Strengthening Democracy in Canada: Principles, Process and Public Engagement for Electoral Reform”, is a significant addition to the study of electoral reform in Canada and includes many important recommendations to improve our electoral system.

I also want to thank all the expert witnesses, the tireless and dedicated committee staff, and the thousands of Canadians who participated in this very important exercise in democracy. The extent of their work was impressive, and a credit to our democratic system.

Meanwhile, our government also spent the summer and autumn of 2016 engaged in extensive consultations on this important issue. We were elected on a commitment to listen to Canadians. The previous Minister of Democratic Institutions and her parliamentary secretary also undertook a cross-country tour during this period, holding community events in every province and territory.

Routine Proceedings

Our government also launched an innovative online tool to engage in a conversation with Canadians and learn more about what they value most in our democracy. This website, mydemocracy.ca, not only helped us to engage with as many Canadians as possible but also provided us with essential statistically valid public opinion research data. Every Canadian household was invited to participate, and more than 360,000 individuals took the time to share their views on democracy. We thank them for doing that. It is indeed rare for a government to be able to engage in such a significant national dialogue.

As the electoral system is a foundational component of any democratic system, I think all hon. members would agree that any significant change in how we vote must have the broad support of Canadians.

As was announced on February 1 of this year, these consultation efforts revealed that there is no broad consensus throughout the country to replace the current voting system or on what a preferred new system would look like.

We learned that Canadians value the direct relationship between their members of Parliament and the constituents they represent and the ability of these constituents to hold their elected representatives directly to account.

Therefore, our government has taken and will continue to take concrete steps to work with all parliamentarians to advance the five principles of the special committee's mandate. These principles are effectiveness and legitimacy, public engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation.

In his report following the 2015 election, our former chief electoral officer made a number of recommendations aimed at modernizing the Canada Elections Act. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is currently considering these recommendations. To date, two interim reports have been tabled, with further feedback expected.

Another important step that we have taken to advance these principles is the introduction of Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act. This legislation seeks to increase inclusion and voter participation by breaking down barriers that discourage Canadians from voting. It would also enhance confidence in the integrity of Canada's elections.

Bill C-33 addresses many of the concerns we have heard from Canadians in response to the changes made by the former government's Fair Elections Act. Bill C-33 reflects our government's focus on how we can help all members of our society gain access to the democratic process, including youth, seniors, indigenous Canadians, new Canadians, those with disabilities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Returning to the special committee's work, I would note that the committee made a number of important recommendations that extended beyond the foundational changes to the voting system, and I would like to address a few of those now.

Let us start with committee recommendation 3, which calls on our government to not bring in mandatory voting at this time. Our government agrees with the committee that mandatory voting is not

the correct approach at this time. However, we are committed to taking steps to encourage greater civic participation and greater citizen literacy to increase voter turnout in future federal elections.

Bill C-33 aims to increase voter participation by reducing barriers posed by voter identification, expanding the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate to undertake broad education campaigns, and creating a national register of future electors.

Furthermore, the government will continue to explore avenues to remove barriers to participation and improve voter turnout. We will do this by working with our partners and all Canadians. Our work will be informed by the recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

● (1045)

Another committee recommendation, number 4, advises against allowing online voting at this time. Again, we agree, and while Canadians who participated in mydemocracy.ca agreed that online voting would improve voter turnout, their support was contingent on the need for solid assurance that such a system would not be vulnerable to manipulation by hackers. Similar concerns were heard from the experts before the special committee.

Recommendations 5 and 6 call on Elections Canada to explore the use of technology to make voting more accessible, particularly for people with disabilities, while also ensuring the overall integrity of the voting process. The former chief electoral officer has made similar recommendations, and the government will consider them carefully in light of PROC's own deliberations. We will also consider consultations led by the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities on broader measures to help disabled Canadians participate in our democracy.

Recommendation 8 calls on the government to amend the Canada Elections Act to create a financial incentive that encourages political parties to run more female candidates. The government acknowledges that more must be done to support the participation of women in Canada's democratic life, and we urge all parties to more aggressively recruit, encourage, and support female candidates. As such, the government is committed to building on existing measures as well as to considering innovative approaches to further this goal.

For example, last year Status of Women Canada solicited applications for projects to create inclusive public spaces to increase the participation of women, including indigenous women, in the democratic life of our country. The call consisted of two themes: empowering women for political action to promote the participation of women in political life, and empowering women for community action to improve conditions for women by amplifying women's voices and enhancing their civic participation. A total of 14 projects have been approved for funding since the spring of 2016, totalling an investment of \$8.7 million over the next three years.

Recommendation 9 of the special committee report calls on our government to include youth in the national register of electors before they reach the voting age. Our government is very much in favour of this recommendation. In fact, we have already included a national register of future electors in Bill C-33.

Routine Proceedings

Canadians have told us that they want to encourage young people to vote, and research has found that when young people vote in one election, they are more likely to make it a lifelong habit. The Chief Electoral Officer recommended that we prepare young people to vote. It would happen by introducing pre-registration. The amendments to the Canada Elections Act in Bill C-33 would allow Elections Canada to work with young people in schools and other settings to register to vote. Young Canadians aged 14 to 17 would be able to pre-register and to access educational resources as well as other information about our democracy, elections, and voting. Upon turning 18, they would be automatically added to the national register for voting and would be ready to cast that all-important first vote.

The 10th recommendation made by the committee has a similar theme. It asks the government to empower Elections Canada to encourage a higher voter turnout. We agree with this recommendation, as a lack of information can create a significant barrier to participation. Under the previous government's legislation, the Chief Electoral Officer can only conduct educational programs for primary through grade 12 aged children. The Chief Electoral Officer has recommended that the mandate be extended to conduct education programs for all Canadians. We agree, and that is why our government has included a provision in Bill C-33 to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to undertake non-partisan educational programs aimed at providing information to all Canadians.

During our national electoral reform engagement tour, Canadians told us that they wanted more done to improve civic literacy and to build knowledge about Canadian democracy. They told us that they want us to make it easier to vote. They want to make it easier to learn about voting and the democratic process, and they want to make sure that as many Canadians as possible who are eligible to vote have an opportunity to do so.

Although this is reflected in the measures in Bill C-33 I have already mentioned, the bill has several other key measures that underscore the efforts we would make to improve democratic participation in our country. First, it would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to authorize the use of voter information cards as identification. Elections Canada piloted the use of the VIC as ID in 2010, and in the 2011 general election, approximately 900,000 Canadians, at more than 5,600 polling stations, were eligible to use the card as ID. The initiative was particularly useful at polling places such as long-term care homes and seniors' residences.

Unfortunately, the former government's Fair Elections Act prevented Canadians from using the voter ID card as ID in the 2015 election. Last autumn, the CEO recommended to the procedure and House affairs committee that the practice to use the card as ID be re-established. He said that this would be particularly helpful for three groups that have difficulty proving residency: youth, seniors, and indigenous voters.

• (1050)

Reinstating the VIC would increase access to voting for a number of Canadians.

Second, Bill C-33 would re-establish vouching so that a Canadian citizen could vouch for another to allow him or her to vote. Before the Fair Elections Act, an eligible Canadian voter could vouch for

someone who needed to prove his or her identity and residence but lacked proper ID. The limitation on vouching created a significant barrier to voting.

A Stats Canada survey last year estimated that some 172,000 Canadians said they were unable to vote because they lacked proper ID. This is a particular problem for indigenous people living on reserve and homeless people.

Third, Bill C-33 would help Elections Canada clean up data in the national register of electors. This is in response to the Chief Electoral Officer's request for more tools to improve the register. Our bill, if passed, would give Elections Canada new resources to refine the register's data and to let it operate more effectively.

Fourth, it would improve the public's confidence in the integrity of our elections by addressing concerns raised related to the independence of the commissioner of Canada elections as a result of the Fair Elections Act. The commissioner is a non-partisan official responsible for investigating potential voting issues, such as voter fraud or financial irregularities. The commissioner ensures that Canada Elections Act rules are followed.

Previously, from 1974 to 2014, the Chief Electoral Officer appointed the commissioner, and the commissioner reported to the Chief Electoral Officer within Elections Canada. The previous government's Fair Elections Act transferred the commissioner to the office of the director of public prosecutions. We heard from Canadians during electoral reform dialogues that there were concerns that the commissioner would be subject to less independence. Bill C-33 would enhance confidence in the integrity of the elections system by clarifying this situation.

Finally, it is estimated that Bill C-33 would expand voting rights to more than one million Canadians living abroad. Today, Canadians living abroad may only vote within five years of leaving Canada and must have an intention to return. These restrictions are currently being challenged before the Supreme Court of Canada. Our bill would remove a barrier to voting for those Canadians who, even though they choose to live abroad, care about the future of our country and want to have their voices heard. This proposal does not impact Canadian Armed Forces voters, who already have a full right to vote, regardless of where they are posted.

Routine Proceedings

I want to touch briefly on the Minister of Democratic Institutions' mandate to protect our electoral system from cyber-attacks. Working with her colleagues, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of National Defence, the minister has asked the Communications Security Establishment to analyze proactively the risks to our electoral system and to release a public report. Further, we will ask the CSE officer for advice for political parties on cybersecurity best practices.

In conclusion, the government is greatly appreciative of the special committee's work in studying electoral reform as well as other important issues they raised as part of their study. We remain committed to strengthening Canada's democratic institutions and processes. Bill C-33 would remove voting roadblocks, encourage participation, and create a level playing field for political parties. We are also working to defend the Canadian electoral process from cyber-threats and are increasing transparency in the political fundraising system.

Why take these actions? It is because Canadians value their democratic institutions, which remain the envy of the world. Our system is trusted by Canadians and is renowned worldwide. Our government remains committed to improving, strengthening, and protecting our democracy. The work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform represents an important contribution to these efforts.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, my thanks to my colleague for his speech.

However, I must admit that I would hate to be in his place and to have to deliver that kind of speech. I would be very uncomfortable. It is fascinating how one can use so many words without ever addressing the issue at hand.

I have three questions for my colleague. First, should political parties keep their promises? Second, when 85% of people want something, does that represent a consensus? Third, should Parliament faithfully and fairly represent the will of its citizens?

[*English*]

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, coming from a long career based in public engagement before I came to this place, I know that when people say they are going to do public engagement, they must honour what they hear.

We were very clear in the election platform that we would be improving our democracy and democratic institutions and that we would be engaging Canadians to find the best way to move forward with Canadians. We undertook one of the most robust public engagement processes the country has seen, and in the end, no clear consensus was found. Unfortunately, we had low participation from Canadians.

I believe firmly that the Prime Minister made the responsible decision in not making a change to our fundamental voting system based on such a small number of Canadians engaging and such a lack of consensus within that small number. It would have simply been irresponsible.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I, along with all my colleagues in this House, remember very clearly the number of all-candidates debates we were at through the last campaign where we heard time after time, dozens of times, probably, the Liberal candidates promising that this was going to be the last first-past-the-post election in Canada.

Many times throughout my colleague's speech he commented on the democratic process. If the democratic process is so important, why would the Liberal government not allow the referendum, which was clearly recommended by the democratically appointed committee, to give all Canadians a say on the voting system they would like? It is not fair that the Prime Minister would take upon himself that one decision for the entire country. Why not allow the Canadian population to have its say on this important issue?

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his devotion to this file. We know that in Canada, referenda fail. I presume that the member is keenly interested in improving our democratic institutions. I believe that probably one of the best ways to close the discussion on electoral reform is to hold a referendum. A referendum is a blunt instrument. It does not allow the opportunity for Canadians to become educated about what it is they are voting on. Of course, the ERRE report, for all its strengths, was very weak in one regard in that it did not actually describe what the question for the referendum would be. Therefore, we were really left, in this motion, asking for a referendum but with no question to ask.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, something my colleague said really stood out for me. When we do not want something to pass, we hold a referendum. That comment has implications for Quebec sovereignty too.

I am not surprised at what the government did, but I am disappointed. When the Liberal Party was the second opposition party, it promised electoral reform and seemed to be strongly in favour of a proportional voting system to close the gap between the percentage of votes cast and the percentage of members elected. Once in power, the Liberal Party reneged on that promise because it came to power under the current system. I can only conclude that the Liberal Party wants a system that favours the Liberal Party. When it is the second opposition party, it wants a proportional voting system, but when it is in power, that no longer seems like such a good idea.

Can the parliamentary secretary confirm that the Liberal Party's first priority is the Liberal Party, not democratic ideals?

Routine Proceedings

•(1100)

[English]

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, I understand that it can be very politically tempting to attribute various other reasons to the decision of the government not to proceed with electoral reform, but the fundamental truth is that there was no clear consensus. We worked very hard to hear from as many Canadians as we could. I will just put a number to this. In the most inclusive and generous estimate, the number of Canadians who were involved in this consultation was a little less than 1%. That is a little less than 2% of the 17.5 million people who cast a vote in 2015. It is simply not responsible, nor is it the right choice, to move ahead with a change of this magnitude with so few people weighing in. Again, within that 2% of the people who voted in 2015, there was no consensus on which system to move ahead with, nor does the report suggest a specific system.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have to say to my friend from Halifax, the parliamentary secretary, that I am offended by what we just heard. I worked hard on this committee. We were never as a committee given a mandate to get large numbers of Canadians involved. We were not given a budget to get large numbers of Canadians involved. The government spent millions of dollars on Vox Pop, where it did get hundreds of thousands of people involved, and that survey said that 70% of Canadians would rather see a system in which many parties worked together by consensus rather than one party making all the decisions, even if it took longer. Therefore, the outreach the government did got hundreds of thousands of people involved and actually supported PR.

The parliamentary committee, which came to a majority report, travelled 31,000 kilometres, to every province and territory, holding open-mike sessions with thousands of Canadians who gave up their time preparing briefs. More than 100,000 people went online to give us information. We were never told as a committee that we were supposed to accumulate numbers of Canadians to justify a promise the member's government made to Canadians, and that I voted for in the Speech from the Throne in this place, that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, of course I would never, and have never, disparaged the work of the committee or any Canadian who has participated. I know everyone would agree with that. There is nothing in what I said that would suggest otherwise.

The committee report made the statement that no electoral system was perfect. From expert witness testimonies, no clear preference for a way forward emerged.

I do not understand how we could possibly move forward credibly and responsibly unless there were a greater mandate to do so.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when we deal with electoral reform, it comes in different ways. There was an expectation, and the government is, in good part, meeting that expectation by changing some of the laws. The member made reference to voter accessibility, the voter ID card. For example, many Canadians thought that when they went to vote, they could use the registration card issued by Elections Canada as part of their identification.

Could the member reinforce some of the things the government is moving forward on to reform our system, which will improve our democracy here in Canada?

•(1105)

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, the member has hit exactly on the areas in which there was great consensus through our public engagement process over the last year or so. Those are things like removing barriers to traditionally marginalized voters so they can get to the ballot box, through our work with Bill C-33. It includes efforts to engage youth into our political process through things like the pre-voter registration, a proactive analysis of cyber-threats to our democratic institutions and voting systems, making changes to make our political fundraising more open and transparent and reintroducing the voter identification card. It also improves large-scale efforts by allowing the Chief Electoral Officer to engage in education efforts for all Canadians.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, I take issue with something the hon. parliamentary secretary said in his remarks. He suggested that there was a lack of consensus and that it would be irresponsible to move forward in the absence of that lack of consensus. I want to read the relevant recommendation of the report, recommendation 12, to make the point that what he said was factually incorrect. It reads:

The Committee acknowledges that, of those who wanted change, the overwhelming majority of testimony was in favour of proportional representation...The Committee recommends that:

The Government hold a referendum, in which the current system is on the ballot;

That the referendum propose a proportional electoral system that achieves a Gallagher Index score of 5 or less; and

That the Government complete the design of the alternate electoral system that is proposed on the referendum ballot prior to the start of the referendum campaign period.

This acknowledged the fact that when there was a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, as there was among many Canadians, one would look for an alternative that had the largest amount of support. Broadly speaking, that alternative was proportionality. There are different kinds of proportionality. It is up to the government. It is the government after all that writes policy and does not try to find unanimity on issues before it pushes forward. It seeks majority consent.

Therefore, the government would have made the decision whether to go with single transferable vote, which is a form of proportionality, or multi-member proportionality, which is another form. That would have been the government's choice. The government then would have submitted that question to the Canadian voters, who would have voted either yes or no.

That is the way we determine whether a majority of Canadians support it, and a majority is what decides things. A majority would have to decide before we would go forward. Surely, a government elected with 39% of the vote is in no position to argue that a consensus is necessary for anything. There is never a consensus as to who should sit here. Occasionally one party gets more than 50%, but there is never a consensus.

Routine Proceedings

The hearings of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform terminated almost exactly six months ago, December 1. A report found the support of a majority of committee members, and also the support of four out of the five parties represented on the committee, in short, something very close to a consensus.

The committee focused on producing a proposal that would allow the government to fulfill the commitment it made in the 2015 election and that it repeated in the Speech from the Throne, “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system”, subject only to the provision that the new electoral system would have to be approved first by the Canadian people in a referendum.

Had our recommendations been followed, a new electoral system could have been designed in spring 2017, been voted on in a referendum over the summer, and if the Canadian people had given their approval, implemented in time for election 2019, and the Prime Minister would have fulfilled his election promise.

The committee recognized that Canadians were not fully unified as to which electoral system ought to be in place in Canada. However, our hearings, as well as the extensive electronic survey we conducted, and the results of a dozen national polls, made two things clear to us.

First, among Canadians who wanted to change the electoral system, which may not be a majority, there was a consensus that the change should be toward some form of proportionality.

Second, subjecting the proposed new system, once it had been designed, to a national referendum, be it a new proportional electoral system or the existing system, would cause the winning system to be regarded universally as a legitimate system under which to conduct the 2019 election.

My intention originally was to repeat the quotation I just gave from the report, recommendation 12, to make this point.

However, as we know, this recommendation was rejected by the Prime Minister, who announced on February 1 that he was unwilling to move forward on a promise that had, until that moment, been presented by him as a sacred trust. An anonymous Liberal source, speaking to CBC on February 2, explained the Prime Minister's change of heart this way. He was “was open to having his mind changed... But the more he thought about proportional representation, the more he thought it was exactly the wrong system for a big, regionally and culturally diverse country.”

• (1110)

He had been open to the idea of proportionality, but had been dissuaded by the facts. I am left wondering which facts would have come to light during the course of the hearings that would have made him feel this way. Perhaps he will share those with us at some future point. There is one explanation of the Prime Minister shutting the whole thing down.

Here is an explanation that I think is more robust.

I think the Prime Minister was always serious about changing the electoral system, but never serious about allowing it to change to

anything other than his preferred system of ranked ballots. He said as much in question period on February 1, when he declared:

As people in this House know, I have long preferred a preferential ballot. The [NDP] wanted a proportional representation. The official opposition wanted a referendum. There is no consensus.

There is no clear path forward.

Of course, there was a consensus in favour of a referendum on proportional representation. The only thing off the table, because Canadians emphatically did not want it, was the preferential ballot. Therefore, the Prime Minister picked up his marbles and went home.

Let us now imagine an alternative universe in which the Prime Minister's remarks about an impasse actually reflected reality. What if, for the sake of argument, the committee had produced a deadlock, with the NDP and the Green producing one dissenting report, advocating a proportional system that, all things being equal, caused these two parties to win additional seats? What if the Conservative advocacy of a referendum had been successfully portrayed by the Liberals, who made no small effort to portray it this way, as simply being a way of retaining the status quo, which is, ostensibly, the electoral system that maximizes the number of seats won by Conservatives?

Under this scenario where every party is advocating its own self-interest, the Prime Minister could have posited a position of moral equivalency. He could have said that he was no worse than the other parties in advocating for an electoral system that would benefit his own party in the coming election. For the record, a study that was cited by the committee showed that preferential ballots would have generated an average of 19 additional Liberal seats based on the same voter preferences had it been applied in the elections over the past 20 years, but there would be more equivalency. The New Democrats want a system that will give them more seats. The Conservatives wanted a system that will give them more seats. The Liberals are doing the same thing.

Moving forward with the preferential ballot in time for the 2019 election under this scenario would not have seemed so morally indefensible in a world where, first, no consensus exists among Canadians as to how to move forward on electoral reform and therefore the government cannot take guidance from Canadians; second, every other political party is simply advocating its own electoral best interests; and, third, the clearest promise from the 2015 election had been that, come hell or high water, the 2019 election would be fought under some system other than first past the post. I think it was based on trying to make this scenario come to fruition that the Prime Minister so emphatically repeated over and over again over the course of the year that he made a commitment, he stood by it, and he was the kind of guy who did not abandon his commitments no matter what.

Routine Proceedings

Finally, under this alternative scenario, if it were to turn out that by the time the national consultations on electoral reform were completed there was no longer enough time for the Chief Electoral Officer to implement any system that involved riding redistribution, this would have made it well-nigh impossible for any form of proportionality to be introduced as the shift to a proportional system involved riding redistribution, a process that would take about two years. Thus, the government could have announced, right about this time of year, in new legislation, that there just was not enough time to move forward with any other system than ranked ballots. The government made a sacred promise, which it said it would not break. It said that the people gave it a mandate. In 2019, it would have had a system in place that would have ensured the Liberals would be able to win a majority government with as little as 35% of the popular vote and to form a minority government with as little as 30% of the vote.

The establishment of just such a mandate to implement preferential balloting in time for the 2019 election was pretty clearly what the Prime Minister was aiming for. In anticipation that this was how things were going to work out, the Prime Minister started to lay the groundwork for arguing that. In a country like Canada, ranked ballots are superior to proportionality.

• (1115)

For example, this is what the Prime Minister said to students at New York University on April 21 of last year. He stated, “We want our government, our parliament, to reflect a broad range of views of Canadians. Right? Absolutely. We can all agree on that. Well, there’s multiple different ways of doing that. You can have 50 different parties in the House of Commons,”—this is a nightmare scenario under a runaway form of PR, I guess—“each representing a different perspective and view and voice and make sure that that’s the way we highlight the diversity, or you can have a fewer number of political parties that do a better job of reaching out to include a broad range of voices and perspectives within their political parties. Do you want to reward difference or do you want to reward accommodation and inclusion? Now, I’m not going to tell an answer on that, although I have my own reflections as a leader of a big-tent liberal party that values diversity....”

In fact, viewed in this light, the promise made by the Prime Minister back when he first introduced his electoral reform proposals in June 2015 start to sound very artfully worded, artfully worded so as to allow people to think he means he is open to proportionality when in fact he was completely shut to proportionality and was going to engage later on in a bait and switch.

He said, in June 2015, that Canadians “need to know that when we cast a ballot, it counts, that when we vote, it matters, so I’m proposing that we make every vote count. We are committed to ensuring that the 2015 election be the last federal election using first past the post. As part of a national engagement process, we will ensure that electoral reform measures such as ranked ballots and proportional representation...are fully and fairly studied and considered.”

This promise was about making every vote count. Those are the words: “making every vote count”. It is a phrase that would be repeated in the Speech from the Throne.

The phrase has one meaning in the context of proportional representation, where our vote will elect an MP from the party we prefer, which will then carry on negotiations in the House of Commons. That is something entirely different from preferential voting, where our second and third choices are ultimately what will count in building a large-tent party.

Back in June 2015, only a few observers noticed that something was amiss in this messaging. One was John Geddes, who said, following an interview with the then leader of the third party, the present Prime Minister:

The items on that short list of reform ideas can’t be assigned equal weight. ... Experts point out that those two models don’t really have much in common. Far from being variations on a single reform theme, they are entirely separate propositions, each designed to remedy a different perceived problem.

To be clear, preferential and proportionality are the two different remedies to two different problems that ought not to be presented as alternative solutions to the same problem.

He then went on to quote Jonathan Rose, a political science professor at Queen’s University who was the expert at the Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform about a decade ago. Professor Rose states, “Trudeau has picked two very different models. I think it’s a bit confusing; they are not equivalents.”

Geddes then paraphrases Professor Rose, when he states:

[Professor Rose says] PR is meant mainly to solve the problem of small parties failing to gain seats that reflect their share of the overall vote. Ranked balloting, also called preferential or alternative voting, is designed, he says, to “convey legitimacy” on the ultimate winner in any constituency.

That point was caught by those two individuals, but not by most people back before the election.

The rhetorical point, which means two different things to two different audiences, was the bait. The switch was to have come after a lack of consensus had been demonstrated, the self-interest of the other parties had been revealed in the course of the special committee hearings, and the clock had run out on proportionality, allowing the Prime Minister to move forward reluctantly but determinedly to show that he would always honour his promises, even if it meant adopting a preferential system, which coincidentally would ensure his party an average of 19 extra seats in the average election.

A closer look reveals that the Prime Minister has always been deeply committed to ranked ballots, for reasons that I have already explained, and was never sincere about considering proportionality. For example, listen to this response from Kiel Dixon, in the Prime Minister’s correspondence department, or what would have been the Liberal Party’s correspondence department, dated December 19, 2014. There had just been a vote in the House on electoral reform, and the Prime Minister had voted against it.

• (1120)

Mr. Dixon writes:

[Our leader, the present prime minister] believes that it is important to take an evidence-based approach to electoral reform rather than an ideological one, and that all available options are considered. Further, he does not support proportional representation, as he very deeply believes that every Member of Parliament must represent actual Canadians and Canadian communities, not just the political party that appointed them to the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

Further on, Mr. Dixon continues to make a comparison to the Liberal leadership race:

This leadership race was unique and one of the most open contests in Canadian history...as...the traditional “first-past-the-post” system was replaced with a preferential ballot to give Canadians a greater amount of choice. In that system, voters rank the candidates in their order of preference, and the eventual winner must receive over 50% of the votes. If used during the general election, this would ensure that MPs secured support from a majority of the constituents, and beyond his or her traditional voting base, leading to a more representative government. Options such as a Preferential Ballot system are important to also consider, so as ensuring that a variety of reforms are presented.

There it is: away back in 2014, the Prime Minister was already indicating that he had no interest in proportionality and was never willing to consider it. That was his position until he was able to muddy the waters a bit, give the impression that he might be open without ever actually stating that he was, and set up a series of markers that would allow him to move forward to a system that would give the Liberals more seats under the same preferences expressed by Canadian voters. He would change the way we express our preferences in order to ensure that the Liberals would do better in every election.

The Liberals would have done better than they did in 2011, a disastrous election for them, had it been preferential, and would have done better in a phenomenally good election like the last one in 2015. They would do better in every election, and every other party would do worse, of course. Every Canadian would see the same preferences rejigged in a way that they clearly are not willing to consider, because Canadians indicated in poll after poll in our consultations that the one system they do not want to look at is the preferential ballot.

I want to be clear in the remaining time I have that I am not actually opposed to preferential balloting in its place. I was the person who designed the system of preferential balloting that elects the Speaker of the House of Commons. I was involved in designing the system of preferential balloting that elects the leader of the Conservative Party. I designed the system of preferential balloting that elects national councillors to the Conservative Party's national council. When there is a referendum a year from now in the city of Kingston on preferential balloting for city councillors, I am inclined at this point to think that I will be supportive of it. Part of Kingston is in my riding.

That is because in all these cases, there is no party system to cause a kind of tragedy of the commons, but here is what happens when we do have a party system: certain parties, typically in the centre, will benefit and will win more seats. We will see a replication over and over again, riding after riding, of the same phenomenon. As a result, one party will come to predominate.

That is what happened in Australia when this system was adopted. It was a system that was locked in and has benefited the Liberal Party in Australia consistently for a century now, at the expense primarily of the Labour Party. It has had a marked and meaningful impact on the political fortunes of that country.

Do not misunderstand me: I love Australia. I love almost everything about that country, but this system ought not to have been adopted in 1918, as it was, by a government that saw itself being able to perpetuate itself. That is the final point.

The whole purpose of having a referendum, the whole purpose of trying to move these things outside the hands of the politicians, is that we all have a conflict of interest. We all can figure out who will benefit under this system or that system. The only solution is to move forward and have a referendum on a system that has a realistic chance of actually winning because it has a base of support that might be stronger. Anything else is a waste of time.

This is a logical way forward. It is what was proposed by the committee. I support it. I hope that all members of the House of Commons will support the committee's report when this matter comes to a vote later today.

• (1125)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thanks to the member opposite for his thoughtful and studied devotion to this topic over a long period of time.

The member asserted in his interpretation that there was in fact consensus around the idea of a referendum in the special committee's report. I am not sure how that squares with the minority dissenting report from the NDP, which is against having a referendum. That does not sound like consensus to me.

Canada is a vast country spanning over 6,000 kilometres, and constituents value the direct connection they have with their members of Parliament. They put them into office and are able to communicate with them. I wonder if the member could help me to understand why he believes it is a good idea to replace that in part with a system whereby political parties would pick members for certain geographic regions.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, let me answer the second question first. I am not actually advocating in favour of proportional representation. I am advocating that if one is looking at alternatives to the status quo, one ought to move toward something that actually has a base of support, that actually stands a chance of winning the support of the Canadian people. What our hearings clearly showed was that only proportional representation has a realistic prospect of doing that.

Also, I might take an opportunity to correct an error the member made earlier. He said that if we have a referendum, the status quo will always win, the alternatives will always lose, and it is a good way of defeating a proposal on electoral reform. However, in the recent referendum in Prince Edward Island that was held just last November, an alternative to the status quo was in fact chosen: multi-member proportional. The British Columbia referendum on electoral reform in 2005 resulted in 57% voting in favour of that option. That is two majorities in favour of electoral reform. In three other referenda, the options in favour of electoral reform were defeated, but that is a 40% result. That is not so bad.

With regard to the other question about the NDP and the Green Party's concurring report wherein they indicated they had reservations about a referendum, the thing I would say is that first of all, they signed onto the majority report. They then expressed some reservations, saying, “We could live without a referendum.” That is fine. That is what they were expressing.

Routine Proceedings

I should also add that they submitted that report late, and the Conservatives had to assist in allowing it to get in. We understood when it went in that they were expressing an opinion, and we thought that in the interests of consensus, it made sense. Consensus really was achieved at all levels in this committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his hard work on electoral reform. Unfortunately, the Liberals broke their promise to implement a new voting system. What message does this send to the young voters we want to attract? People say that young people are disconnected from politics, but that is because of the cynicism fuelled by politicians who do not keep their promises.

We also have a Prime Minister who says he is very attuned to youth, established a youth council, and appointed himself minister of youth, but is thumbing his nose at them. The Prime Minister repeatedly promised that there would be electoral reform to make every vote count, to restore the public's confidence in politics, to attract youth to this place, and to make the process as democratic as possible. However, in the end, at the last minute, after the committee widely consulted Canadians, including youth, the Prime Minister says that it does not suit him and that he prefers the first-past-the-post system, and he ignores all the recommendations made by the experts and the public.

What message is the Prime Minister sending to youth who might be interested in politics and those who say that change is possible, when he laughs in their faces by not keeping his promises?

•(1130)

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, there are two kinds of young people: those who voted in the last election and those for whom the next election will be their first opportunity to vote. Among those in the first category, some voted for the Liberals and for the current Prime Minister. Indeed, during the election campaign, he said that politics would be different under the Liberals and that it would be less confrontational, more consensual, more generous, more open, more focused on the mission and the importance of truth, and always genuine. Those young people are realizing that they can no longer believe many of the things this Prime Minister says on major issues.

For those who are younger, it is another question altogether. They may not be personally invested, but I hope they will reflect on this carefully and thoughtfully. Young people have a unique ability to hear and analyze arguments from all sides because of their capacity to engage on social media. They will vote more thoughtfully than the same age group in previous elections.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his thoughtful speech and also for his work on the committee. I am hoping he can help me understand the inconsistent flip-flopping of the government.

I heard the Prime Minister clearly say in his throne speech, and multiple times in the House, that Canadians have elected the Liberals to ensure that this election will be the last election under first past the post. He said it repeatedly. Then, when our party challenged him that he really did not have a mandate, that the Liberals only had 39% of

Canadians vote for them, and that they needed a referendum to get that mandate, they clearly rejected that.

Now, the Liberals have come and flip-flopped again on the whole issue, and are saying that there is just no consensus to move forward with it and that they are going to drop it. If that were the case, then on the infrastructure bank that the Liberals promised and can now see that Canadians do not want, why have they flip-flopped back? Could the member help me understand these inconsistencies?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I suspect they are best explained by self-interest. That goes further than anything else.

I have outlined a scenario that I sincerely believe is what was afoot. I think that at some point the Prime Minister realized things were not going to go the way he wanted them to, and he then tried to find an exit ramp. He chose it somewhat clumsily and prolonged his own suffering more than he had to.

Ultimately, the real point I have been trying to make is that the Prime Minister was only ever willing to act in his own interest. The first-past-the-post system is not a bad system from the point of view of the Liberal Party of Canada. It has caused that party to win a greater share of the seats than its vote share would warrant in most of the elections since Confederation, and has caused it to be in power more than half the time, a good deal more than half the time. It is not a bad system for them; it is just not the best system.

The very best of all is preferential or ranked ballots. He was therefore willing to consider that. He was actually remarkably consistent in this point, and only veered away for rhetorical purposes. Even then, he only got away with it because we were not looking very closely. People wanted to believe in him.

There will be no expectation of consensus on anything the government genuinely wants. I see no effort to seek out consensus in favour of support for endless subsidies to Bombardier, for example.

•(1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to speak to this issue.

I want to thank the government for letting us know that this debate was taking place. It would have been nice, however, if the party that actually initiated the debate, the NDP, had given us the information. I suppose they can try to do better next time.

That being said, the current system poses a significant problem in that it gives rise to a major discrepancy between the votes that are cast during the election and the degree of power obtained by the parties and the proportion of members from each party who are then elected. That is why it should go without saying that the electoral system should be reformed to make it more proportional.

The current system worked very well when we were a two-party system and alternated between the two parties represented in the House. That is why the House is set up the way it is. We do not sit in a semi-circle, which would promote greater collegiality. Rather, there are rows of benches on both sides and people face off against each other. This was designed around a two-party system.

Routine Proceedings

However, that is no longer the reality we are seeing today. There are five parties in this House alone. The current system is outdated, which is why, when I read the Liberal Party's election promise to reform the voting system, I assumed right away that the reason for that was to deal with the situation, because it had to be done. That goes without saying.

That is also why the Special Committee on Electoral Reform was established. Thanks to the NDP's initiative, the member of the Green Party and one member from the Bloc Québécois were able to sit on the special committee. The House agreed, and I applaud that initiative. I had the opportunity to be on the committee during the tours, and I can tell you that we worked hard. We did not sleep much, because we had a very full schedule and it was very intense. There were a lot of trips and meetings. We learned a lot from that experience. The consensus that emerged from the consultations was the desire to reform the voting system in order to reduce the gap between the percentage of votes cast and the percentage of seats obtained. That must be done, because there truly is a consensus on that.

The committee worked hard on this matter and was thus able to present a very interesting brief. What really surprises me, however, is that the Liberal Party members on the committee were opposed to it. It is rare for there to be such co-operation, but it is still a fundamental question. We received approval from the Conservative Party, NDP, Green Party and even Bloc Québécois members. In fact, there was such agreement regarding the committee's report, that we did not even prepare a dissenting report. Throughout the consultations, the Liberal members seemed to support the direction we were taking, which is why I was so disappointed to see them reverse their position.

During consultations, the Minister of Democratic Institutions stated that she trusted the committee, that she was confident that it would produce a good report, and that we would move ahead. Every time we asked her a question in the House about her desire to reform the voting method to add an element of proportionality, she sang the same old tune, that is, until she saw the direction the committee was taking with its report. She then began speaking harshly of the committee's work. She apologized later on, but by that time the cat was out of the bag: things were not going the way the Liberal Party wanted. They were in line with its election promise, and that would not do.

That is when the government disavowed the report. The Prime Minister shuffled his cabinet and appointed a new minister, who disavowed everything—the promise as well as the report's findings. This great deception can only fuel the public's cynicism.

In the House, voters who vote for small parties are discriminated against, because the proportion of elected members from the small parties is smaller than the proportion of votes that they received. I would like to note another discrimination against people who vote for small parties.

• (1140)

The discrimination is two-fold. Voters who vote for those small parties are not as well represented in the House. They often make strategic choices to not vote for the small parties because they tell

themselves that, although the small party represents them better, the voting system means that their candidate is less likely to be elected.

The other type of discrimination concerns the fact that there are two types of members in the House. Indeed, parties with fewer than 12 elected members in the House, like my colleague from Saanich–Gulf Islands's Green Party and my own, fall into a second category, one that is truly discriminated against and in which members have fewer means to do their work than those from a recognized party. Discriminating against us in this way amounts to a breach of the rights of the voters who voted for us. In my opinion, that should be changed as soon as possible. Our current system goes against the very principles of democracy. I would therefore qualify it as undemocratic.

Allow me to give some examples. First, as members who are not part of a recognized group, we are excluded from committees. However, that is where the real work of improving legislation takes place. We can only take part at the very end of the process, to propose amendments that are quickly debated before being rejected or not. If the chair finds our amendments to be out of order, we cannot respectfully tell him that we disagree with him, as we do not have a right to speak. We thus have fewer means of presenting the concerns of our fellow citizens. For example, the Bloc Québécois addresses matters and interests of Quebec, and we would like to be able to promote them in the House, as we find that they are not properly addressed by the other parties in the House. That is our specific task, and yet we cannot perform it.

The committee is currently finishing up with Bill C-44, a mammoth 308-page bill that affects several departments. We cannot be heard in the way other parties can. The committee analysts stated that it was a very complex bill, and they undertook a major, clause-by-clause analysis. We requested access to their report, but it was refused because we are not on the committee.

We are not on the committee and we do not have access to documents prepared by the analysts, which further pushes us aside. As well, since we are not a recognized party, we are not given the funds to hire researchers. Clearly, the government has access to civil servants in all departments, which gives it quite an advantage. The official opposition has more than \$10 million a year to hire researchers to conduct analyses. Ten million dollars is a good amount of money. The second opposition party, I believe, is entitled to \$4 million. We are not entitled to anything. We do not even have access to committee reports. Our evenings, nights and weekends are spent poring through documents.

When it tables mammoth reports and bills, the government breaks another of its election promises. That gives us more work. It is quite hard to get through all that and find all the hidden elements. One element of Bill C-44 aims to eliminate private members' access to the parliamentary budget officer. As tabled in the House, Bill C-44 would no longer allow us to submit requests to the parliamentary budget officer regarding subjects of general interest. Once again, we are facing further discrimination, which discriminates against voters who voted for a third party.

Routine Proceedings

Fortunately, I presented an amendment to that effect this morning in committee. The process is nearing its end. We found a complete aberration in Bill C-44, one that would make the Infrastructure Bank and, even worse, all private projects that go through it, agents of the government. What an extremely regressive measure. Until now, the government had to use the notwithstanding clause, as in the case of the Champlain Bridge, to exempt infrastructure from Quebec laws, such as the Act respecting the Preservation of Agricultural Land and Agricultural Activities and the Environment Quality Act, among others. Now, projects will get green lighted on the government's say-so. That is serious.

● (1145)

We were handed this 308-page bill but were not given the documents made available to the recognized parties or any funding for research. Even so, by dint of hard work, we came up with something pretty good, and we are not through talking about this yet.

As second-class MPs, we are always the last to speak to bills before the House. We are 34th in line. In many cases, when the government uses closure, we get no speaking time at all. This is an extreme prejudice because we bring a perspective that nobody else here does. We represent the interests of Quebecers. Every now and then, we get a chance to speak just before closure. This time, my Green Party colleague and friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands is the one being left out. This is a discriminatory measure.

During question period, we are always last. After 45 minutes, students and other people attending question period have heard enough, and since there is often a lot of commotion in the House, they leave before we even ask our questions. The same goes for journalists. We are yet again victims of discrimination.

Again, I want to point out that because of the current voting system, the percentage of seats that went to small parties is much lower than the percentage of votes cast for those parties. That is one way we are discriminated against. The 12-member rule is another way we are discriminated against. We are second-class MPs.

I sincerely hope that these rules will be rewritten, especially because this convention is based on a House rule that says if a parliamentary group has at least 12 members, party officers, which means the leader, the House leader, the caucus chair, and the whip, get a bonus.

We do not care about bonuses. That is not what we are after. We agree that parties of fewer than 12 members should not get them. What we do want is to have the same opportunities as other members to properly defend the interests of our constituents.

This is especially shocking when you look at what they do in the rest of the world. This kind of thing does not happen anywhere else. For instance, at Westminster, only two members are needed to be recognized as a party and to have access to all the tools we are asking for. In Quebec, for example, Quebec Solidaire is given research tools. Actually, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois on his win yesterday. To my knowledge, Canada is the only democracy in the world where such discrimination exists against the elected members of minority parties and therefore their constituents. That really needs to change.

As I was saying, what we want is respect for people who vote for smaller parties. I think the Liberal Party really cares about this principle, too. If we look back at the written works of John Stuart Mill, for example, the ideology of liberalism is very British and Anglo-Saxon. Ultimately, maybe the smaller groups are right and we should let them speak. This was a value that was held dear by the Liberal Party, and I hope it makes changes to reflect that.

As a final point, another absurdity in the Parliament of Canada is the fact that the other place is made up of individuals who are not elected, but rather appointed by the government, which only reinforces its power. While the upper chamber could serve to better represent the regions, instead it only reinforces the government's power. When I talk about the other place, of course I mean the Senate. As of a few years ago, we can now say the name of that chamber. I will end on that note.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberal members and ministers, as well as the Prime Minister, are saying there was no consensus, in committee or elsewhere.

However, from what I understood from my colleague's speech and other speeches, that did not seem to be the case in committee at first. There was no lack of consensus when the committee began its work, but there was in the end.

Does my colleague think that the Liberal members of the committee received instructions from the party or from another Liberal MP?

● (1150)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Hochelaga for her question. That is indeed what I believe.

We had a good time and worked hard on that committee. All the members were on the same page and I remain convinced that we made a fair bit of progress. I forgot to mention that our colleague from the Green Party also worked very hard on that committee.

This is all it takes to fuel cynicism. I am not surprised, but I am extremely disappointed in the Liberal Party. The Liberals called for electoral reform when they were the second opposition party because things were not going their way, but once they took office, they said that the existing system was working just fine and that they did not want to change it.

What I take from that is that the Liberal Party is working for itself and its re-election, not to uphold principles and values. That is extremely unfortunate. I completely agree with my colleague's hypothesis, because it happens to be mine, as well.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I have had the opportunity to discuss various issues with him.

In response to his speech, it truly was an all-party committee. We were able to work together very well to make decisions, but we still did not feel there was unanimous consensus.

Routine Proceedings

Has my colleague been prevented from meeting with one of our colleagues to talk about various issues, whether to move issues forward or even for his riding? Have the Liberals ever refused to collaborate with my colleague?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes. As I said earlier, we wanted access to the analysis report of the Standing Committee on Finance, but we were refused simply because we are not part of the committee.

However, I would like to stress the great openness of the members, ministers and parliamentary secretaries opposite. In our riding, 175 cases have been settled. We often call on the ministers for some help with that. Every time, there is great openness and things move forward. We applaud that. That is not what we are criticizing. Working together helps cases in ridings move forward. Although we argue in the House, including during question period, we are able to work together.

That said, we still face extreme discrimination, as we are second-class members because we are not members of a recognized parliamentary group. As I was saying, unlike other members, we receive no funding for research. This creates more work for us. We do not have de facto access to committees and we do not have the right to vote at committees. Furthermore, we have the 34th speaking slot, which is often after closure. It is more difficult for us to represent the people who voted for us, and yet, the Liberals should be ideologically inclined to give under-represented views greater power in the House. These views are inherently under-represented because of the discrimination stemming from the current voting system.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech and the comments he received.

I agree with what he said about discrimination against members who are not recognized and that they are treated like second-class members of little importance. When we first arrived in the House, we had to eat standing up in the cloakroom. We were told that we could not speak in committee, that we could not speak in the House, except in response to another MP's speech, and that we would occasionally be given 10 minutes to speak, with consent.

That is discriminatory and does not happen in any democratic parliament in the world. We do not see such discrimination and members are not treated as second-class members in any Canadian province or European country.

My dear colleague, I do not understand this because in rereading the Standing Orders, it is clear that the Speaker of the House has the duty to protect my rights and my privileges.

How can the Speaker act in the interest of the three whips in committee? How is it that he receives instructions from these three whips rather than rising, holding the Standing Orders in his hands, and saying that we have the same rights as other members?

• (1155)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague, the member for Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, on this.

It is the duty of the Chair to ensure that the rights of each member, and indirectly of each voter, can be exercised. We are elected by voters. We must represent them and we must have equivalent means.

On that point, I would note that my colleague from Montcalm has called on the Chair to do more to defend us in this regard and to have amendments made to the rules of procedure. Each party that wanted to speak on this subject has done so. We are impatiently awaiting the Chair's response. Let us hope that, for once, the Chair will truly do his job, which is to stand up for our rights here, rather than serving the interests of three whips.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague again. I completely agree with his comment about two classes of members. That only exists in Canada. It does not exist in any other country or any other parliament.

I would just like to ask my colleague a question. If the Bloc Québécois agrees with this motion, and I believe it does, what is the key issue to get the Liberals to vote on this motion?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I thank my Green Party colleague for her excellent comment.

As I said earlier, we worked together on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. We worked very hard; we believed in it. No one can imagine the disappointment I felt when the government went back on its campaign promise, on the broad public consensus and the agreement of all the opposition parties.

Unfortunately, I am a cynic when it comes to this issue. I believe that the party currently in government is working for itself first and to be re-elected rather than for democratic principles. What can we do, then, to persuade it to come up with electoral reform that includes more proportionality? I think we are wasting our time. It will not work. The Liberal Party has understood that the present system serves it well and what it wants, first, is to serve its own interests, and then its friends' interests—as history has shown us, and as seems to still be the case in the legalization of marijuana—rather than serving democratic ideals and thus the public interest and the public.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Bloc party was the official opposition during the nineties. I am wondering if there is any regret on the member's part that the Bloc, at that time, did not advocate for the types of changes they are advocating for today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Speaker, I was not a member at that time.

I speak for myself, and only for myself. I am in favour of democracy; I believe in it. I think there was an arm wrestling match among the parties that were in opposition but were not recognized. The Bloc got a taste of something that then went back to someone else.

Routine Proceedings

Obviously, all the parliamentarians here have to rise above this partisan jousting and put democratic ideals and the interests of the voters first.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am so proud to participate in today's very important debate. I am also very proud of our report, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform's report entitled "Strengthening Democracy in Canada: Principles, Processes and Public Engagement for Electoral Reform".

We worked very hard on this report. There were 12 of us, and our approach and the spirit of our discussions throughout was very collegial.

• (1200)

[*English*]

We worked really well together, as I have just said, as a committee of 12 members of Parliament from five parties, a uniquely comprised committee. I commend the former minister of democratic institutions, current Minister of Status of Women and hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha, who made the decision that it would be fair to ensure that the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party each participated as full members of the committee. She went further—and this was a step that I never thought the Liberals would take—and conceded to an NDP request that the Liberals give one seat of theirs on the committee to allow the NDP to have two full members, so that we were a committee of five Liberals, one of whom served as chair. I have to say our chair, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, did an extraordinary job. There were then four voting Liberals, three voting Conservatives, two New Democrats, one Bloc member, and one Green member.

We heard from witnesses across Canada. We fulfilled our mandate, and I think we fulfilled our mandate admirably. We had, between late June and December 1 when our report was due, more than 60 meetings. We heard from experts. We heard from the leading experts on electoral reform, not only in Canada but from around the world. Many world-leading experts participated by video conference with us. We also heard from hundreds, in fact thousands, and tens of thousands of Canadians. That process led to an overwhelming consensus, which was that it was time for Canada to move away from first past the post.

I want to touch briefly on the substance of the issue before moving to the politics, but the politics are clearly important.

I have worked on electoral reform for a very long time. For much longer than I have been a member of the Green Party, I have been committed to seeing the end of the first-past-the-post voting system because of its perverse results. On the substance of the issue, we learned in this committee process that it is clear it is a voting system that allows the popular vote to diverge from the seat count. That is the easiest way to understand what is wrong with first past the post. The popular vote can say there is a minority Parliament, but the seat count can say there is a majority. Democracy is not well served when the popular vote is not reflected in the seat count.

As I said, I have worked on this issue for years, but there is always a lot to learn and I learned a lot as a member of the parliamentary Special Committee on Electoral Reform. For instance, I never knew

how it was that Ireland had single transferrable vote. Ireland got their voting because in 1921 when the British Parliament of Westminster decided that Ireland should be allowed its own parliament, the British were concerned for the minority rights of Protestants so they did not want Ireland to have first past the post. They did not want Ireland to have the same system Westminster had so they gave Ireland single transferrable vote, a system of proportional representation that works well in Ireland to this day.

It had something to do with that decision in Ireland in 1921 that 1921 was the first year in which this Parliament, the Parliament of Canada, struck a committee to study our voting system. That committee in 1921 concluded that first past the post does not work for Canada. That is right. Since 1921, we have known this. That was when a committee said that as long as we have a democracy with more than two parties—and since the 1920s Canada has always historically in this place been a multi-party system—first past the post did not serve Canadian democracy.

We worked hard to then decide what would serve Canadian democracy, and that is why this report is so historic. We worked to deliver on the promise of the Speech from the Throne and of our Prime Minister that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post. We wanted to provide, as we were mandated to do, the answer of what is next.

We concluded that a system of proportional representation was appropriate for Canada, that it could be tailored specifically to Canada's needs, and we specifically precluded the kind of PR used in Israel or Italy. We said that we did not recommend a system where we have only lists by party and voters only vote for a party list. We want to maintain that crucial link with the local MP as well as proportionality. At the end of the day, we want the popular vote to be reflected in the seat count and we want to make sure that members of Parliament are elected to represent their constituents and have a local connection. It is important that voters know that. We can have both. That is what our committee recommended. Our committee also recommended that this be tested by a referendum.

Now we are going to have for the first time, and we are having today for the first time, a debate. I wish more MPs were participating in this debate. This is the first chance we have had as a Parliament to really discuss what kind of voting system would work best for Canada. We know that every single Liberal MP in this place was elected on a platform that said we would be moving away from first past the post. My plea to them is, do not let the promise fade away. Too much rides on it.

For a very long time now, Canadians have known that first past the post has this perverse result of separating the seat count from the popular vote. It is possible to have, and in fact two times in Canada we have had, what political scientists call the "wrong winner problem". The wrong winner problem is when the party that got the most votes loses the election. It has happened twice in Canada. It has not happened recently. However, it can and does happen under first-past-the-post voting systems.

Routine Proceedings

How do we ensure that the way the popular vote is cast is reflected in the Parliament we get and we still have the advantage of MPs being elected after going door to door in their own community where people know them?

There are a number of solutions, and there are a number of compromises. This is the only place where I regret how our committee worked together. It comes to this. We ran out of time. We had a hard deadline of getting the report in by December 1. I believe, and I am firmly committed to this belief because I know every single one of those individual 12 MPs, all of them, are excellent people, if we had more time, if we had been allowed to work to consensus, we would have had that discussion of, "What if we give a little here? Is the problem that by 2019 we have full PR? What if we did it incrementally, a bit more fairness in our voting system by 2019, a bit more the election after that? Would that work for you?" We never got to have that discussion of what could work if we compromised.

However, it is not too late to compromise. In voting for this concurrence motion, I certainly hope that the Liberal benches will be given a free vote so Liberal MPs can go back to their constituents and tell them they actually voted for what their constituents wanted. We know that the four MPs from P.E.I. just had a plebiscite that called for electoral reform in P.E.I. We know that in British Columbia 40% of the voters just voted NDP and 17% just voted Green, and that 57% of voters voted for parties, once again, that called very clearly for getting rid of first past the post.

MPs know what their constituents would want them to do on the motion. What I want to urge people to consider is that in voting for concurrence, we will not be forcing a referendum to happen and we will not be forcing the government to move to PR. We will be keeping the debate alive and creating that opportunity to find the middle ground. There is middle ground here to be found. Whether it is having a referendum in 2019 concurrent with the voting day that we have next, whether it is saying we move to a single transferable vote system as our former chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, recommended, that we cluster those ridings in the vast areas of Canada where that works and exclude those areas that are remote or where the ridings are too large, or if we move to the Fair Vote Canada approach of one set of voting rules that work for rural Canadians and another set that work for where we are more concentrated in our ridings, there are compromises here that can be found.

• (1205)

What is unacceptable is to break the promise and leave it broken. That will break people's faith with democracy itself, those young people who voted for the first time and who believed the Prime Minister's promise. I frankly believe he fully intended to keep it when he made it, and it will be better for the health of democracy if we work to allow that promise to be kept.

[*Translation*]

It is time to keep that promise. I urge the members to vote in favour of this motion.

• (1210)

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate our colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands.

As she said, she travelled across Canada with the other committee members. I think she made a very positive contribution.

The member mentioned a referendum, and I would like to hear more about that. We are talking about modernizing how we do business here in the House. I did not quite understand the member's comments about a referendum.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We know that some referenda work well, and others are total disasters. It depends entirely on how much people know about the issue and how well they understand it prior to the referendum.

[*English*]

We have had very few referenda in Canadian history. Federally, we had one on conscription during the war. We had one on prohibition. We had one on Charlottetown. If we were to hold a referendum we would need to rewrite our Referendum Act. Our current Referendum Act does not allow for the question of electoral reform to be put to a referendum.

It is clear from the British North America Act, as it was written in 1867, 150 years ago, that the question of our voting system is squarely one for Parliament to decide. However, there is a strong view among public opinion and strong views from some of the parties in this place that if we are changing our voting system it should be put to a referendum.

I mentioned that P.E.I. just had one, and the people of P.E.I. voted overwhelmingly for mixed-member proportional voting systems and for getting rid of first past the post. We had a referendum in British Columbia on single transferable vote and 57% of British Columbians voted for that, but they had set the threshold at 60%. A lot depends on the level of public information available before the vote.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that the House agreed to the New Democrat motion to formulate the committee on electoral reform so that it would include Bloc and Green members for the first time. I am very grateful also for the continued iteration of what happens when we have many parties represented and have co-operation. The electoral reform committee report is an expression of that, along with yesterday's news about the agreement in British Columbia around potential co-operation of two parties to work together and hold government in British Columbia.

Looking at all the examples around the world of what happens when many parties co-operate together, we see their parliaments and legislatures develop policies that are more lasting and do not have extreme swings of ideology from one election to the next.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to know about the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands' degree of optimism. I understand we only need 20 members of Parliament from the Liberal Party to agree to this concurrence motion to keep the discussion around electoral reform alive. It is an opportunity for these MPs to keep their promise, which was broken by their Prime Minister. I would like to hear whether my fellow member of Parliament is hopeful that tomorrow's vote might result in a keeping of the promise by at least some of the Liberal members of Parliament.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, as ever, my optimism on any issue of fundamental democratic reform increases in direct proportion to the non-partisan nature of the debate. If we use this as an excuse to beat up on the Prime Minister for breaking a promise, we will not succeed. If we use this as an opportunity to focus the Prime Minister's attention on the possibilities, they are still there for him to keep his promise. If we urge Liberals to vote for what we think is in the best interests of democracy, I am quite optimistic, particularly if it is not a whipped vote and Liberal MPs are allowed to vote how they believe their constituents would like them to vote. I thank my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith for giving me this chance to reframe my main point, which is that we can still salvage this promise in a way that meets the needs of government and opposition parties. We can do it together if we check our partisanship at the door and think about what is best for Canada.

I would ask members to please consider this. Let us say that 10 or 15 years from now, we do not know when it might be, somebody who represents a Canadian version of Trump—and do not think it cannot happen—seizes 100% of the power over our country with a minority of popular support. There is always the risk of someone extreme seizing power with majority support, which is a democracy, but our system of government is extraordinarily vulnerable because the Prime Minister of Canada has more power, relative to our government, than the president of the United States or the prime minister of the U.K. We must check that exercise of power by assuring it is never vested in any party or individual that does not have the support of the majority of Canadians before getting 100% of the power. It is a matter of protecting our democracy in the future by voting yes tomorrow.

• (1215)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to take exception to one thing my hon. colleague just said. I personally do not believe that any electoral system has the effect of privileging or diminishing extremism. It has been an unfortunate aspect of this debate that the Prime Minister has asserted that proportionality would lead to greater power being exercised by extremists who would hold the balance of power, potentially, in some future government and be able to get disproportionate influence. My colleague from the Green Party is now making the opposite assertion, that first past the post does this.

The fact is that we have seen pure proportionality used to terrible effect in Germany, in the system under which Hitler was elected, and yet it has not discredited proportionality in other countries, including Israel, the Netherlands, and so on. The same thing is true for first past the post and, I suggest, any system. We need to discuss these things with the goal of trying to improve our system as much as we can, but I actually do not think it is helpful to suggest that any system that is going to be seriously considered in this country,

including the status quo, actually privileges extremism. We are an inherently moderate country, we have more than a century of inherent moderatism, and I suggest that our future will be moderate and intelligent as well, as long as we are moderate in our rhetoric.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the chance to respond to my friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, and I want to thank him once again for his superb contribution to our work on the committee.

He has misunderstood my point. I did not say that first past the post privileged extremism. I am saying that Canada is uniquely vulnerable to an extremist or unpopular leader, so to speak, of a party gaining 100% of the power with a minority of the votes. It is only under first past the post that a party with 25% of the popular vote can potentially get all of the power, because our executive and legislative are not separated, as they are in the U.S., and because, as we know, the Prime Minister of Canada is not subject to caucus confidence, which can remove the leader of the party and thus change the prime minister.

We have numerous authorities on this from academics, whether it is Peter Russell or Donald Savoie. A lot of experts have pointed out that the Prime Minister of Canada, relatively speaking, has more power than other leaders of other governments, and the reality is that no one should hold that office with a majority unless the person is supported by the majority of the voters. That is why we have to get rid of first past the post.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fundamental to this issue is really the issue of trust in our democratic system.

A lot of young people went into the election believing this was going to materialize: the election would be the last one held under first past the post, and going forward we would have something different.

I am worried that this motion might not pass. I hope it will, as this is an opportunity for all members of the House to reflect on that and to pass this motion, to change course so that we can restore faith and ensure that the young people and Canadians who voted for change will actually have that change.

I wonder if the member could comment on the democratic system and the faith the electorate placed on us, and on restoring the work we need to do to demonstrate that democracy is in fact fundamental to the promises we make.

• (1220)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, clearly, no one would debate or dispute that our democracy is threatened by cynicism and that those who give up on voting are a tremendous loss to the health of our democracy. In fact, when there is low voter turnout, we increasingly lose the legitimacy of government and we lose the empowerment of a society to actually choose its own course.

Routine Proceedings

We are a democracy, and we should be getting 90%-plus voter turnout. We were pleased to see it go to 68% last time. I believe the reason we saw it go to 68% in 2015 was largely based on young people voting for the first time, young people who believed this promise, young people who will become increasingly cynical and angry, and who may not vote again if we do not work hard in this place to find some common political ground to deliver on that promise, either partially or fully, and with a promise for before the next election. One way or another, this promise for fair democracy and fair voting must be kept alive.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

[*Translation*]

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: 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: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the recorded division on the third report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, “Strengthening Democracy in Canada: Principles, Process and Public Engagement for Electoral Reform” be deferred until the expiry of the time provided for oral questions on Wednesday, May 31.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division is deferred until May 31, at the conclusion of oral questions.

The House will now resume with the remaining business under Routine Proceedings.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased, but also quite sad, to table a petition signed by hundreds of my constituents, not to mention the similar electronic petition—which is still open, by the way—concerning Sophie Thewys, a resident of Mont-Saint-Hilaire who tragically lost her spouse on Christmas eve. He was sponsoring her application for permanent residency.

The people who have signed the petition are asking the Minister of Immigration to review the extraordinary circumstances of her file, given that the application had been approved. With the death of her spouse, Nicolas Faubert, her application was dropped. This is an obvious lack of compassion, and the people in Sophie's community have shown great support for her.

With this petition, we hope that the government will take note of the situation and finally allow this family to grieve and to continue to live in Canada.

[*English*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition from my constituents with regard to genetically modified foods.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to establish mandatory labelling of all genetically modified foods.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions from my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The first petition calls on the federal government to act on the long-standing and unresolved issue of abandoned vessels. Repeated promises for at least 14 months in this chamber have not yet been met by a legislative solution. Despite goodwill expressed on the other side of the House, there is still no change for coastal communities threatened by the economic and environmental risk of oil spills and the blight of abandoned vessels.

I recommend again that the government act quickly and legislate an end to this problem.

●(1225)

My second petition is directed to the Minister of Transport in response to the threat posed by five new commercial bulk anchorages proposed for the beautiful and pristine shore of Gabriola Island. These are to facilitate coal exports from Wyoming to China to burn in power plants.

The petitioners decry the environmental impact and the threat to the commercial and sport fishery in the region, and they urge the Minister of Transport to have the commercial bulk anchorage application withdrawn.

HIV/AIDS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House today to present two petitions.

The first petition is from residents within Saanich—Gulf Islands calling for the government to pursue a strategy that has been proven effective. The threat of HIV/AIDS is not completely history. We have made progress, but we need to stay vigilant.

The petitioners are calling for a national program, a national AIDS strategy based on the proven principle of treatment as prevention.

Government Orders

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is about an issue that some may also think is history, but it is still an issue where our democracy has failed to come to grips with what occurred in the 2011 election.

The petitioners call on the government to empower and put in place a royal commission into electoral fraud that took place. Of the so-called robocalls, some were personal calls, but every single call was a violation of the Elections Act, and we still have not had an independent inquiry. The petitioners ask us to address this.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions.

The first petition is relating to conscience protection for physicians and health care institutions. It highlights that at the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying, the witnesses repeatedly asked for conscience protection; that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion; that presently in Canada physicians' freedoms are under attack, particularly in Ontario where the College of Physicians and Surgeons is.

The petitioners are calling on this Parliament to enshrine in the Criminal Code the protection of conscience for physicians and health care institutions, to protect them from coercion and intimidation.

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I am shocked that this is happening in Canada, and I pause.

The second petition is about vehicular homicide. It highlights, sadly, that 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was tragically killed by an impaired driver who chose to drive while drunk. Kassandra's family members are devastated, and they are part of an association called Families for Justice.

The petitioners are calling for the crime of driving impaired and killing someone to be called vehicular homicide, and they are calling for mandatory minimum sentences to give guidance to the courts to make sure there is an appearance of justice upon conviction.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to table a petition that was initiated by Scott Fenwick, the executive director of STAND Canada, a youth-led, anti-genocide organization. In four short months, this petition gathered 2,300 signatures.

The petitioners recognize that starting only 30 days after their arrival, refugee families are required to pay back, with interest, the costs of their transportation loan to Canada, which severely hurts their ability to adapt and to thrive in Canadian society. Some 40% of all loan recipients have left school and language training programs in order to work and repay their loans. Faced with such limited resources, 76% of the government-sponsored refugees have used social assistance to repay their loans.

The petitioners call on the government to waive the travel loans for all refugees admitted into Canada and to view all refugees of any

nationality fleeing conflict as equal refugees so they all will be able to get the loan waived. They also call on the government to increase funding for mental health, language training, child care, and other integration supports for all refugees who arrive in Canada.

• (1230)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and pleased today to stand with the petition I am presenting on behalf of law-abiding target shooters, hunters, trappers, farmers, and collectors.

The petitioners call on the Minister of Public Safety to increase their representation on the Canadian firearms advisory committee. At the moment, out of the 10 who are on the minister's committee, only two actually have a firearms background. The vast majority support stricter gun control and are members of the Coalition for Gun Control.

* * *

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.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANNABIS ACT

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved that Bill C-45, An Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to speak today to Bill C-45. The bill proposes a framework to restrict and strictly regulate access to cannabis in order to protect the health and safety of Canadians, to keep cannabis out of the hands of young people, and to keep the profits out of the hands of criminals.

I introduced Bill C-45 on April 13, alongside another important piece of legislation, Bill C-46, which proposes new and stronger laws to more seriously tackle drug and alcohol impaired driving.

Government Orders

In the 2015 Speech from the Throne, our government committed to legalizing, strictly regulating, and restricting access to cannabis. This commitment is motivated by a recognition that Canada's existing approach to cannabis, one of criminal prohibition, is not working. It has allowed criminals and organized crime to profit, while failing to keep cannabis out of the hands of young Canadians. In many cases, it is easier for kids to buy cannabis than cigarettes or a bottle of beer.

Statistics tell us that the current system of criminal prohibition is failing. Youth in Canada use cannabis at some of the highest rates in the world. A 2013 UNICEF report found that teenagers in Canada used cannabis more than teenagers in any other developed country. The 2015 Canadian tobacco, alcohol and drugs survey found that 21% of Canadian youth aged 15 to 19 and 30% of young adults from age 20 to 24 reported using cannabis.

The current approach to cannabis has created an environment where organized crime reaps billions of dollars in profits from the sale of illicit cannabis, and thousands of Canadians end up with criminal records for non-violent minor cannabis offences each year.

A majority of Canadians no longer believe that simple possession of small amounts of cannabis should be subject to harsh criminal sanctions, which can have lifelong impacts for individuals and take up precious resources in our criminal justice system. Our government agrees that there is a better approach.

Bill C-45 would pave the way for Canada to become the first G20 country to enact legislation to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis at the national level. The overall goal would be to protect the health and safety of Canadians, with a particular focus on protecting young people. Our government understands the complexity of this initiative. That is why we have taken a cautious evidence-based approach.

To ensure that our legislation would be informed by evidence, my colleagues, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of Health, and I announced the creation of a task force on cannabis legalization and regulation on June 30, 2016. Its mandate was to advise our government on the design of a regulatory system.

The task force conducted extensive consultations across the country, visited the states of Washington and Colorado, both of which have legal access to cannabis for non-medical purposes, and considered nearly 30,000 online submissions sent in by Canadians. It also sought the views of a diverse community of experts, professionals, advocates, front-line workers, youth, indigenous communities and organizations, government officials, law enforcement, citizens, and employers, as set out in its mandate.

All Canadians owe a debt of gratitude to the chair of the task force, the Hon. Anne McLellan, and the eight other distinguished members, all experts in their own right and all of whom volunteered significant amounts of their time throughout the second half of 2016.

The task force delivered its final report on December 13, 2016, entitled, "A Framework for the Legalization and Regulation of Cannabis in Canada." The chair described this final report as the result of a truly national collaboration, featuring a diversity of

opinions and expertise expressed by those who gave their time and reflections.

I would invite members who may wish to inform themselves of the complex and cross-cutting issues and challenges associated with cannabis legalization to have a look at this substantive piece of work. The report has been very well received, is comprehensive, and provides important background information on the issues this bill seeks to address.

● (1235)

The task force is comprised of over 80 recommendations for the development of the cannabis framework in Canada. It reflects a public health approach aimed at reducing harm and promoting the health and safety of Canadians.

The recommendations fall under five themes:

First, in taking a public health approach to the regulation of cannabis, the task force proposed measures that would maintain and improve the health of Canadians by minimizing the potential harms associated with cannabis use.

Second, the task force called for the creation of a safe and responsible supply chain and recommended the design of an appropriate distribution system. The task force noted that the government's principal interest should be to establish an efficient, accountable, and transparent system for regulatory oversight of the supply chain, emphasizing the protection of health and safety and reducing diversion to the illicit market. It recommended that wholesale distribution of cannabis be regulated by the provinces and territories.

Third, the task force highlighted the need for clear enforceable rules to ensure that all Canadians and law enforcement agencies understood what was permitted and what continued to be prohibited under the new legal regime. The task force also heard that penalties for contravening the new rules would need to be proportional to the contravention and that the criminal justice system should only be employed where truly necessary.

Fourth, the task force recommendations for a regulatory framework for non-medical cannabis were informed by the existing rules governing the medical system. These rules establish safeguards to ensure product quality and security, as well as safety provisions to prevent diversion.

Fifth, the task force report underscores that the regulation of cannabis is a complex public policy issue. As with other such issues, the depth and scale of the complexity increases as we turn to the practicalities of implementation. Our government recognizes that it will be necessary for all levels of government to coordinate efforts in order to implement an effective regime. We remain committed to working with our provincial and territorial counterparts, as well as with municipalities, to develop a framework that strictly regulates access to cannabis in a way that works for everyone involved.

Government Orders

Building on the recommendations of the task force on cannabis legalization and regulation, our government has proposed legislation that pursues a new approach to the regulation of cannabis. The approach sets national standards and will be more effective at protecting public health and safety, keeping cannabis out of the hands of youth and reducing the role of the illegal market and organized crime.

Our government's commitment to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis marks a major change for Canada. However, I am convinced that what is proposed in Bill C-45 is the best approach for Canadians.

I would like to speak to a few components of Bill C-45.

I will begin by highlighting the overarching purpose of the bill. Simply put, its purpose is to protect the health and safety of Canadians. Specifically, it aims to protect the health of young people by restricting their access to cannabis; to protect young people and others from advertising and other promotional activities that are likely to encourage them to use cannabis; to provide for the lawful protection of cannabis to reduce illegal activities in relation to cannabis; to deter illegal activities in relation to cannabis through appropriate sanctions and enforcement measures; to reduce the burden on the criminal justice system in relation to cannabis; to provide Canadians with access to a quality-controlled supply of cannabis; and to enhance public awareness of the health risks associated with cannabis use.

I want to emphasize that while our government is legalizing cannabis, we are also strictly regulating and restricting access to it.

• (1240)

Bill C-45 would create a new legal framework that would allow adults to access legal cannabis through an appropriate retail framework, sourced from a well-regulated industry or grown in limited amounts at home. Adults 18 years or older would be permitted to legally possess up to 30 grams of legal dried cannabis in public, or its equivalent in other forms. Adults could also legally share up to 30 grams of dried cannabis, or its equivalent, with other adults. Selling, or possessing cannabis to sell it, would only be lawful if authorized under the act. Under no circumstances could cannabis be sold or given to a young person. Production of cannabis would also have to be authorized under the act.

Possession, production, distribution, importation, exportation, and sale outside the legal framework would be illegal and subject to criminal penalties. These penalties would be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence, ranging from ticketing up to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. This reflects a measured approach to meet our legislative objectives.

Bill C-45 would exempt young persons who possess up to five grams of cannabis from criminal prosecution. Our government has proposed this approach because we do not want to expose young people to the criminal justice system for possessing what amounts to very small amounts of cannabis.

For possession or distribution of more than five grams, young people would be subject to the provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which emphasizes community-based responses that promote rehabilitation and reintegration. For less serious offences,

alternatives to charging would be encouraged, such as taking no further action, warning the young person, or referring the young person to a community program or agency to help address the circumstances underlying the offending behaviour.

Moreover, our government would be engaging with the provinces and territories to encourage them to create provincial offences that would apply to youth possession under five grams of cannabis. This would provide police with the authority to seize cannabis from a young person while not subjecting the person to the consequences of criminal liability for these small amounts. This would be similar to the approach that has been taken in the context of alcohol.

Such a measured approach for youth is consistent with the task force report, which stated that simple possession for youth should not be a criminal offence but that sanctions should focus on adults who provide cannabis to youth. It is also consistent with the substantive body of evidence concerning the heightened risks of cannabis use for young persons, including the effects on brain development. This approach would also address our objective of keeping cannabis out of the hands of youth while ensuring that they do not enter the criminal justice system for minor possession offences.

Bill C-45 would allow cannabis producers to promote their brands and provide information about their products, but only where young persons would not be exposed to it. These limits are reasonable. They would allow adult consumers to make informed decisions, but they respond to the greater risks cannabis poses for young people.

Under the proposed legislation, the federal, provincial, and territorial governments would all share responsibility for overseeing the new system. The federal government would oversee the production and manufacturing components of the cannabis framework and would set industry-wide rules and standards.

Provinces and territories would generally be responsible for the distribution and sale components of the framework. They would also be able to create further restrictions as they saw fit, including increasing the minimum age in their jurisdictions to, for example, align with the drinking age, and lowering possession limits for cannabis, which could be pursued to further protect youth. Further, the provinces and territories, along with the municipalities, could create additional rules for growing cannabis at home, including the possibility of lowering the number of plants allowed for residents and restricting the places in which cannabis could be consumed.

In addition to working with the provinces and territories to establish a secure supply chain, jurisdictions would be key partners in our government's efforts to raise public awareness about the potential risks associated with cannabis use.

Government Orders

•(1245)

Our government believes in evidence-based policy. We would monitor patterns of and perceptions around cannabis use among Canadians, especially youth, through an annual Canadian cannabis survey. The data gathered would inform and refine public education and awareness activities to mitigate the risks and harms of use. In this regard, as spelled out in budget 2017, existing funding of \$9.6 million would be directed to public education and awareness and monitoring and surveillance activities.

Our government intends to offset the broader costs associated with implementing this new system by collecting licensing and other fees and through revenues generated through taxation. This is currently what we do with the tobacco and alcohol industries.

Subject to approval by Parliament, our government intends to bring the proposed legislation into force no later than July 2018. At that time, adults across Canada would be able to legally possess up to 30 grams of dried cannabis, or its equivalent, when in public. They could share up to 30 grams of dried cannabis, or its equivalent, with other adults. They would be able to purchase dried or fresh cannabis or cannabis oil from a provincially regulated retailer, or, in jurisdictions that have not put a regulated retail framework in place, online from a federally licensed producer. Adults could choose to grow up to four cannabis plants per residence, subject to a height restriction of one metre. They could also make legal cannabis-containing products, provided that dangerous solvents were not used.

Upon the legislation coming into force, adults would be able to legally purchase fresh and dried cannabis, cannabis oils, and seeds or plants for cultivation. Other products, such as edibles, would become available at a later date, once federal regulations for their production and sale were developed.

I would note as well that the current program for access to cannabis for medical purposes would continue under the new act. This is in keeping with the task force recommendation to initially maintain a separate medical access framework to support patients.

Our government has been clear that to meet its objectives of keeping cannabis out of the hands of kids and the profits out of the hands of criminals, there needs to be a legal means by which adult Canadians can purchase cannabis. Our government's objective is to provide room for the provinces and territories to establish distribution and retail systems that align with their unique circumstances.

Recognizing that some provinces and territories may not have systems set up and running upon royal assent, our government is proposing to facilitate access for Canadians to a regulated, quality-controlled supply of cannabis through a secure mail system via existing licensed producers.

I would like to conclude by encouraging all members to support Bill C-45. I know that the status quo is not working. All members of this House understand that we must do better, especially for our youth. The proposed legislation represents a balanced approach designed to protect the health and safety of Canadians. It would provide adults with regulated access to legal cannabis while restricting access by youth. It would put in place strict safeguards to protect youth from being encouraged to use cannabis and would

create new offences for those adults who either provide cannabis to youth or use youth to commit cannabis-related offences.

By reducing demand in the illicit market, the proposed regime would also cut the profits of criminal organizations that are benefiting greatly from the current regime.

Bill C-45 would also help reduce the burden on police and the criminal justice system with respect to non-violent minor offences. In addition, the bill proposes to strengthen laws and enforcement measures to deter and punish more serious cannabis offences, particularly selling and distributing to youth and selling outside the regulatory framework.

Following the debate at second reading, I urge all members of the House to support Bill C-45 at second reading and refer it to committee.

•(1250)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two quick questions for the Minister of Justice. She indicated that this whole bill is based on evidence-based policies. She said that is the policy of her government. She must be aware of the fact that the Canadian Medical Association has already come out with its stand on this, which is that the use of cannabis has significant psychological impacts on brain development until the age of 25. In addition, the Canadian Pediatric Society considers that young people using marijuana, up to age 25, are jeopardizing their brain health. If it is evidence-based policy, would she not agree that this is completely inconsistent with that?

She mentioned on at least six occasions during her speech that the Liberals were very interested in protecting youth. Is there any easier way for young people to get marijuana than if their parents have four plants in the kitchen? Is there any easier way for them to have access than that?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have introduced Bill C-45. It is an evidence-based piece of legislation that seeks to put in a complex regime to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis in this country. It is based on a substantive task force report. The task force travelled across the country and received over 30,000 submissions with respect to how we can put in place a complex regime for legalization.

In terms of evidence on the legal age for being able to access a legal supply of cannabis, this was something the task force weighed in on with respect to the necessity of protecting the health and safety of young people and recognition of the impacts there may be on brain development. We had to balance that reality with another reality, which is that the greatest number of individuals who are currently smoking or using cannabis are young people. We had to balance the two realities in terms of our position with respect to legalization and regulation.

With respect to homegrown cannabis and having four plants one metre high, this legislation would provide the ability to grow cannabis in one's home, recognizing that people would, as they do with prescription drugs or alcohol, provide security and safety measures so that young people, who may or may not live in that home or access that home, would be protected against having access to those—

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear in the minister's speech on Bill C-45 that she noted that criminal prohibition is not working and is indeed failing. She also noted that the majority of Canadians support the end of criminal prohibition and punishment. Indeed, going back to the Liberal platform of 2015, it noted that, "arresting and prosecuting these offences is expensive for our criminal justice system. It traps too many Canadians in the criminal justice system for minor, non-violent offenses."

The Liberals have repeatedly said that they want to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to keep cannabis out of the hands of kids and the proceeds out of the hands of criminals. I accept that. I do not think the minister will find any argument in this House against that.

In the minister's preamble, she seems to have made a very strong case for decriminalization. She has acknowledged the harms criminal prohibition and punishment do to our society, particularly to youth and racialized Canadians.

The government has now been in power for almost 20 months. Many regimes around the world have instituted decriminalization quite well. I still have not heard a good argument from the Liberal government as to why it will not institute this as a good interim measure on the road to legalization.

•(1255)

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reiterating why we are introducing this legislation. We are committed to legalizing, strictly regulating, and restricting access to cannabis. The reason, as the member clearly articulated, is to keep it out of the hands of children and the proceeds out of the hands of criminals. By simply decriminalizing right now, we would not be able to achieve those objectives. That is why we are working very diligently, benefiting from the substantive input we received from the task force and Canadians right across the country, to ensure that we put in place, working with the provinces, territories, and municipalities, this complex regime for the legalization and strict regulation of cannabis. That is what we are focused on. We are very hopeful that this legislation will move through the parliamentary process and that we will have a legal regime in this country to achieve the objectives I stated in my remarks: keeping cannabis out of the hands of kids; keeping the proceeds out of the hands of criminals; and ensuring that for minor possession offences, we are not criminalizing young people and adults.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. justice minister says is very nice, but it does not accurately reflect what is in the bill, specifically with respect to keeping cannabis out of the hands of children and youth. With respect to the four plants in the household, if the minister would refer to poisoning data, she would see that kids eat plants all the time, because their parents do not put them up in the cupboard. In addition, we also have a provision in this bill to allow 12- to 17-year-olds to have up to five grams of cannabis, which I understand is about 10 joints. Does the minister not agree that this would put cannabis in the hands of youth? In fact, they would probably become the drug mules at the school.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear. There is nothing in Bill C-45 that would provide the legal ability for young people under the age of 18 to access cannabis.

In terms of the four plants that the member referenced, as I noted in the previous question, it is certainly necessary and the responsibility of adults in the home to take precautionary measures to prevent young people from gaining access to plants, as they do for alcohol or prescription drugs.

In terms of the five-gram limit that the hon. member mentioned, this is so as not to criminalize young people for possibly having less than five grams of cannabis in their possession. We are working very closely with the provinces and territories, encouraging them to put in place offences in terms of possession of less than five grams for young people, along the same lines as what happens with alcohol.

We are going to continue to have these conversations with the provinces and territories to ensure that we are covering all of our bases and that this complex regime is put in place and recognizes the differences between and among the different provinces and territories potentially using the permissive nature of the legislation to adapt to their respective jurisdictions, whether it be around age or around home grow.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her speech on Bill C-45. My concern all along, since news of this bill first broke, is that the Liberals have not announced any new funds for prevention.

We are told that the bill is meant to protect young people and their health and to restrict their access to marijuana, but what I am hearing on the ground from youth workers, including the ones working in youth shelters, and those who work with young offenders or in the field of mental health and addictions, as well as teachers, is that more money is needed for prevention.

The government announced less than \$2 million a year, and this bill does not even target just marijuana, but all drugs and everything that happens in the area of health. The state of Colorado invested \$45 million in 2015 alone for its bill to legalize marijuana.

This bill lacks vision. It trivializes the impact this could have on mental health, social behaviours, and the lives of young people. The minister mentioned that there could be effects on brain development. Scientists are still studying the effects associated with the consumption of various quantities of THC. We need to have the means to match our ambitions. I am hoping to see the government invest more money. The last budget provided nothing for prevention, even though that is crucial—

•(1300)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret that the hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the question from my hon. colleague across the way in terms of prevention. I could not agree more that our government needs to continue the work we are doing, building on the work of the task force that raised awareness around the legalization and regulation of cannabis. We are ensuring that we are taking a public health and safety approach and that we use the \$9.6 million that was mentioned in budget 2017, while also recognizing that we are going to have to continue, and are committed to continuing, to have a broad-based public education campaign that speaks to the detrimental impacts of cannabis on brain development and speaks to the impacts on and relationship to mental illness.

I know my colleague, the Minister of Health, is committed to continuing this discussion. She will be presenting to this hon. House in a couple of days, and I would invite my colleague to ask her about the specific measures. However, this is a firm commitment by our government that, when putting in place a complex regime for the legalization of cannabis and strict regulation, we will do the necessary work to ensure that we are communicating effectively and providing the education measures that are required for Canadians to understand the regime we are putting in place.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to share some thoughts regarding Bill C-45, an act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other acts.

Essentially the bill proposes to regulate and legalize the production, possession, use, and distribution of marijuana across Canada. The government is on record saying it wants to implement this by July of next year. The government's decision to move hastily on such an important piece of legislation concerns me.

Let me be clear, this marijuana bill will have far-reaching impacts on every part of our society. It is imperative that before proceeding with the significant changes to the Criminal Code, a thorough debate takes place in the House for all members who wish to speak.

I would like to take a minute to outline some of the areas of concern that I have with the legislation. One of the major issues I have with the legislation is the fact that it will be putting children at risk of having much greater access to marijuana. I am sure this concern resonates with parents of young children and teenagers. While the government has consistently touted that one of its objectives is to prevent young people from accessing cannabis, in reality the bill does just the opposite.

Clauses 8 and 9 of the legislation are a perfect example. These provisions state that it is prohibited for an individual to possess or distribute more than four cannabis plants that are not budding or flowering. This means that it will be legal for people to grow at least four marijuana plants inside their homes. I do not know of any easier way, and I said that in my question, for children to access marijuana than in that way.

Unlike prescription pills, which people can put away, marijuana plants, by definition, have to be out in the open. I cannot imagine any easier way for children to get hold of marijuana than when their parents are starting to grow it in the kitchen.

My concerns for children and teenagers do not end there. Let us consider the dangers for young people who may come in contact with marijuana edibles. This is an issue that is not properly addressed in Bill C-45. I have seen photographs, as I am sure other members have, of these edibles. They are indistinguishable from candy treats or baked goods that are often found on the kitchen counter, in the kitchen cupboard, or even in a cookie jar, enticing prizes for young children. They are so convincing that an adult could mistake a pot edible for the real thing.

The possible health risks for children ingesting these kinds of edibles cannot be underestimated. According to health care professionals, such as Dr. Robert Glatter, the consumption of multiple servings of edibles at one time, for any age group, results in various potential psychological effects, not to mention the possibility of over-sedation, anxiety, or psychosis. Ingesting multiple servings in a short time span can also produce intense anxiety, paranoia, and even psychosis. These adverse side effects are more frequent among first-time users.

If these are the health risks that affect adults ingesting edibles, one can only imagine the danger they pose to children who are almost certainly going to be first-time users. In fact, experts from the Department of Justice have attested that edibles pose significant risks to the health of children. Clearly, the entirely plausible chance that children may accidentally ingest these edibles deserves a more careful examination by the members of the House.

Another illogical aspect of the legislation that the government must address is the ambiguous rules regarding the quantity of marijuana that children may legally possess. As we have heard, according to Bill C-45, paragraph 8(1)(c), children under the age of 18 are prohibited from possessing the equivalent of five grams of marijuana or more.

What happens when a 12-year-old uses or distributes cannabis to his peers on the playgrounds, every day, with no questions asked? This is a lax approach. How can the government ensure that children and teenagers will not be recruited by organized crime? I can see that is what is going to happen. On a simpler front, is it safer to be in possession of four grams of cannabis or five, or is the safest quantity the possession and distribution of zero grams? That is what our party would support.

● (1305)

The Liberals will tell Canadians that four grams is okay but the Conservatives, on the other hand, are firm in our conviction that zero grams is the only safe amount for our children.

The cannabis act is replete with arbitrary cut-offs that do nothing to protect our children from the dangers of marijuana. In fact, we believe they expose them to greater risk. Canadians deserve clarity when it comes to legislation that will significantly affect so many aspects of our justice, health, and public safety systems, and more important, their daily lives and families. It is not enough, I would like to point out, to say we are going to shove all these things over to the province and let them figure it out. There is a responsibility for the federal government to get it right.

Government Orders

If all these problems with accessibility alone were not sufficient to highlight the shortcomings of Bill C-45, please note that the Prime Minister and his government proposed that the legal age to purchase marijuana be 18 years of age. For a government that claims to espouse and produce evidence-based policy, this provision is clearly off the mark. All we have to do is ask any doctor, health organization, or health expert. For one, the scientific evidence overwhelmingly confirms that the human brain does not fully develop until individuals reach their mid-twenties.

The Canadian Medical Association, as I have pointed out, has already warned the government that the use of cannabis may have significant psychological impacts on brain development up to the age of 25, and recommends that 21 be the youngest acceptable age to legalize the purchase of marijuana. Indeed, the position of the Canadian Paediatric Society likewise urges the government to consider the dangers of so young an age to purchase marijuana. Again, the government keeps talking about protecting children but it completely ignores the evidence. Indeed, the co-author of that position paper, Dr. Christina Grant, has stated, at the very least, the levels of THC must be limited until after the age of 25 to be considered safe for brain health.

Once again, Bill C-45 lacks crucial information. Why are the Liberals ignoring this crucial scientific information, information that has a tangible impact on the health and best interests of Canadians? It is not enough to say we are ignoring all the evidence and let the provinces figure this out. That is not good enough.

Further, while drafting the legislation, the Liberal government had plenty of time to study the impact of marijuana legalization in several jurisdictions in the United States. Instead of learning from the mistakes and challenges that have befallen these states, the government decided to ram the legislation through. Again, this will be a complete detriment to Canadians.

I will give members a couple of examples of what we are talking about.

First is the fact that our American counterparts have found an increase in impaired driving following the legalization of marijuana in certain jurisdictions. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice found that on Colorado roads, during the year following legalization of marijuana, there has been a 32% increase in deaths related to marijuana-impaired driving. That is completely unacceptable.

There is little doubt that Canadians will see a similar increase of drug-impaired driving if marijuana is legalized. In fact, statistics have already shown that this is a serious problem. According to the Canadian student tobacco, alcohol and drugs survey, nearly one in five Canadian high school students have been a passenger in a car whose driver had recently smoked marijuana.

Canadians of all ages are very confused about the many existing myths regarding smoking and driving. For example, in a 2014 poll, 32% of Canadian teens believed that driving high is less dangerous than driving drunk. The perpetuation of this kind of thinking will have serious consequences. A report prepared by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse states that Canadians 16 to 19 years of age are more likely to drive two hours after ingesting marijuana than they would be two hours after drinking.

The World Health Organization, on the other hand, has been clear in debunking this myth. It has stated:

Evidence suggests that recent cannabis smoking is associated with substantial driving impairment, particularly in occasional smokers, with implications for work in safety-sensitive positions or when operating a means of transportation, including aircraft.... Complex human/machine performance can be impaired as long as 24 hours after smoking a moderate dose of cannabis and the user may be unaware of the drug's influence....

● (1310)

In light of this information, Bill C-45 does not provide sufficient avenues to educate young people about the undeniable danger of driving high. Should the government insist on ramming this legislation through, it should seriously take into account the importance of public awareness campaigns in protecting young people.

Ultimately, actions speak louder than words, and legalizing marijuana sends the wrong message to young Canadians that pot is a benign drug, that it is not a cause for concern. In reality, the government cannot guarantee that more children and teenagers will not be injured in motor vehicle accidents, if not worse, as a result of increased access to marijuana. This, beyond doubt, is something the government should have considered seriously before trying to ram this bill through Parliament in an attempt to live up to a campaign promise.

Another important and threatening problem facing jurisdictions that have legalized marijuana is the increase in cannabis-related hospitalizations. We have already established the research that proves marijuana can have dangerous effects on children's brain development and overall health.

In Colorado, these studies have had far-reaching and tangible consequences. According to a recent report by the Colorado Department of Health, hospitalization involving patients with marijuana exposure and diagnosis tripled from around 803 per 100,000 between 2001 and 2009 to 2,413 per 100,000 after marijuana was legalized. That is about three times as many people who were hospitalized. This serves as a cautionary guideline for how children will be impacted by easy access and exposure to pot.

A report by the Rocky Mountain HIDTA states, "the number of Colorado children who've been reported to a poison control center or examined at a hospital for unintentional marijuana exposure annually has spiked since the state legalized recreational cannabis..."

These statistics are not inconsequential. Once again, why has the government ignored the lessons our peers have faced after legalizing marijuana? Answers to these challenges are certainly not found in Bill C-45.

Government Orders

The gaping holes in the legislation are indisputable. If homegrown marijuana plants are permitted, coupled with alarming and unanswered questions related to marijuana edibles, children will clearly have easier access to the substance. Given the bill's ambiguity on how much cannabis constitutes an offence, children and teenagers may possess and distribute up to four grams of marijuana with no clear recourse to protect them. Setting the age of majority for marijuana use at 18 promotes a lax approach to brain development and public safety.

Finally, the government's unwillingness to acknowledge the fact that comparable jurisdictions have faced critical health and safety challenges as a result of their similar legalization processes is not only reckless but unfair to Canadians who put their trust in their members of Parliament.

While the risks to children constitute my greatest concern with Bill C-45, there are numerous other problems that go unaddressed in the legislation. One of these is the fact that the bill provides little to no clarity on the degree of flexibility that the government will allocate to provincial governments and municipal law enforcement to implement this. Additionally, the bill does not sufficiently address the costs for retraining officers given the changes to the Criminal Code.

Moreover, the questions surrounding Canada-U.S. border crossings should legalization take place is particularly worrisome to me, as my constituents in Niagara Falls live right across from our American neighbours and often have the occasion to travel to the United States. Taking note of the fact that most American border states have not legalized recreational marijuana, the discrepancy in policy could greatly impact, among other things, the waiting time to cross the border.

● (1315)

The former U.S. ambassador to Canada, Bruce Heyman, has expressed his doubts regarding efficiency at the border and the legalization of marijuana. His primary concern is the fact that border patrol dogs are not trained to distinguish marijuana scents from other prohibited items.

He stated:

The dogs are trained to have reactions to certain scents. Some of those scents start with marijuana. Others are something that are significantly more challenging for the border. But the dog doesn't tell you this is marijuana and this is an explosive...

The dog reacts, and these border guards are going to have to appropriately do an investigation. That could slow the border down.

My constituents, and all of the 400,000 Canadians who travel to the United States every day, are deeply concerned about the waiting times and they want them to be as expeditious as possible. How can the government ensure that these delays will not affect Canadian business people, families visiting loved ones or even Canada-U.S. relations writ large? Bill C-45 is silent on yet another consideration for Canadians.

It is evident that the government has been too hasty in its attempt to push through this legislation without consideration of all the risks to children, confusion surrounding implementation, and delays in border crossings. This complex issue could result in insurmountable health and safety burdens in the years to come.

As such, I urge my fellow members to take the significant problems with the legislation into consideration.

To conclude, I move that the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-45, An Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts, since the bill makes homegrown marijuana more accessible to children.

● (1320)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have much respect for my colleague, but I would like to highlight a number of flawed assumptions with his interpretation of Bill C-45.

The first is that somehow children will have lawful access to cannabis. I want to assure the hon. colleague that Bill C-45 would in no way allow any lawful access to cannabis to youth.

The second is that children will somehow be allowed to traffic cannabis. Of course, Bill C-45 would not permit that and it would certainly not permit adults to use youth to traffic cannabis. In fact, we are proposing a higher maximum sentence, a 14-year sentence, which is an improvement from the current regime.

The most important flawed assumption he made was that somehow the status quo was working with respect to cannabis, when all of the evidence and all of the efforts put in by the independent task force demonstrated it was not.

Is that not the trouble with the Conservatives' approach to law and order? They ignore evidence, they somehow continue to introduce unconstitutional laws, which have been struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada, like mandatory minimums, and they show no faith in our courts, which are situated best to provide justice and safety to all Canadians.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I put a question to the Minister of Justice at the justice committee just a couple of weeks ago, and the hon. member will probably remember this. I asked her what would happen to the child who had four grams of marijuana. We made the point that the bill specifically said that a person could not have more than five grams. What if someone has two or three grams? Will this not be very helpful to people who love to sell drugs around schools? They will tell the young people to be careful, that they should not take more than five grams with them. They will give them four grams, ask them to sell that, and come back to see them.

Again, the hon. member said that we did not respect the justice system for everything else. That is the point. Does he want to ignore the evidence with respect to impaired driving? He should check it out in Colorado and in all of the different jurisdictions. Once they legalized marijuana, the impaired driving as a result of smoking marijuana went up. There has been a 32% increase in deaths in Colorado since it has done that.

Government Orders

Therefore, yes, we are worried about the Criminal Code, the justice system, and the people who are victims of crime. This is one of the things that distinguishes us.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the parliamentary secretary's line of questioning.

When I read Bill C-45 and I look at the provisions involved with youth, I read it as the five grams acts as a benchmark. I think all hon. members would agree that we want to do everything possible to keep our youth out of the criminal justice system. This is not in any way accepting the fact that they can have marijuana. It is just so it is a ticketable offence so they are not stuck for the rest of their lives with a criminal record. I would like to hear the member's comments in response to that.

I respect the Conservatives. They represent a segment of society that has problems with the bill, but I would agree with the parliamentary secretary and the Liberals. The status quo is not working and the statistics are there to back it up. A criminal law and order approach to this problem has not worked. What do the Conservatives propose as an alternative?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member says that the Conservatives are not worried enough about criminalizing this activity, we are worried about children having access to any marijuana. We are very concerned about that. The health studies, as I pointed out in my speech, point out very clearly the harmful effects that smoking marijuana can have on brain development. One of the things we have pointed out as well is that there is no safe level on this.

I have indicated that we cannot do what the Liberal government has done, which is to dump it all on the provinces. We know what happened to the Liberals. It is like their promise on electoral reform. They did not think it out. They probably thought the NDP would win the election, so they could promise anything, such as new electoral reform, legalized marijuana. These are wonderful things, but then it turned out they ended up in government. Now we can see that the government has not thought this out at all. To say that it will push it through and then the provinces can figure it out is completely unacceptable.

Yes, we are very concerned about that and we are proud of the position we have taken.

• (1325)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe there is anyone in the House who does not care about the safety and the health of our kids and about their outcomes. I believe we all can agree on that. We can also agree that the current system is failing our kids.

The overwhelming evidence is the fact that our kids are using cannabis at a higher rate than any other country in the world and they are getting it from organized crime, from criminals. I do not think it is appropriate, and I do not believe any member of the House believes it is appropriate, that we should leave the health and safety of our children up to criminals. A government has the responsibility to take action.

As the former minister of justice, the member for Niagara Falls is well aware that in every province and territory across the country, issues such as of the purchase and consumption of alcohol are most appropriately under provincial governance and provincial regulations. Every province and territory has a liquor licence act that makes it a provincial offence for minors to possess, purchase, and consume alcohol. That enables law enforcement to enforce an absolute prohibition for young people under the age of adulthood, however it is defined in a province.

Similar measures for cannabis would enable law enforcement to enforce a prohibition in all amounts of cannabis for young people, without subjecting them to a criminal record. I am sure the member opposite would agree that we want to protect the health of our kids. However, as I talk to parents across the country, they are concerned about the health of their kids, about their outcome and that they will get a criminal record. We have a responsibility to address the legitimate concerns all parents have. This legislation is about that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, on one part, I am not going to challenge the hon. member who said that if the government legalizes it, that the quality of marijuana that our children would be smoking would be increased. Again, I am not happy with any marijuana being smoked by children.

I have to go back to one section of this, and I put this to the hon. member. We are very concerned about the protection of our children from having access. Again, I ask the Minister of Justice this, and I would love to hear from the parliamentary secretary. Is there any easier way to get marijuana than if one's parents and everybody have plants in the kitchen? I cannot imagine. It is not enough just to say that prescription drugs are up in the medicine cabinet and children have access to them. Children can be protected against medical prescriptions, and my colleagues are pointing out ways we can do that. Of course we can.

However, by definition, one has to have plants out there, I guess, in the kitchen by the window to get lots of sun, with lots of exposure to the kids. I cannot understand how the Liberals can be making this point that somehow we are protecting our children here. Guess what: one is only going to get four plants and cannot have 40 plants. One can only have four plants because we are so worried about the health of our children. I say to skip it.

I ask the members of the Liberal Party why not bring a subamendment and get rid of that whole thing about the four plants. Get the plants out of people's houses. Nobody wants that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for pointing out many of the dangers that all of us are aware of in this House. Certainly, the safety and welfare of our kids is paramount, but also the safety of those who operate heavy equipment or are driving on our roads. These are all concerns that we have.

Government Orders

My colleague clearly pointed out the evidence from the Canadian Medical Association that calls for a minimum age of 21. It would like it to be 25, but in light of the desire to move ahead, it said 21. Just yesterday, in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, an editorial by Dr. Diane Kelsall had some great points, but the very last sentence stated, "If Parliament truly cares about the public health and safety of Canadians, especially our youth, this bill will not pass."

I wonder what my colleague would say to that.

• (1330)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, what I first want to do is thank the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his support of the amendments that we have brought forward here today, and thank him for his support throughout this issue, on behalf of our party. He is absolutely correct.

I say to the Liberals to raise the age to 21. If they are so concerned about children, go ahead. Do not take my word for it, but check out all the medical reports and organizations. It is not the Conservatives who are saying that one should not be smoking marijuana under the age of 21 or 25. No, check with all the medical people and then make an amendment to bring it up to 21. Start with that, then get rid of the four plants in the kitchen, and I promise that will better protect children in this country.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a great pleasure to be rising to speak to Bill C-45. I think this is the first important step to recognize the failed approach that we have had in this country for far too long. The war on drugs has plagued Canada for far too long. We have had marijuana criminalized in this country since 1923, and I believe, based on the statistics, it is time for a change. It is time for a new approach, and this is an important first step.

The plans for this legalization were announced in the Liberals' plans. It has been in government now for almost 20 months, and of course we have probably until July of next year before we finally see it implemented. It will be a long time for Canadians to finally see some actions on this file.

The NDP will support the government's plans on this in principle, but we want to ensure that it is done effectively, that marijuana has the safeguards in place for our children, and that we have a reliable, long-term revenue stream that is specifically earmarked for public health initiatives, prevention, and all-important research, because those areas are very much lacking in our country today.

We do have some key differences with the government, as we do believe that the Liberals should put into action their concern about the unjust laws. The crime that still exists in this country for simple possession is profoundly unjust, for a substance that the government is going to legalize. That has always been our strong position, and we will continue to hound the government on that point whenever we get a chance.

Our justice system is clogged up. We have serious criminal charges that are either being stayed or withdrawn. This is all in light of the Jordan decision, yet the government refuses to act on an initiative that would free up so many police resources and so many justice resources, which are so sadly needed in our country right now.

As we debate this legislation, and the government is giving itself a pat on the back for meeting one of its promises, this is all being done in the light of the fact that many Canadians are still getting criminal records for possession, and it very disproportionately affects our youth and racialized Canadians. We will continue to push the government, whenever possible, on those points. We will be preparing constructive proposals for the government, especially in light of bringing pardons. We feel that those who have received previous convictions for marijuana possession should have some form of amnesty offered. I have heard some encouraging words from Public Safety Canada lately, but the government should be following through on that, and we would certainly like to see a firm commitment spoken by a minister in this House at some point in the future.

The government must also be clear and upfront regarding provincial responsibilities. We certainly want to see how this structure will be shared, and indeed, the provinces will have a lot of responsibilities, so it is up to the federal government to clearly lay those out.

There are a lot of items in the bill. It is about 131 pages. It is a lot to read through. This is quite a revolutionary step for Canada after so much prohibition. I will briefly go over some of the main points.

It will allow an adult who is over 18 to possess up to 30 grams of marijuana or equivalent in a public place, and it does not preclude provinces from harmonizing the age according to their liquor laws, if they so wish.

The Canadian Medical Association, as has been mentioned by my Conservative colleagues, has expressed concern with the age limit, and I think we do need to take those concerns into question, but the thing to remember is that age 18 is an age when we trust Canadians to vote, and age 18 is when we trust they have the ability to freely join our armed forces and fight abroad for us. It is a bit of a struggle finding that right age. We need to invest those dollars in research and prevention campaigns so that our youth understand the risks that come with heavy and sustained use of cannabis.

The other point that is causing a lot of consternation is the possession of up to four cannabis plants per household. This is probably something that will have to be looked at. I do not think there is anything in this legislation that precludes a municipality or a strata corporation from setting its own rules, so this is simply about removing prohibition and punishment for those four plants. However again, I think this is something with which Canadian society has already expressed a little bit of discomfort. It is something that we certainly do want to be looking at.

Government Orders

●(1335)

With respect to the punishments, it would allow for a punishment of up to 14 years for anyone over the age of 18 who sells marijuana to a young person. This is a fairly harsh punishment. It is actually in line with the punishments for producing child pornography and attempting to leave Canada to commit terrorism. I know it would give judicial discretion, but it is a pretty harsh punishment for this, and we need to look at whether it complies with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. With respect to young people, the legislation would allow young people between the ages of 12 and 18 to possess up to five grams of cannabis. I mentioned this in questions and comments earlier. This is about trying to save our youth. It is not about promoting the use of the drug; it is about trying to save our youth from going through the criminal justice system. If they possessed over that amount, they would be subject to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, but that is an important distinction to make. Nothing precludes the ability of provinces to institute civil, ticketable offences for this, and that is an important point to bring in.

There would be minor ticketing options available in this legislation, so it would give police officers some leeway. Individuals possessing over 30 grams and under 50 grams could be subject to a \$200 fine. If they went over four plants and had five or six plants, the legislation would allow for a ticketable scheme. Again, this is about saving our overburdened criminal justice system, which is currently feeling the strain of the Jordan decision, and allowing those civil offences so that our criminal justice system can look at the serious charges that are currently being withdrawn and stayed in our courts today.

There would also be restrictions on the type of packaging and promotions. There would be a lot of freedom given to the Minister of Health in developing regulations that deal with these particular laws, so we want to make sure that there is no false, misleading, or deceptive promotion of the products and nothing that appeals to young people. We certainly want to see some clarity on child-resistant packaging; the labelling of amounts of THC, the active ingredient in marijuana; and of course the health warning, similar to what we already see on tobacco packaging. There would also be a cannabis tracking system that sets up a national seed-to-sale tracking system in order that, for all the licensed producers, we could track the marijuana that has been produced, basically from the farm to a person's household at the point of sale.

Here are some of the outstanding issues. As I identified in my introduction, there are a lot of key issues that are left up to the provinces. I know some provincial governments have expressed some consternation about that, but the government has rightly pointed out that this is a shared jurisdiction. The federal government has clear jurisdiction in the federal criminal law power, but when it comes to sales and distribution, that is very clearly a provincial power under our Constitution. Again, it would require some harmonization between the federal government and our various provincial governments.

As I mentioned in my introduction, we would like to see more information from the Minister of Finance, from the current government, on what the tax and revenue structure would be. We do not want this simply to be a cash cow for the government. We want to make sure that the funds would be generated for a reliable

stream of revenue for research and prevention. I was sad to see that, on the day this legislation was rolled out, the Minister of National Revenue was present with the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, but she had nothing to say about her portfolio, which is the Canada Revenue Agency. That was a missed opportunity, in my opinion. When it comes to the long-term revenue stream, we are certainly looking for more details.

The other thing that has been brought up, which I have heard from my caucus colleagues and I know from the member for Windsor West, is the issues that we would have to deal with at the border with our American cousins. We know that the Trump government is taking a decidedly wrong turn on this approach, but the U.S. is our neighbour and we have to deal with the laws that it puts in place. A lot of our trade and a lot of Canadians are reliant on crossing the border with the United States freely and without hindrance. My friend from Windsor West sees so much trade go across from Windsor to Detroit every single day, and he has already expressed concern about whether truck drivers would see increased delays. This is an area where the government still has a lot of homework to do. The public safety minister has been asked this question repeatedly and his answers have been lacking so far. He owes it to all members in this House to clearly explain how the negotiations are going with our American counterparts and exactly what progress is being made in that particular area.

●(1340)

It is not just trade. When ordinary Canadians are going down for a visit, if we have legal cannabis in Canada and people are asked by a border guard if they have ever ingested or smoked marijuana, the answer can have serious consequences. While we support the overall goal of this legislation, we still have to confront the reality that exists with our closest neighbour and ally. The Trump administration is anything but consistent these days. It seems that if we are to follow the president's policy directions, we have to read his tweets. It is something that we will have to stay on top of.

The other item concerns the international treaties of 1961, 1971, and 1988, to which Canada is a party. I have asked the government this question a few times, and it still has not given us an answer as to what its plans are for Canada's obligations under these treaties. It is not a trick question. I would simply like to know what the government's plans are. Is it going to make an announcement that we are withdrawing? The deadline is July 1. I would hope that in the next 30 days or so, the government will come up with a plan that we can have confidence in.

Those international treaties represent a 20th century way of thinking on the drug policy problem. Canada has an opportunity to assume some international leadership in this regard, especially if we become the first G20 nation to legalize it. We could probably stand firm in the world and promote an alternative way of dealing with drug issues, rather than the old failed law-and-order approach.

Government Orders

I made reference to the crisis that exists in our justice system, and particularly the fact that we have seen some serious criminal charges, such as murder and assault, stayed or withdrawn. We have repeatedly pointed out to the government that it could have instituted decriminalization as an interim measure to make sure that our police and crown prosecutors do not have to deal with minor marijuana possession charges. As the law is currently written, under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, these are still crimes.

We do not have enough crown prosecutors, we do not have enough courtrooms, and we do not have enough administrative staff to run an effective justice system today. The minister has repeatedly identified these problems and has acknowledged that the criminal approach is ineffective, yet the government refuses to do anything as an interim measure. It is falling back on the same tired arguments, which I do not think Canadians are very convinced of. Perhaps the Liberals are, but I think Canadians, when they hear those arguments, do not buy into the Liberal argument. Aside from appointing the proper number of judges and resourcing the system properly, enacting decriminalization could be very effective.

Let us go to the Liberal platform of 2015, and I am going to paraphrase it here. The Liberals acknowledged in 2015 that arresting and prosecuting in cannabis offences is expensive for our criminal justice system and traps too many Canadians in the criminal justice system for minor, non-violent offences. They will find no disagreement from the NDP on that claim.

As for decriminalization, historically opposition to decriminalization usually came from those who favoured continued prohibition. There have been fears expressed that decriminalization would send counterproductive messages that would increase the use of cannabis and related problems, and that it would sustain and possibly strengthen criminally controlled contraband trade in cannabis.

Despite these largely unsubstantiated fears, many nations and subnational states have opted for the decriminalization model. Researchers have found that under prohibition, cannabis users, for the most part, even in times of easy access, moderate their cannabis use, such that it does not interfere with their lives or lead to adverse health consequences. These patterns appear to persist under decriminalization.

For decades, research on the impact of cannabis decriminalization has shown that in a variety of jurisdictions, including Australia, Europe, and the United States, decriminalization does not cause an increase in consumer demand or in the ease of access.

• (1345)

What decriminalization does do is decrease the related social problems, the criminal records that people have tied around their necks for the rest of their lives, and the impact on employment and people's ability to rent or to travel. It also reduces the costs in our judicial system. On this side of the House, the NDP feels that this is a solution that is backed by science, and it would immediately relieve some of the pressure on our overburdened justice system.

There is a fair amount of commentary in Canadian cannabis literature that contains concerns that cannabis trade in Canada is under the control of violent and exploitative criminal elements, causing harm to users and children. The Liberals really love to say

that they want to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to cannabis in order to keep it out of the hands of children and the proceeds out of the hands of criminals. New Democrats agree with that approach, but it is more of a fear-based objective in that Liberals do not want to decriminalize because of those reasons.

It should be noted that only a particular share of the illegal cannabis trade occurs within international crime syndicates. There is good cause to doubt that most cannabis users in Canada would ever have contact with violent exploitative criminal organizations or people. Most people buy small amounts from friends, family members, or close acquaintances, yet the Liberals have continued with this fearmongering. They say that every day our kids turn to dealers, gangs, and criminals to buy marijuana, putting them in harm's way. That is simply not true. That is fearmongering at its worst.

Studies have shown that the illegal cannabis trade, as it stands today, resembles more of a disconnected cottage industry in which independent and otherwise law-abiding people attempt to support themselves and their families. They are meeting demands in their communities. Basically, it is something that most Canadians do not believe should be illegal in the first place. Many people in small towns, when the economy gets tough, have turned to growing and selling cannabis. They are not violent criminals, but the Liberal approach treats them as being in that category, even the people who purchase and possess marijuana. It is a failed approach, the politics of fear.

A study by the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition found that links between the cannabis trade and violent organized crime groups have been greatly exaggerated. It describes cannabis operations as independent, small in size, local, non-violent, and modest in realized revenues.

When the Prime Minister first announced that he favoured the legalization of marijuana, it sparked a lot of questions from society, and one of the questions was about pardons. He said the following: "There has been many situations over history when laws come in that overturn previous convictions and there will be a process for that that we will set up in a responsible way." We will certainly be holding the Prime Minister to his word. However, he has been contradicted by the Minister of Public Safety, so I would appreciate a clear and concise statement from the government at some point on what precisely it is going to do with respect to pardons.

I want to turn to how legalization would affect youth and racialized Canadians.

Government Orders

Thirty per cent of Canadian youth have tried cannabis at least once by the age of 15, which is the highest use among many different countries, and it would disproportionately affect those people. The Prime Minister acknowledged the wrongs of this in the past when he related the story of how his late brother was able to get off because of his father's connections in the legal community. It is one type of justice for the wealthy and well-connected and another type of justice for the poor and marginalized groups. The cost of a pardon is \$631. When people are living on the margins of society, how are they supposed to afford pardons in order to clear their names and get ahead in life? That question has not yet been answered adequately by the government.

I will conclude by restating that the status quo approach has been a complete failure. The war on drugs has cost billions of dollars but has not produced the results that we as a society had hoped for and demand. A new approach needs to be taken. I will therefore support this bill in principle at second reading. It deserves very close scrutiny in the Standing Committee on Health. I and my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway, the NDP health critic, will be working together to make sure it gets the scrutiny it deserves.

• (1350)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very grateful for the comments made in support of Bill C-45 by the member opposite. I just want to clarify a point.

He spoke quite effectively on the important regulatory measures the bill contains in order to control, for example, the quality, potency, and circumstances of production and sale of cannabis. At the same time, he advocates for a system that would maintain a prohibition with civil penalties.

I would like to quote for him remarks made by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in its document on a public health approach to the legalization and regulation of marijuana. It acknowledges that decriminalization can address a single but important social harm, but it also says that this model fails to address certain very important things. For example, it states, "Under decriminalization cannabis remains unregulated, meaning that users know little or nothing about its potency or quality. As long as cannabis use is illegal"—and prohibited, as advocated under the decriminalization model of my friend—"it is difficult [if not impossible] for health care or educational professionals to effectively address and help prevent problematic use."

It goes on to say that decriminalization may encourage commercialization of cannabis production and distribution.

Quite frankly, I have never heard of street gangs and Hell's Angels being referred to as a disconnected cottage industry, but I can assure him, from decades of experience, that there are serious criminal enterprises involved in the production and illegal distribution of cannabis in our country.

Finally, CAMH points out that in other models of decriminalization, it inevitably results in an increase in the number of people who are being penalized.

Could the member share with us what he believes would be involved in passing new legislation that would decriminalize it and

in establishing an enforcement and regulatory framework? As well, might he agree with me that it would be expensive and time-consuming to do it wrong, as compared to what overwhelming expert opinion suggests is the right way to do it?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully disagree with the parliamentary secretary. As a point of clarification, I was not in any way stating that Hell's Angels and organized crime have no part to play. They do. What I wanted to illuminate for my Liberal colleagues was the fact that the criminal organizations represent more of a stratified industry. Yes, large-scale criminal organizations do play a part. They are involved. The evidence is there, and I know he spent a long time during his career fighting those very organizations, but there are also many other elements to the illicit market, which are in no way connected to violent organized crime groups.

With respect to decriminalization, it is important to note that we have been emphasizing this as an interim measure. It does not have to be complicated or expensive. It does not even need a legislative change to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. The government could simply give direction to the director of public prosecutions to ask provinces and the various administrations not to enforce the current law as an interim measure while we wait to decriminalize.

I think most Canadians would be on side with that particular measure, and I am certainly happy to continue debating that with him into the future.

• (1355)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting that the member was saying he intends to support the legislation and then he went on and on giving examples of why we should oppose the legislation. Many of those things I happen to agree with, but it was just very strange. He said very little positive as to why we should support the legislation.

There is one area I would like him to comment on. One of the problems we have had in the past is dealers are selling cannabis to children in the schools, even the elementary schools. Their answer is that the provinces are going to regulate this and it would be sold in certain places. I have heard the criticism that because of those high regulations and what the provinces are going to have to do, the cost of selling drugs is going to be extremely high and the dealers will still be able to make a deal to these young children buying drugs illegally. I would like him to comment on that, because that was the one area he seemed to leave out of his myriad of opposition to the bill.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I will leave the defence of Bill C-45 to the Liberal government. What I was indicating in my speech is that there are areas in the bill that are of concern to our caucus, but we do not think that the baby needs to be thrown out with the bathwater. The bill in principle needs to be passed at this stage so the committee can do its due diligence.

With respect to the selling of marijuana to children, I, of course, am concerned. I am the father of twin girls who are about to turn five years old. Everyone in the House has concerns about the effects of marijuana on children. We want to make sure there are prevention programs for that case.

This is the status quo today. In the approach that exists today, even though we have criminal prohibitions, we still find that Canadian youth are among the highest users of any developed country in the world. The current form is a complete failure. A new approach is needed and I still have yet to hear from my Conservative colleagues as to what they suggest as an alternative. The stats show us the current method is a failure, so the very least we can do is to try something different, to try a public health approach, and that is why I support the bill being sent to committee so that it can get the due diligence it needs. Experts can comment on it and so can the Canadian public.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really important for us to realize that on the issue of cannabis, Canada and our young people have the highest usage in the developed world. As the member points out, it is important that we recognize the status quo is damaging to our young people in every region of our country. It is not good enough to do what the Conservative Party is doing, which is putting their heads in the sand. We need to recognize the need for change. Would the member at the very least acknowledge that fact?

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North illustrated the issue quite concretely. The status quo is not working. A new approach is needed. It is 2017, and we have dealt with cannabis prohibition and punishment since 1923.

With respect to the international treaties that Canada is a party to, I hope the government will one day inform the House what it is going to do because there is a real opportunity for Canada to stand up as an international leader to show the rest of the world there is a different way and maybe assume that leadership position. We are waiting. Again, I look forward to getting the bill to committee so it can have the close scrutiny that it deserves.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford will have two minutes remaining in his time for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the question.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there may be a, shall we say, pink elephant in the room when it comes to the legalization of marijuana.

First let us talk about the risks. Quebeckers are aware of them. Some of those risks include normalization of marijuana use, public health impacts, and increased use by our young people, just to name a few. Then there is production. The opening of this new market

Statements by Members

should benefit more than just the Liberals' friends. As we have seen, almost every cannabis company has a former minister or well-known Liberal on its board of directors.

If we vote to legalize marijuana, it must be done right. It must not have a negative impact on our young people or the general public, and it must certainly not be done just to benefit the Liberals' friends. The government has not yet done anything to address Quebeckers' concerns or to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest. Things are off to a bad start.

* * *

[English]

YARMOUTH SPORTS HALL OF FAME

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, West Nova has a rich sporting heritage, with five sports halls of fame throughout the riding that actively work to showcase our local sports heroes and history.

Earlier this month, I was honoured to attend the induction dinner of the Yarmouth Sports Hall of Fame where the following achievements were recognized: David Sisco, a two-time national special Olympic gold medalist in powerlifting; Imrich Kiraly, who has won numerous medals in international and national track and field events; the 1972 bantam B hockey team, which brought home Yarmouth's first provincial hockey title; and Yarmouth's 1977 beaver B baseball team, which went undefeated in their season and clinched the provincial title.

[Translation]

What is more, in 2015, the hockey team from École secondaire de Par-en-Bas won the division 3 high school provincial championship for the first time.

[English]

I invite my colleagues to join with me in congratulating these exceptional athletes and all those like them in communities large and small, right across Canada.

* * *

2017 RBC CUP CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in August 2016, 130 Junior A hockey teams started the journey to the national championship, the RBC Cup. It was hosted during the third week of this past May by the welcoming community of Cobourg, Ontario, in the riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South.

After many provincial and regional finals and a week of round-robin play in Cobourg, two great teams representing tremendous organizations from very supportive communities qualified for the championship game: the Brooks Bandits of Brooks, Alberta, and the hometown Cobourg Cougars of Cobourg, Ontario.

With a thrilling, close, overtime game win, congratulations to the 2017 RBC Cup champions: the Cobourg Cougars.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

SKI SAINT-BRUNO

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since this week is Tourism Week in Canada, I would like to talk about Ski Saint-Bruno, Canada's largest snow school.

With 565 instructors and 33,000 students each year, Ski Saint-Bruno is Canada's premier ski and snowboard school, boasting more than half a million graduates over the past 50 years. On June 17, 10,000 people are expected to participate in the fifth edition of Montreal Mud Hero. They will need agility, speed, and endurance to climb, crawl, and slide their way through more than 16 muddy obstacles on the six-kilometre course.

On June 17, I will be in Mont-Saint-Bruno. I invite all my colleagues to come to Montarville to breathe some fresh mountain air, play in the mud, and cheer on these intrepid participants.

* * *

[English]

RECONCILIATION SASKATOON

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the launch of a month of events, culminating in the Rock Your Roots Walk for Reconciliation on June 21, National Aboriginal Day.

Reconciliation Saskatoon is a collective of 58 organizations, including Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Shift Development, the City of Saskatoon, the Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre, and other non-profit, business, faith, and community partners, all working to encourage education, conversations, and a change in response to the TRC's calls to action.

I urge all Saskatoon residents to embrace this opportunity to learn more about the history and ongoing legacy of residential schools and the unshakable resilience and strength of Saskatchewan's indigenous peoples.

I implore all members of the House to follow the lead of Reconciliation Saskatoon. We must not only mouth the words of reconciliation but also follow through with real, substantive, and lasting change.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

INSURANCE BROKERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Insurance Brokers Association of Canada members are here with us today, and I would like to welcome them to Ottawa. Seventy delegates from the Insurance Brokers Association of Canada, or IBAC, have come from all over the country to gather on Parliament Hill for their annual advocacy day.

[English]

The Insurance Brokers Association of Canada, or IBAC, is a national federation representing over 36,000 property and casualty insurance brokers across Canada. Insurance brokers across the country are small business owners and community builders.

Brokers from coast to coast to coast are here today to speak about the need to protect consumers from the ongoing pressures at the hands of Canada's banks to push insurance products when credit is granted.

[Translation]

Brokers serve consumers, not insurance companies. They use their expertise to help consumers make informed decisions about their insurance needs. We thank them for their work and for being here today.

* * *

[English]

HPV PREVENTION WEEK

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a survivor of HPV cancer, a strain of cancer preventable through vaccination, I am delighted to support an initiative announced today by the Federation of Medical Women of Canada.

Since our Conservative government first funded girls' HPV vaccinations 10 years ago, addressing the sharp rise in HPV cancers in women and men, most provinces now fund boys and girls. The same vaccine has now also been found to be effective in preventing cervical cancer in mature women. More than 1,500 Canadian women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer this year and some 400 will die. Beyond our borders, a quarter of a million mothers and grandmothers die of cervical cancer every year in developing countries.

We know HPV cancers can be beaten with vaccines. At home and abroad, Canada can make a difference.

I salute the Federation of Medical Women of Canada for HPV Prevention Week announced today here on the Hill.

* * *

[Translation]

HPV PREVENTION WEEK

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the excellent work being done to prevent the transmission of human papilloma virus infections, many of which can cause different types of cancer.

The Federation of Medical Women of Canada has organized events on Parliament Hill to promote the first-ever HPV Prevention Week, which will take place the first week of October. This is a first step toward raising awareness about this extremely contagious virus.

Statements by Members

I am proud to say that Canada has been a world leader on this issue for over 10 years now. I call on our government to maintain its support for prevention strategies as we strive to eradicate HPV. Imagine a Canada without HPV and the cancers it causes.

* * *

[English]

ANTONIO SOUSA

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate Antonio Sousa, who would have turned 92 this Saturday, June 3.

A pivotal figure in the Portuguese Canadian community, Antonio touched so many lives with his integrity, compassion, sense of humour, and dedication to helping others. He came from Portugal in 1953, and was joined a year later by his wife Maria Antonia and son Julio. In 1958, their younger son Charles, now Ontario Minister of Finance and my local MPP, was born.

In addition to being a successful small business owner, Antonio Sousa co-founded the First Portuguese Canadian Club of Canada and supported many other Luso Canadian organizations. He worked tirelessly to make it easier for Portuguese immigrants and other newcomers to succeed and prosper.

Antonio Sousa was always kind and gracious to me, and I know that today all those who knew him are better people for it.

[Member spoke in Portuguese as follows:]

Foi uma honra reconhecer este canadiano notável.

* * *

CANADA 150 COMMEMORATIVE MEDALS

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks Canada's 150th anniversary since Confederation, but Canada's history stretches back further than those 150 years.

One remarkable figure who sticks out to me is John Graves Simcoe, who was Upper Canada's first Lieutenant Governor. During his tenure, Mr. Simcoe created numerous institutions and reforms such as the abolition of slavery, English common law, and trial by jury. We still celebrate these institutions today.

Unfortunately, the government has decided not to celebrate our 150th anniversary with a commemorative medal, so we in Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte have taken matters into our own hands and will be commissioning 150 medals named after Mr. Simcoe, which will be given out to exceptional Canadians in Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte.

I would like to wish every Canadian a very happy Canadian 150th birthday.

In Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte we will be celebrating the true, the north, the strong, and the free.

● (1410)

[Translation]

FIRST NATIONS

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that Canada's most important relationship is the one we have with our first nations.

[English]

Today I would like to pay tribute to three communities that play an important role in the development of northern New Brunswick. In my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, a name with Mi'kmaq language origins, I have the privilege of working closely with three dynamic first nation communities. The Eel River Bar First Nation is located on the north shore of Chaleur Bay.

[Translation]

Further west we have the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation.

[English]

Finally, the Listuguj First Nation, located just across the Restigouche River on the Gaspé Peninsula, is nevertheless a very important economic presence in the Restigouche region.

These communities are thriving hubs of activity, and their potential for economic, cultural, and social development is enormous.

[Translation]

This year we are celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary. What a wonderful opportunity to have a conversation with our first nations about the country we want to live in for the next 150 years.

Happy birthday, Canada.

* * *

[English]

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Canada once again paid tribute to the victims of the Komagata Maru incident of 1914, a black mark in Canadian history. Last week also marked the one-year anniversary of the Prime Minister's historic apology in this very House for the incident, something I had fought for long before I was elected in 2006. This apology has had a significant impact in healing the country and in celebrating a modern Canada, where diversity and cultural exchange is one of our greatest strengths.

Today I once again want to thank the Prime Minister for his bold leadership in turning the page toward a better future for all Canadians.

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COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP AWARD

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate my good friend and constituent Frank Austin. Frank recently received the Toastmasters District 86 Communication and Leadership Award.

Statements by Members

Through my work as a member of Parliament, I have had the privilege of meeting with Frank on many occasions, and I have been impressed each time with the way he has overcome personal challenges, having experienced a stroke that resulted in severe aphasia. Today he inspires others to surmount personal challenges and overcome disabilities.

Frank saw a need in his community and met it head on by launching The Expressive Café. With his own experience as his guide, he has developed a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment and provided a place where all levels of communication ability are welcome: those with aphasia, their family, friends, and community volunteers.

Frank's ability to overcome his own challenge has established him as a hope-filled role model for others who find themselves in a similar situation. I am proud to call Frank a friend. Please join me in recognizing his incredible leadership.

* * *

RANKIN CANCER RUN

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, St. Catharines came together during the 12th annual Rankin Cancer Run. More than 13,000 people participated. Starting at the Grantham Lions Park, cancer survivors, family, friends, and Niagara residents ventured on a one- or five-kilometre run or walk. I am pleased to say that Niagara residents gave generously. One million dollars was raised this year for cancer centres and charities in Niagara. Every dollar raised during the run goes right back into the community. Throughout the 12 years the event has taken place, \$7.5 million has been raised for important community projects.

This was my first time participating as a member of Parliament. However, I am no stranger to this event. As a cancer survivor myself, I was very happy that day, and that one day, to wear orange, along with other survivors. I was lucky. However, far too many others have been taken far too early.

I am honoured to congratulate Mary Ann Edwards and her team for another successful year. What better way for an entire community to get together than to stand side by side in the fight against cancer.

* * *

•(1415)

[*Translation*]

HPV PREVENTION WEEK

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we announced that Canada has become the first country in the world to establish HPV Prevention Week, which will be held from October 1 to 7, 2017. HPV stands for human papilloma virus.

Led by the Federation of Medical Women of Canada, this new public awareness initiative is possible thanks to a collective effort made by an alliance of health care professionals. Why? Because HPV infections affect everyone, not just women, and cervical cancer is not the only risk. HPV also affects men. It is the most common sexually transmitted infection and can cause several types of cancer.

October's HPV Prevention Week is a great initiative, and I call on the government to increase funding to researchers in Canada who are working to eradicate this disease once and for all.

* * *

LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a storm is brewing on Parliament Hill. The strong winds of change are making the Liberal Party, the NDP, the Bloc members, and the Leader of the Green Party shudder. Why? A man of the people has just been elected leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is an authentic, dynamic, sincere person who brings people together and does not need cardboard cutouts to give the impression that he is passionate about what he does. The man with the smile that no one saw coming represents the millions of Canadians who love their family and their work, and who work hard to get ahead.

Unlike the Prime Minister who gets his advice from the elite and those who pay dearly for access, the new leader finds his inspiration on the farm, at the corner store, in the factory, in the office, and at home.

I am proud of my new leader, and if people really want to know what is behind that smile, wait and see what the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has in store for those who wrongly make the middle class pay for their deficit. He will not hesitate to soon send them back to the opposition benches.

* * *

TOURISM WEEK

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, happy Tourism Week to everyone.

Tourism accounts for over 2% of Canada's GDP and more than 1.7 million jobs right across the country.

I am proud of Canada's new tourism vision. Our plan will help grow the tourism industry and create good jobs for the middle class across the country.

[*English*]

This vision is our pan-Canadian approach to improving tourism marketing, making it easier to get here by land and air and developing urban, rural, indigenous, LGBTQ2, francophone, and culinary tours and experiences. Over the next five years, our plan will help bring six million more visitors to Canada, and many of them to the Long Range Mountains.

To celebrate this week, I invite all members to join the Tourism Industry Association of Canada for a reception at the Château Laurier this evening.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Trans Mountain expansion project is in jeopardy because of backroom deals in British Columbia. Forces are uniting to kill this project and the thousands of jobs and opportunities for young people that come with it.

The Prime Minister personally approved this pipeline. He said that it was a fundamental responsibility to get Canadian energy to market. Will the Prime Minister finally stand up to the forces that are seeking to kill these jobs, or will he fold like a cardboard cut-out?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said just this morning, the decision we took on the Trans Mountain pipeline was based on facts and evidence and on what is in the best interests of Canadians.

Regardless of a change in government in British Columbia, or anywhere, the facts and evidence do not change. We understand that growing a strong economy for the future requires taking leadership on the environment, and we have to do those two things together. That is what drives us in the choices we make, and we stand by those choices.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, northern gateway was approved because of evidence and science, and he killed that because of political opposition.

The Prime Minister claims that the approval of Trans Mountain's expansion was based on science. We know it will be good for the country. It will be good for British Columbia and Alberta workers, but he has already killed the thousands of jobs that came with northern gateway because he caved to political opposition.

Will the Prime Minister stand up to the "forces of no" and get shovels in the ground and people working, or is this project doomed to the same fate as his political rejection of the northern gateway project?

• (1420)

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the review around the Trans Mountain expansion was the most exhaustive in the history of pipelines in Canada. There are 157 recommendations from the National Energy Board. We set up our own ministerial panel, and it went up and down the line.

The consensus, after all of that conversation with Canadians, was that it is in the national interest to build that pipeline. Therefore, we gave it approval, and that approval stands.

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*[Translation]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants us to trust him to spend \$35 billion on an infrastructure bank no one asked for when experts are saying that the bank will be susceptible to political influence and will subsidize profits while letting taxpayers absorb the losses.

Experts also doubt that the bank will attract the promised private investments.

Knowing all that, why is the Prime Minister trying to get Parliament to pass this disastrous bill before the summer recess?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a decade of inconsistency and ad hoc planning by the previous government, municipalities told us that they want long-term, sustainable, and predictable funding to build the infrastructure they need. We put forward a historic plan to support our municipalities and provinces. We want to mobilize our pension funds and institutional investors to build more infrastructure that our Canadian communities need, to create jobs for the middle class, and to help those who want to be part of the middle class.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are very worried that this \$35-billion infrastructure bank is just a way for the Prime Minister to line the pockets of his friends. It would not be the first time Liberals have tried this. François Beaudoin says that this scheme is ripe for political interference, and he would know. The Liberals pressured him to dole out special favours to their friends when he ran another government bank, under the Chrétien government.

Will the Prime Minister admit that Canadians are catching on to his scheme and quit putting their tax dollars at risk to benefit Liberal friends?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and this House that the bank will be accountable to Parliament. The bank will table its corporate plan in Parliament as well as the annual reports. It will report to the Auditor General. It will be open to audit by the Auditor General.

We want to make sure that we are creating the right balance to mobilize private capital but still make sure that we are protecting the public interest and building infrastructure that is needed by the Canadian community, infrastructure the previous government failed to build.

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*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS**

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our two official languages should never be the object of partisan political games. The Commissioner of Official Languages holds a non-partisan position and should be completely independent. Using this position to reward a Liberal who was deemed too partisan to even hold a seat in the Senate is an insult to Canadians' intelligence. It is shameful.

When will the Prime Minister finally see reason, implement a credible, non-partisan process, and rescind Ms. Meilleur's appointment?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were determined to find the best candidate for the job of Commissioner of Official Languages, and that is exactly what we did. Madeleine Meilleur's expertise and experience were recognized by many members of the House on many different occasions.

For over 30 years, Ms. Meilleur has fought for francophones' rights and French language services, for example to protect the Montfort Hospital. She was key in creating the position of French Language Services Commissioner in Ontario. I am confident that her expertise, skills, and experience will allow her to carry out her duties in a non-partisan way.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Madeleine Meilleur is being appointed because she is a Liberal, period.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said, and I quote, "Our government welcomes suggestions on ways to improve the bill, and we are open to amendments to ensure we accomplish the objective of an effective and independent parliamentary budget officer."

Is the leader able to rise today and explain how this statement can be true after the Liberals refused and rejected each opposition amendment to make the parliamentary budget officer truly independent?

• (1425)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has always been our intention to have an effective and productive House of Commons, where the members of all parties are able to work in the best interests of all Canadians.

Our government was able to bring forward numerous pieces of legislation to strengthen the middle class and those working hard to join it. The committee did very important work. We listened and accepted a number of amendments that improved the bill.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): It is the wrong card, Mr. Speaker. We are not on the middle class; we are talking about the parliamentary budget officer.

In fact, the Liberals are so close to listening to reason that they passed a Liberal amendment that would do the exact opposite of what they thought it did. Get this, Mr. Speaker; you are going to like this one. The Liberals claimed that they removed "explicit limitations" on the PBO's disclosure of information, but what they actually did was remove exceptions to the limitation, thus, in fact, creating even greater restrictions on the PBO.

Therefore, either the Liberals do not understand their own bill or they are intentionally misleading Canadians. Which is it?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our intention has always been to

have a well-functioning House of Commons. When we have a well-functioning House of Commons, we know the middle class will succeed. We know that when there is a strong middle class, we have a strong economy. It is important the member understands that.

When it comes to the parliamentary budget officer, we received much constructive criticism. We listened and the committee did the important work, which we know its members are more than capable of doing. They heard from experts. They listened to past parliamentary budget officers. We have delivered on advancing those amendments, and that is why the legislation has improved.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the only suggestions the Liberals are open to are Liberal suggestions, even if they make no sense. I got it.

When it comes to the infrastructure bank, the Liberals are no longer even pretending they are open to improving or changing it. This is a multi-billion-dollar boondoggle made by corporations for corporations.

In terms of the Liberal decision to not make any changes, did that directive also come from BlackRock?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian communities and municipalities are very pleased with our infrastructure plan because they understand. That leader and his party had no plan for infrastructure. That party neglected infrastructure for a decade.

Therefore, our goal is to ensure we put forward an ambitious plan to invest to build more affordable housing, to build more shelters for women leaving domestic violence, to build more transit so people can reduce commuter times, and to build more resilient communities. That is exactly what we are doing, and we will continue—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Outremont.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for the minister. He just told us that the municipalities and the provinces want his bill, which is essentially a steamroller. The infrastructure bank is going to steamroll over the municipalities and the provinces.

Does he have the nerve to tell us, today, that the province of Quebec agreed to this encroachment by the infrastructure bank on Quebec's jurisdiction, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know to which interference the hon. member is referring. We consulted with provinces and municipalities. The infrastructure bank is one additional tool to help them build the infrastructure that communities need.

*Oral Questions***NATURAL RESOURCES**

We are putting forward \$186 billion, tripling the amount of investment of the previous government, to ensure we add this additional tool to mobilize private capital. Our own institutional investors invest in foreign countries, but why would they not invest here? We want to create the right conditions for them to invest to build the infrastructure, which all Canadian communities need.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to plow ahead with Gomery 2.0. The Liberal infrastructure bank boondoggle has the potential to be the biggest scandal yet for the Liberal Party, and that is saying something.

Smaller municipalities are scared they will be left behind. The bank has no focus, no clear mandate and, most importantly, as has already been said, is wide open to political interference.

Why is the government so focused on making sure its Liberal elite friends get a giant slush fund as opposed to taking care of Canadians?

• (1430)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the first time in the history of our country that we have put forward \$2 billion in dedicated funding for rural northern communities so we can focus on building infrastructure that those communities need. This is on top of the other funding available to our communities.

We want to ensure we build the necessary infrastructure for everyone to enjoy the quality of life they deserve, regardless in which city or community they live. Our plan will help build infrastructure from coast to coast to coast for every community of all sizes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former president of the BDC fears that there is political interference in the infrastructure bank.

The proposed structure gives the minister and the Prime Minister full authority to select the CEO, as well as full authority to fire him if he does not respect the wishes of this Liberal government; so we take \$35 billion from taxpayers, create a new bank to please the Prime Minister, and then give him full authority. We are headed straight for a new sponsorship scandal.

Is there anyone on the other side of this room who understands that?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I assured members earlier, the bank will be accountable to Parliament in a number of ways. It will be required to submit an annual corporate plan and annual report. Further to that, it will have the highest standard of having its books audited by the Auditor General of Canada, as well as private sector auditors.

We want to build infrastructure. Our focus is to go grow the economy and create jobs. The Conservatives may have something against the private sector; we do not. We believe we can mobilize private capital to build more infrastructure.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unemployed Canadians want to get back to work and support their families. The natural resources of Alberta have to get to the international market. Canadians are very concerned that British Columbia politics may hinder the Trans Mountain project. We know the Prime Minister has said the facts and evidence are there, but facts and evidence are also there that the Liberal government has broken so many promises.

Will this be another promise the Liberal government will break? Can we trust the Prime Minister on this?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government approved the pipeline because it determined that moving crude from Alberta to British Columbia and then to export markets was in the national interest. As members know, 99% of the export of Canadian oil and gas goes to the United States.

Therefore, we concluded that it was in the interests of Alberta, British Columbia, and all of Canada to approve this pipeline. It employs thousands of people not only in British Columbia and Alberta but all across the country. We stand by that approval.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been in this Parliament, hearing from the Liberals about helping the national economy. We know they give good words, but on jobs and taxes it remains that you have broken so many promises. Our concern and the concern of Canadians is whether you will keep this promise and ensure that oil gets to tidewater so people can be employed in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind hon. members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for giving our answer for us. It is important to create jobs in the oil and gas sector. In fact, just last week, the \$30 million that we had granted to Alberta is resulting in \$250 million of investment to reclaim oil wells. This will create 1,650 jobs in Alberta because of an investment from the Government of Canada.

We have confidence in the people of Alberta. We wish the Conservatives had as much.

• (1435)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in B. C., the forces of no are uniting to try to scuttle the Trans Mountain pipeline, a project the Prime Minister has personally approved.

Oral Questions

While the Prime Minister has no trouble bragging about approving the pipeline when he is in Calgary or Houston, he hides from his decision in B.C. because his Liberal MPs there continue to oppose it.

Will the Prime Minister finally tell his Liberal MPs from B.C. to stop opposing this job-creating pipeline, go back to B.C., and sell this project that he has personally approved, so it actually gets built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend's question gives me another opportunity to say that this government believes that pipeline should be built and it should be built because we want to take the crude from Alberta and move it to an export market. We want to create the 15,000 jobs for Albertans and British Columbians, just as we have created jobs in the approval of other pipelines, just as we continue to have confidence in the innovation and the entrepreneurship of Albertans.

We on this side of the House have confidence in Alberta.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have no confidence that the Prime Minister will actually stand up to his Liberal MPs and push for this project.

He claims that he approved the pipeline based on science and would not be swayed by political arguments, yet there is a big political argument coming his way because the forces of no uniting in B.C. They are trying to derail the project. Even his own Liberal MPs hope it fails.

If the Prime Minister cannot even get the social licence in his own party for this project, how will he get it in British Columbia? Will he finally put the jobs of energy workers ahead of the jobs of Liberal MPs, stand up for this project, and fight for it in British Columbia?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister said this morning, the decision we took on the Trans Mountain pipeline was based on fact and evidence and what was in the best interests of Canadians.

Regardless of the change in government in British Columbia, or anywhere, the facts and the evidence do not change. Neither does the approval. Neither does the commitment of this government to support the pipeline so we can move Alberta oil not only to the United States but to export markets as well.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after promising more times than we can count to get rid of our unfair voting system, the Prime Minister abandoned that promise. He would not let members of the House decide whether to move forward. Instead he said it was his choice alone. Well, he is wrong, and tomorrow every MP will get to make that choice for themselves.

Will the Prime Minister get out of the way and promise not to punish Liberals who, unlike him, choose to keep their promise?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would like to thank the members of the committee on electoral reform for their excellent work and for the excellent recommendations they put forward.

I was pleased to table the response of the government, which was in agreement with the majority of those responses. However, I am also looking forward to working with members in this place to move forward on political financing, on cybersecurity, and on the many ways we can improve, strengthen, and protect our democracy.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised in 2015 that would be the last election under the current voting system. Once elected, the Prime Minister said it again. He put it in the throne speech. He put it in the minister's first mandate letter, and he made it part of the committee's mandate.

Then something incredible happened: people actually believed him. They thought that change was coming. Never in our history had so many people taken part in a public consultation. A huge consensus was reached.

Will the Prime Minister, who does not want to live up to his word or his promise, let his Liberal members vote for the committee report?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the members of the House who worked on the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I would also like to thank the thousands of Canadians who took part in the discussions.

We listened to them, and I am proud of the government's decision to improve, protect, and strengthen our democracy here in Canada.

* * *

● (1440)

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): "Always scheming," Mr. Speaker. That is the new slogan of the Liberal Party across the way.

Schemes are what led to the appointment of the new Commissioner of Official Languages. We do not even have to dig anymore. The Liberals went way beyond decency in a process that is supposed to be non-partisan. There is no transparency. Even the Minister of Canadian Heritage decided she would take a seat at this partisan table. She clearly should have kept walking.

In these circumstances, will the minister take responsibility and rescind Madeleine Meilleur's appointment?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have risen several times in the House to point out that we were committed to finding the best candidate for the position of Commissioner of Official Languages.

Oral Questions

This is exactly what we were able to do. How were we able to do it? We were able to do it through a merit-based process. In these circumstances, 72 applications were received, and a selection committee conducted several rounds of interviews and tests. In short, Madeleine Meilleur was the best candidate.

As well, her experience and expertise have been recognized on both sides of the House. This is why, as a government, we are extremely proud of Ms. Meilleur's candidacy.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): She was certainly the best, Mr. Speaker, as she gave \$5,000 to the Liberal Party. Madeleine Meilleur's appointment as Commissioner of Official Languages is a disgrace when it comes to ethics in the selection process.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage keeps defending the indefensible, when she knows full well that it was unethical of her to interfere in the process.

When will she finally take her job seriously, reconsider her unacceptable decision to appoint Madeleine Meilleur and finally acknowledge the non-partisan nature of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by my colleague's reaction, because she herself acknowledged Madeleine Meilleur's experience and expertise. Why? Because Ms. Meilleur is a language rights pioneer.

I would like to go over her career. For 30 years she has fought for francophone rights and services. She was involved in protecting the Montfort Hospital, Ottawa's francophone hospital, and in establishing the position of French-language services commissioner, which until then did not exist in the Ontario government.

That is why we were satisfied that she is an excellent candidate and will be able to serve impartially as Commissioner of Official Languages.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. We learned last week that a well-respected Acadian lawyer specializing in linguistic rights, Michel Doucet, applied to become the official languages commissioner, yet despite the promise of an open nomination process, a Liberal member of Parliament told Mr. Doucet that if he was serious, he had to talk to leaders of the Liberal Party or Liberal insiders. Gee, I wonder who that might be.

It is clear that if an individual is not a connected Liberal, they should not bother applying. Did the minister approve the appointment of this Liberal insider even before the appointment process began?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have committed ourselves to find the best candidates to make sure that there would be a strong official languages commissioner, and that is exactly what we have done. How did we find that person? We found that person through a round of interviews, 70 candidates—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There is too much noise in the chamber. Members and ministers take 35 seconds to pose their

questions and respond. It is important that members have the opportunity to hear the response.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the expertise and experience of Mrs. Meilleur is recognized by many and by both sides of the chamber, and actually many of them have remembered how much she has been involved in the protection and the promotion of linguistic rights in this country.

We are comfortable that she is the right candidate, following a thorough, open, and merit-based process, and I hope that many people in this House will be able to support her candidacy.

• (1445)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): It is interesting, Mr. Speaker, because the Liberals promised in their election platform that government watchdogs would be accountable only to Parliament, not to the government of the day.

The excuse given by the heritage minister for the Prime Minister hand-picking Madam Meilleur was that she was the best candidate out of 72. I do not think we need a psychometric test to understand that this does not pass the smell test. Who were the other 71, and what exactly made Meilleur the best? Was it her donations or was it the English translation of her last name?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as an agent of the government, of course the official languages commissioner will be accountable to Parliament. We never questioned that. What we were in charge of was making sure that we would find the right candidate with the right expertise and the right competence to make sure, ultimately, that she would be an important watchdog of the government. That is why we wanted to make sure that the person had a history of supporting the protection and promotion of linguistic rights in the country.

That is what Mrs. Meilleur has done over the past 30 years, and I am glad to see that she will be, I hope, the next official languages commissioner.

* * *

PRIVACY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is not much use for LinkedIn when one can just get on the Liberal donor list, because that clearly seems to be the way in.

[*Translation*]

A letter from the Privacy Commissioner outlines his concerns about the powers granted to the Americans under Bill C-23. Despite the minister's assurances, Canadians who will be intimidated or subjected to invasive searches by American border guards will not be able to pursue civil action. This grants American officers immunity on Canadian soil.

[*English*]

With Trump flirting with the idea of searching cellphones at the border, when will the Liberals finally reconsider this legislation and once and for all stand up for Canadians' rights?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-23 does not provide U.S. preclearance officers with any electronic search authority that does not already exist. What Bill C-23 does provide is the umbrella of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is not available when customs procedures take place only after one arrives at a destination point in the United States. Obviously, Canadians are better off with Bill C-23.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals claim that closing down the Vegreville CPC was supposed to save money and improve service. Instead, we have learned that it will cost more and that the workers there are among the best in the country. If the centre is closed, 2,000 years of valuable experience could be lost, 280 lives will be disrupted, and a town will be devastated. There is no good reason to close down Vegreville, other than moving jobs to a Liberal riding. Why will the minister not reverse his decision?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making responsible decisions based on government spending of hard-earned tax dollars. With about 20% of available positions currently vacant, the move will address long-standing staffing challenges, allow for an expansion of immigration operations, and actually create additional jobs in Alberta. In fact, the new location will accommodate 312 employees and allow us to expand our workforce by at least 40%.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last June, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women released its report on gender-based analysis plus and made 21 recommendations related to improvement, performance, training, and supervision.

Seeing as this is Gender-Based Analysis Plus awareness week, will the Minister of Status of Women tell the House what the government is doing to step up the implementation of GBA+ within federal departments?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Nickel Belt for his question.

[English]

Our government has made conducting GBA+ mandatory. This work laid the foundation for the first gender statement in a federal budget in 2017. This is important because in order for Canada to reach its full potential, we need to ensure that all Canadians across genders and intersecting identities are included in our discussions and in our decisions. I encourage all my colleagues to follow the lead of the status of women committee, earn their certificates online, and use the work of GBA+ in their committee work.

● (1450)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, NATO has recommitted its efforts to stop radical terrorism and is sending more resources to the fight against ISIS. Everyone is doing their part except Canada. The Liberal government recently pulled out one of our Aurora surveillance aircraft, and this is on top of withdrawing our CF-18s.

Canada's contribution to the fight against ISIS expires in exactly one month, and the Liberal government is stepping back. Is the defence minister the architect of Canada's retreat from the fight against ISIS?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to announce yesterday that we have actually increased and expanded our counterterrorism mission with Operation Artemis. We have actually increased our efforts in the fight against terrorism. When it comes to Operation Impact, we tripled our special forces trainers and we doubled our intelligence.

We are taking our time to make sure that we remain a credible and responsible partner with the coalition. I look forward to explaining to Canadians and the House our continued effort in the fight against Daesh.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's remarks did not answer my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman's question. Canada's capacity has been reduced. An Aurora surveillance aircraft has been pulled out of the theatre of operations. This indicates that Canada is disengaging from the fight against ISIS and terrorists.

Can the minister explain why the Aurora aircraft was pulled out?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have increased the fight against terrorism with the recent announcement yesterday about Operation Artemis. We are bringing back one of the two surveillance aircraft as part of routine. We are taking the time right now to make sure we have the right discussions with our coalition partners so we can fill the appropriate gaps in the coalition and continue the fight. That is exactly what we did last year, and it is one of the reasons we have had tremendous success with the coalition in the fight against Daesh.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoulu, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has managed to mess up yet another an important file, that is, the replacement of Canada's search and rescue aircraft.

That is not surprising, however, since the department has been without leadership since 2015, and even more so for the past two months, considering the very partisan parliamentary secretary who is responsible for the department's policy issues.

Oral Questions

When will the Prime Minister understand how important and how urgent procurement is and finally intervene before this completely falls apart?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to building a more agile, better equipped military as well as guaranteeing the best value for Canadian taxpayers.

Our government announced the awarding of a contract to acquire a new fleet of 16 modern, high-tech search and rescue aircraft. We know that Leonardo has filed an application for judicial review, so it would not be appropriate to comment on matters currently before the courts.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently the budget to purchase the new fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft jumped magically by more than \$1 billion. The only problem, though, is no one thought to tell all the companies bidding on the contract about this change. Once again, because of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the project, taxpayers may now be liable for millions in damages and legal costs.

Why did the Liberals not disclose a massive budget change to all the bidders on this contract?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very surprising to hear the pyromaniacs on the other side complain when the fire department turns up. Our government is committed to building a more agile, better-equipped military while ensuring the best value for Canadians.

Our government announced the award of a contract to acquire a new fleet of 16 modern and technologically advanced search and rescue aircraft. These aircraft will save Canadians' lives every day. While we are aware of an application before the court, it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind hon. members that these kinds of characterizations are usually not helpful.

We will go now to the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, UNESCO issued a stern warning that without immediate action, Canada could lose world heritage site status for Wood Buffalo. It directed that the government immediately take 17 direct actions, including conducting an assessment of the impacts of the Site C dam on the Peace-Athabasca Delta, and engage directly with affected indigenous peoples.

Indigenous leaders are saying the government's approach to Site C has violated treaty and constitutional rights. Does the government have any intention of acting on these directives and concerns?

• (1455)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to the ongoing protection of Wood Buffalo National Park. A

comprehensive review of legislation, regulations, and management practices is in place to ensure the protection of Wood Buffalo National Park, including the outstanding universal value enshrined in its inscription as a UNESCO world heritage site.

Parks Canada is working with the 11 indigenous communities to create a co-operative management framework for the national park that respects the cultures and traditions of indigenous peoples.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the UN Security Council's resolutions are binding on all member countries. I have already asked the minister twice whether Canada would abide by the Security Council's resolution regarding illegal settlements in Palestinian territory, and she twice refused to answer.

How can Canada expect to win a seat on the Security Council if it refuses to follow the rules of the organization and to abide by Security Council resolutions?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, speaking of the Middle East, we firmly believe that the only way to achieve lasting peace in the Middle East is through a two-state solution negotiated by the parties.

Canada has a long-standing commitment to a comprehensive, lasting, and just peace, and a two-state solution. That includes the right of Israel to live in peace within secure borders and without terrorism, and the creation of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state.

Canada recognizes the right of Palestinians to self-determination and it supports the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state.

* * *

[*English*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families need the murdered and missing women inquiry to be successful. We recognize that the hearings are happening this week in Whitehorse, but after that they are shutting down for the summer.

Does the minister not recognize what so many others recognize, including the justice minister's father: that there are serious problems with this process? What is she going to do to fix it?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ending this ongoing national tragedy. As family member Bernie Williams stated, families have fought too long and hard for this much-needed inquiry to abandon it and them now.

Oral Questions

The commission has publicly acknowledged the need for increased communication and that families must be at the centre of the inquiry. The commission is committed to culturally sensitive and trauma-informed ways to ensure this—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do acknowledge and we have supported this inquiry. It is important, but the minister has to see what is going on. It has been 10 months, they are having a few meetings, and they are closing down for the summer. At this rate, the inquiry is going to be done at the same time finance figures are going to balance the budget, 2055. The government has to get something done. It has to improve, and the minister is responsible.

Will the minister stand up and tell us what she is going to do to ensure that this inquiry is done on time and on budget?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a bit much coming from a party that opposed this commission during the whole of its mandate.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, we have appointed—

The Deputy Speaker: It is members' time here. We do not want to lose opportunities for members to participate in question period. The hon. Minister of Indigenous Affairs.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, we have appointed an independent commission of truly talented people. The family members are now speaking that they are feeling heard in Whitehorse and they want this commission to continue. The commission will continue to work throughout the summer, and I have every confidence it will be able to fulfill its mandate.

* * *

• (1500)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have racked up massive deficits and hiked taxes, but the reality is that many Canadians are struggling. Meanwhile, they watch the Liberals spent their tax dollars on things like limo rides, Broadway tickets for wealthy bankers, cardboard cut-outs of the Prime Minister, and lavish Caribbean dream vacations. Now, the *Ottawa Citizen* has reported that federal tax dollars were spent on something else that is a little odd. How much are Canadians paying to rent a giant plastic duck?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member posed a question. The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage will respond now. Let us give her a chance and we will hear what she has to say.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure my colleague that my department did not fund this duck.

I would like to tell her what we have funded, because of course, in the context of our reconciliation efforts with indigenous people, we supported the Redpath Waterfront Festival in funding the Rhythm of the Nation performance component of the Ontario 150 Tour. This funding will allow communities across Ontario to discover indigenous music and dance—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: We have reached a level of noise in here that makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for members to hear questions that are posed and answers from ministers.

The hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having served in the Canadian Armed Forces, I know how important it is to find a new purpose after leaving the military. While most military members transition well, some struggle to find their new normal and to build their new life. Access to educational opportunities and training can greatly increase the probability of veterans successfully navigating this critical transition. Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs update this House on the measures he is taking to give better access to education and training for veterans at the end of their military service?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kelowna—Lake Country for his 20 years of service as a pilot in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Our government recognizes that a post-military career is key to the financial security and mental and physical well-being of many veterans and their families. We are proudly fulfilling our commitment to deliver an education benefit for veterans. This benefit will provide up to \$40,000 for those with six years of service and \$80,000 for those with 12 years of service or more. The new benefit provides flexibility and financial support so that veterans can make the choice that best suits their needs and those of their family.

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

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three Liberal ministers, a parliamentary secretary, and an Edmonton Liberal MP have all claimed that closing the Vegreville case processing centre to put the jobs in a Liberal riding will save taxpayers money, but Canadians now know the truth. It will not. It is not responsible.

Just two weeks ago, the current parliamentary secretary claimed the Liberals have been honest all along, but they have not. Government documents prove that this unjustified closure will cost Canadians tens of millions more. Will the minister stop covering up the facts, finally admit this is a costly mistake, and reverse it now?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me clarify the costs, as the member is using outdated estimates and a system comparing apples to oranges.

The most recent analysis shows that the cost of relocating to Edmonton is \$40 million, but this includes an expansion to 312 employees from the current 220 employees and the opportunity to increase the workforce in Alberta even further. The cost of staying at the current location is estimated at \$35 million, but it is based on the current employee level, which is much lower than the expanded opportunity for 312 employees. The move is more cost effective and will address the staffing challenges that we have with respect to Vegreville.

* * *

•(1505)

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the answer to my question on the Order Paper clearly shows that no funding has been allocated and no employee or external consultant assigned to review the quality standard for aggregates used in concrete. Contrary to what the Minister of International Trade led us to believe, the Canadian Standards Association, or the CSA, will not have anything it needs to develop a new scientific standard. In my region, there are thousands of pyrrhotite victims, and compensation for many of them hinges on this standard.

What does the Liberal government plan on doing and when will it take action?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are always interested in expanding markets for Canadian businesses, and we will continue to do so in the most effective and progressive way possible. Trade means growth, and growth means jobs for Canadian workers and their families and opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, many constituents in New Brunswick Southwest expressed to me a growing concern regarding

Lyme disease. As co-chair of two parliamentary round tables on Lyme disease, I hear these concerns often from colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Would the Minister of Health inform this House on what steps she is taking with the new federal framework on Lyme disease to address the concerns of Canadians?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer this question, and I thank the member for New Brunswick Southwest for raising the issue of Lyme disease.

I was very pleased this morning to table here in the House a new federal framework for Lyme disease. This will address the federal role in responding to Lyme disease.

I was additionally very pleased to announce that we are investing \$4 million to develop, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, a Lyme disease research network. This will help to build the evidence to grow the data to be able to respond to, prevent, treat, and diagnose Lyme disease.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal cabinet indicated that it will not support the Canadian autism partnership in today's vote.

Canadians who have indicated support include the vast majority of Canada's autism community, plus the Canadian Association for Community Living, UNICEF Canada, Plan International Canada, Save the Children Canada, World Vision Canada, Global Citizen, Hayley Wickenheiser, Elliotte Friedman, and many others.

My question for the minister is this. In just a few minutes, can Canadians living with autism count on the fact that Liberal MPs will have the freedom to stand up for them?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my role as Minister of Health, I make sure that all Canadians have access to the health and health care that they need. This includes responding to the needs of Canadians affected by autism spectrum disorder. We do that through working with our provincial and territorial partners, who will be given \$200 billion of federal money over the next five years; we do that through research and have invested \$40 million in research into autism spectrum disorder; we do that through working in a cross-government mechanism, including working with my partner, who is the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, including working with my partner who allows the Canada child benefit and Canada disability benefit. We will do everything to make sure we address these needs.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, hiding small sentences that weaken Quebec in mammoth bills is becoming the Liberal government's specialty.

Paragraph 5(4)(d) of the part of Bill C-44 on the infrastructure bank says that the government can order that the bank be an agent of the crown.

Why give a private investment fund the power to circumvent provincial and municipal laws? Are wealthy Bay Street investors more important to this government than Quebecers?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the creation of the Canada infrastructure bank, we consulted very extensively with provinces, territories, municipalities, the private sector, institutional investors, and labour organizations. Our goal is to support municipalities and provinces to build more infrastructure that communities need. We work very closely with all of the provinces as we move forward with the design of it, as we move forward on the selection of the leadership of the infrastructure bank, as we move forward on the selection of the projects that are needed by our communities.

● (1510)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is primarily a gift for investors, and that is the problem. The government is basically giving the infrastructure privatization bank the power to expropriate people's land, like Ottawa did in Mirabel and Forillon. It is giving this bank the power to ignore agencies of public hearings on the environment and to disregard agricultural zoning. That is no joke. Why? It is to attract foreign investors who might be turned off by our way of doing things. That does not make any sense.

Will the government remove the part about the infrastructure bank that will allow companies to circumvent Quebec laws? We are tired of being walked all over.

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the legislation related to the bank is very clear. This is an optional tool for municipalities and provinces to use.

It is part of our overall extensive, ambitious infrastructure plan to invest more than \$186 billion, and out of that less than 10% will be invested through the bank. Again, it is optional. If they wish to do so, they can explore that option. If they wish not to do so, we will continue to support our provinces and municipalities through our traditional grant funding that is available to them.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Gordon Wyant, Minister of Justice and Attorney General for the Province of

Saskatchewan; and the Honourable Scott Moe, Minister of the Environment for the Province of Saskatchewan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair has received notice of several points of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Mr. Speaker, given the strange answer that I received, I thought there must be a problem with the interpretation. I would therefore like the opportunity to ask the parliamentary secretary my question again so that she can give an answer that is worthy of all the members for the Mauricie region.

The Deputy Speaker: I do not think that is a point of order. It is a matter of debate.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, given the partisan and troubling nature of the appointment of the new Commissioner of Official Languages, the main tool parliamentarians have is obviously committee testimony, particularly by the main person involved. I should point out that there is a contradiction between the answer given to the member for Outremont's question about membership in the Liberal Party and what was stated in a written document provided to committee members.

I would like the committee to report, in light of the work by the member for Drummond—

The Deputy Speaker: Once again, I believe this to be a point of debate. The hon. member should perhaps find other means, such as debates, to ask these questions.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, this is a point of order that relates to our Standing Orders, particularly Standing Orders 16 and 18, which taken together mean we should not be interrupting each other in this place, nor speaking disrespectfully of each other. I noted today that we did have a duck question, and I know that sometimes ministers do duck questions. I also know that there are many canards on all sides of this place and sometimes, as today, the atmosphere becomes foul.

I just wanted to suggest that when it is not our—

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that the hon. member began by citing one of the articles in the Standing Orders, but in fact I think we are getting into a continuation of question period.

[Translation]

I would now like to go back to the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly. I believe he is seeking unanimous consent to table a document.

● (1515)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I simply wanted to inform you that once the committee has tabled its report, we will be raising a question of privilege on this issue and the fact that, in light of the information provided, it would seem we were misled in committee by the new commissioner. I wanted to give you advance notice.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, in response to my question on the Liberal mismanagement of the search and rescue aircraft, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement implied that perhaps I was involved in pyromanic criminal activity.

I would like to give the opportunity to the member to perhaps apologize and retract his comments.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I was speaking metaphorically. I did not mean the hon. member actually started a fire.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

As I commented, these kinds of characterizations are usually unhelpful, and I think we will leave it at that.

Caron
Chong
Christopherson
Clement
Davies
Diotte
Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Duvall
Falk
Garrison
Genuis
Godin
Hardcastle
Hoback
Jeneroux
Kelly
Kitchen
Kusie
Lake
Laverdière
Leitch
Lobb
MacGregor
Maguire
Masse (Windsor West)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Moore
Mulcair
Nater
Nuttall
Paul-Hus
Quach
Rankin
Reid
Richards
Saganash
Saroya
Schmale
Shiple
Sorenson
Stewart
Stubbs
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Wagantall
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

Carrie
Choquette
Clarke
Cooper
Deltell
Doherty
Dubé
Dusseault
Eglinski
Finley
Généreux
Gladu
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Kent
Kmiec
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lebel
Liepert
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Malcolmson
Mathysen
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McKay
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Motz
Nantel
Nicholson
Obhrai
Poilievre
Raitt
Rayes
Rempel
Ritz
Sansoucy
Scheer
Shields
Sopuck
Stetski
Strahl
Sweet
Trost
Van Loan
Viersen
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Wong
Zimmer— 130

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

The House resumed from May 18 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 3:16 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Thursday, May 18, 2017, the House will now proceed with the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin relating to the business of supply. Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Shall I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[Chair read text of motion to House]

● (1525)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 286)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Aubin	Barlow
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Brown	Cannings

Aldag
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Boudrias
Breton
Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)
Chan
Cormier
Damoff
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Baylis
Beech
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Bratina
Brisson
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Chagger
Chen
Cuzner
DeCoursey
Dhillon
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca

Business of Supply

Fortier	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fry	Fuhr
Garneau	Gerretsen
Gill	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Harvey
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Joly
Jones	Jowhari
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Leslie	Levitt
Lightbound	Lockhart
Long	Longfield
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
McCrimmon	McDonald
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Mendicino	Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morneau	Murray
Nassif	Nault
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
O'Regan	Ouellette
Paradis	Pauzé
Peschisolido	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Plamondon
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Romanado	Rudd
Ruimy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Sangha
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Sohi
Spengemann	Ste-Marie
Tabbara	Tan
Tassi	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Young
Zahid — 167	

[Translation]

The Deputy 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.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess it is not a surprise to see the government, yet again, and I think we are starting to lose count, stop members of Parliament from speaking about important issues. We have really come to expect that.

I would say on this motion that we on this side have no problem working later hours. We represent Conservatives across the country, people across the country who work hard and who many times work late hours.

We have some issues with this motion. Does the House leader think it is right to extend the day so that the government can continue with its business, but not on the days the opposition has one day to bring forward an opposition day motion? That day cannot be extended. That day is only a half day. We are not asking for anything extra. We are just asking that there be a proportional amount of time given to the opposition parties on our opposition day as the government is asking for to conduct its business. It is not unreasonable. It is not the wrong thing to ask, just like when we were asking for collaboration on changing the Standing Orders. These are very reasonable things, but the government is being heavy-handed.

Can the House leader please tell me why the government will not support and cannot support that change to this motion?

● (1530)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that question. It is a member I work closely with.

I agree that collaboration is the best approach to take when we are representing Canadians, something the members opposite continue to do as they represent Conservatives. When they were in the government benches, that is exactly what they did. They represented Conservatives.

On this side, we represent Canadians, and that is the approach we are taking. That is why we want the constructive conversations to ensure that we are representing the best interests of all Canadians. That is why we are talking about inclusive growth.

When it comes to this specific motion, what we are talking about is extending the hours so we can advance the mandate Canadians have given us, so we can have the important debate, and so members of Parliament can represent their constituents.

When it comes to the opposition days, they will have the exact same hours they have always had. What we have done on this side is ensure that the opposition parties have full days. The previous government used to give us the shorter days. That is not the best approach. We know we can work better—

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[English]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

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 consideration of Government Business No. 14, the debate be not further adjourned.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Questions, the hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just heard something I never thought I would hear the House leader say, which was that they alone on that side represent Canadians, as if somehow to minimize those on this side who also represent Canadians. Maybe I should remind her that her side got 39.5% of the popular vote. That means that 61% did not vote for them. Where is the mandate they claim to have to work unilaterally to change the rules of this place? In what way is this motion congruous with the family-friendly agenda I thought the government claimed to have?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I did not mean any offence to the member or any of our colleagues. I can assure him that I was responding to the House leader of the official opposition and was referring to the previous Conservative government. It is a comment I made, and if I did offend the member, that was not my intention, and I have no problem retracting that comment.

When it comes to the motion before us, it is about extending the hours so we can advance and do the important work Canadians elected us to do. All members represent their constituencies. It is important that we hear their voices. It is important that we debate the legislation. It is important that we have the time to have a fruitful and meaningful debate. That is why we are suggesting a few more hours four days a week so we can advance the important work Canadians elected us to do. It is important legislation we will be discussing. I have no doubt that members would like to share the views of their constituents, and we would like to hear them.

The Deputy Speaker: I will just add, for the benefit of all hon. members, that usually in this 30-minute time period, most of the questions are accorded to opposition parties. It does not exclude time for questions from the government side as well, so we will try to make sure that balance is well kept.

Given the amount of interest in participating in this question period, I would ask members to keep their interventions to no more than a minute, both for the questions put and for the responses.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that the Liberals need extra time to keep their promises. They have already broken so many. I think they could follow their promises if they actually proposed legislation that accorded with them. One of the bills the Liberals want to rush through is actually a bill to increase the pay of cabinet ministers, and they are doing it under the guise of gender equality.

I asked the minister a question earlier this week, and she did not answer. I want to ask it again. Under Bill C-24, are junior ministers, who that minister says are equal, empowered to bring memorandums to cabinet, yes or no.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, there are many pieces of legislation that we know are important and that we would like to debate.

In response to the member's question, this is important legislation we would like to have sent to committee so that the committee can study it. They can scrutinize it. They can do clause by clause.

For me, a minister is a minister. That is exactly what the Prime Minister has said. We know that the Minister of Democratic

Institutions, the Minister of Science, and the Minister of Status of Women are equal ministers. We know how important that work is to Canadians. We will continue working hard for Canadians.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the point has already been made that we are very willing to work as late as we need to, but I have a question for the government House leader on the pathetic record of passing legislation, 19 bills in 18 months, compared to the previous government's record of 52 bills. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result. What is the government going to do differently?

Will the government House leader recognize that she has destroyed trust with the other opposition House leaders and step down?

• (1535)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we get to work. What this government has done differently is that we have meaningful debate to really encourage members of Parliament to share the views of their constituents and to be okay with having a diversity of opinions.

When we talk about diversity being our strength in Canada, we are not just talking about diversity of the selves we occupy. We are talking about diversity of opinion, experience, and knowledge. That is why debate is so important. That is why the work committees do is so important. They can hear from witnesses. They can hear from stakeholders. They can study and scrutinize legislation clause by clause.

These are all important steps in the process we undergo, something the previous government did not understand. We recognize the important work committees do. That is why we will continue to let them do the good work they do. That is why we have increased resources for them as well.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now that the hon. government House leader has retracted her comments about the important work the government is doing and that the opposition is doing, I will ask a simple question.

In the spirit of truth and transparent ways and real change, will the Liberals not recognize the importance of opposition supply days and extend the hours on those opposition supply days so that they are similar to the hours on the normal days of business the government wishes to extend?

Why not see the opposition supply days as having the same level of importance Canadians already see and the opposition parties already see? Will the government House leader see the same level of importance placed on the supply days for opposition members?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the member's question.

Business of Supply

What we are saying is that sitting a few extra hours for four days a week, for the last few weeks of this session, will allow us to debate more legislation.

When it comes to the opposition supply days the member is referring to, they will have the exact same hours they have always had. Something that is different from the previous government, and that the member might not know, is that with this government, what I have tried to do consciously is ensure that the opposition has full days, the long days. There are days we sit in this House that are half days, shorter days, and there are days that are longer days.

When we choose supply days for the opposition parties, we always provide for a long day, something Mr. Harper and the previous government never did. They often provided for a half day, because they did not think the opposition's work was that important. We recognize the important points the opposition brings. We appreciate the constructive feedback. We want to hear from all constituents. We want to represent all Canadians.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the government House leader should talk to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard about when he allocated Friday as an opposition day during the previous session.

On this side of the House, we are happy, eager, and willing to debate the important issues Canadians elected us to debate. However, time after time, when we debate the issues in the House, the members on that side simply do not debate. The member for Winnipeg North is the only one standing up, the only one standing up to debate and the only one standing up to ask questions and make comments.

My question is simple. If we extend the hours of the House, will other Liberal backbenchers be unmuzzled so they can actually speak in debate in this House?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, when we ran in the last election we made a commitment to Canadians for an open and transparent government. We encourage members of Parliament to represent the voices of their constituents, to ensure that when we are advancing legislation, all of those opinions have been heard. We know that when we work better together we can improve legislation so it is good legislation for Canadians. That is who we are all here to serve.

When it comes to respecting the time in this place, we know there are many members on the opposition often saying they do not have enough—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. I am having a hard time hearing the answer with the shouting going back and forth. I know it started during question period. I am just hoping that it does not continue for at least the next two hours while I am sitting in the chair.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we on this side try really hard to ensure that we respect this place. I am sure members on both sides do the same.

When it comes to making sure that all members have an opportunity to share the views of their constituents, we will always ensure that the members opposite have their time. If that means that we need to share our time, we always do that. That is why I believe we can work better together. We can collaborate to ensure that all voices are heard.

• (1540)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, every single opposition member is willing to work overtime. We are willing to come in for whatever time frame the government House leader wants to put us in, whatever hours. That is what Canadians expect. Canadians from all across Canada expect us to work whatever hours it takes to make sure we are standing up for Canadians, being the voice of our electors.

Let me remind my hon. colleague that this is not the Liberals' House. It is Canadians' House, and we will work as long as we have to. We are all agreeing on this side of the House that we will work as long as it takes. We have all of the opposition members in agreement. I will ask again. Will the House leader agree to extend the opposition supply days?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member confirming for the record that all members work hard in this place and that this place belongs to Canadians. That is exactly who we are here to represent. That is exactly the commitment we made to Canadians. That is why we encourage meaningful debate, and that is why we encourage all members to share the views of their constituents so that we can ensure it is good legislation that is advancing.

In the previous Parliament, when the government decided to extend sittings in June 2014, Liberal members supported that motion. None of us are strangers to hard work. We know that Canadians work hard, and we need to work hard for them.

Let us talk really quickly about some of the important pieces of legislation that we will be advancing by extending hours. We are talking about Bill C-44, which implements our budget 2017. The bill is about creating good middle-class jobs today while preparing Canadians for the jobs of tomorrow. I am sure the member will agree that is important work we all need to do together.

There is Bill C-25, which encourages federally regulated companies to promote gender parity on boards of directors and to publicly report on the gender balance on boards, and Bill C-24, which was referred to earlier and seeks to formalize equal status among the ministerial team and level the playing field to ensure a one-tier ministry, that a minister is a minister, recognizing the important work they do.

The list goes on, but I will respect that other members have questions to which I look forward to responding.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the House leader's availability here. She mentioned Bill C-44, the budget implementation act. That just came off the finance committee. Liberal members did not even defend their own legislation as amendments were put up by opposition members.

Business of Supply

She said that we are all here to represent our communities. We are actually all here to hold the government to account, and if we are not members of the executive of the government, then it is our job to come in and talk about the issues of the day. By not allowing opposition days, the ability for us to hear from their backbench on what they think the issue is, she is actually not just demoting the opposition's ability to raise issues; she is actually diminishing the ability of her own members. Does she not recognize that by giving us less time than government business she is actually hurting her own members' ability to stand up and talk about a record that she may or may not have?

Does she agree that by not allowing an equal amount of debate, she is not allowing her own members of Parliament to stand up in this place and enter debate?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly positive what the member is trying to say. Of course, we want all members of Parliament to share the views of their constituents. We recognize that the government has an important job to do, which is to advance the mandate that Canadians have given us. We recognize that the members in the opposition hold the government to account, but we are brought to this place by Canadians. They elect us. We represent our constituents.

Oftentimes we wear many different hats and it is important to do so. Oftentimes we hear opinions that we might not appreciate or might not share, but it is important that we listen to them because that diversity of thought is important so that we can advance legislation that works for all Canadians in the best interests of Canadians.

That is part of the commitment I made to my constituents of Waterloo. I will continue working hard for them. As the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, I represent stakeholders that are small businesses, I recognize the importance of the tourism industry, and I recognize their importance as economic drivers. With my hat of the government House leader I recognize the importance of advancing legislation through this place as well as ensuring that there is meaningful debate.

There are many hats that we wear. Outside of this place we are sisters and mothers and aunts and friends. We have to balance all of those, and it is important work that we do in the commitments that we make to Canadians. We will ensure we provide the opportunities for those opinions and those thoughts to be shared, and I look forward to hearing them. This is not about less or more. This is about all members doing the good work that they do, and that is why we will continue to work together and to encourage the opposition to work closely with the government to ensure that all views are heard.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is passing strange to hear the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons talk about the fine principles that she does not apply.

When the leader of the government says we are here to represent all Canadians, I agree, of course. However, we do, precisely, represent all Canadians, those who voted for the government and those who voted for the official opposition, for the second parliamentary opposition group, for my good friends in the Bloc

Québécois, and for the Green Party. We represent all the textures of the Canadian fabric.

Why, then, when it comes time to debate questions raised by the opposition on opposition days, do the exceptional rules become blunted with time?

We want to allow the government to extend speaking time and sitting days; we are not in disagreement on that, since we know the legislative agenda is a full one. However, the matters that are raised by the official opposition, duly elected by Canadians, are pushed aside.

[English]

This is the House of Commons, and the House of Commons represents every Canadian. Those who voted for the Liberals, those who voted for the opposition parties, this is a place for everybody. This is the House of Commons of Canada. Shall the government respect it for once?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I am a proud Canadian and I respect my country and the people who work hard for it every single day. I will continue to do that.

I am not exactly sure what the member is referring to. I agree it is the House of Commons. I agree we are all elected to this place by Canadians. I agree that every opinion matters, and that is why we encourage meaningful debate. That was not the case under the previous government, but it is the case under this government because that is the commitment we made.

[Translation]

We have a lot of things to get done over the next few weeks. Our government has an ambitious legislative agenda on which we need to make as much progress as possible so we are able to honour the commitments we made to Canadians in the last election.

I hope that before we go back to our ridings, in four weeks' time, we will be able to have open and honest debates about the government's priorities, and we will be able to work together to achieve progress on the agenda for which Canadians sent us here.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I agree with what the parliamentary secretary to the House leader said the other day when he said that many of us work these kinds of hours anyway, but I thought the government was trying to make Parliament more family friendly.

Using this tactic to keep people sitting late, I just wondered if the government House leader could comment on whether she thinks that is a family-friendly initiative.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is mistaken. What we are providing for is an opportunity to debate important legislation to ensure that members of Parliament can actually advance and share the concerns and views of their constituents. Members want to debate legislation. We are providing the opportunity to debate that legislation. Under the previous government there was a similar motion. Liberal members supported it because we know the importance of debating legislation in this place. We are sent here to do that work.

When it came to modernizing this place and having the conversation the member referred to, it was clear that the members of the Conservative Party had no desire, no appetite to have that conversation. I released a discussion paper. There was no desire from the members opposite to discuss that or to share that conversation, and there might be concerns that we shared it with the public.

This place belongs to the people of Canada. That is who we are here to represent, and we want to ensure that their voices are heard. That is why it was an open and transparent discussion paper, shared with members of Parliament, shared with the public, because that is who this place belongs to.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go to the next question and comment, we were doing so well. I want to remind hon. members, and one member in particular. I will not name him and I will not say that it is a him.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has been ducking the question so far. The issue is time allocation and the Liberals use of it again. I looked up the word “hypocrisy” on DuckDuckGo. It said, “An act or instance of such falseness” and “The practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess; falseness.”

That side of the House ran on the promise of doing things better, the sunny ways, improving the decorum in the House, a better way of managing the House business. So far, we just do not see that. Instead the Liberals have resorted to what in the HR world we call “wing flaps”. It is just a couple of things they have done here and there and no actual achievements at the end of the day. Why are they moving on this? Why is the member continuing to duck the simple question? Why is there a lack of democracy on that side of the House?

• (1550)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that there would be a member of the Conservative Party that would pass blame just to one side. Every single one of us is elected to this place. Every single one of us has a responsibility to work better together. That is the attempt that I have been making and I will continue to make that attempt. Every single time we try to advance a desire to collaborate, there are some members who do try, but there are other members who do not have the desire or the appetite. I will continue to endeavour to make this place a place that represents all Canadians because we know that all voices need to be heard.

We had an attempt with the discussion paper to modernize this place to bring in more stability so that members would have a more predictable schedule, so that they could do their important work in the House as well as for their constituents. There was no desire from

the members opposite to have that conversation. I shared a letter with my colleagues on the opposite side, the House leaders in the opposition, to say that if there is no desire to have that conversation, then there are only so many tools that we have in the government benches, which is no different from the fact that there are limited tools in the opposition benches.

What we know is that we can modernize this place. There is no desire to do so. We understand that and when the desire is there from the opposition benches, my door will remain open as it always has, and I welcome the opportunity to work better together.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to an earlier question from my colleagues as to why the Liberals would not allow the Conservatives when they had an opposition day motion to have extended hours, my colleague responded that they always give us the longer days as opposed to giving us one of the shortened days of Friday or Monday.

On May 13, 2016, a Monday, the government gave the opposition a shortened day. I would like my hon. colleague to retract her comments and correct the record. She indicated many times today that the House is for Canadians. Could she explain to Canadians why the opposition day motions are not important enough for us to have a longer time to debate them, the same as for the government legislation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the words we choose and the opinions that we have are different and that is the beauty of this place, the diversity of opinions.

Monday is actually referred to as a long day in the House of Commons. This is why in the discussion paper I said that most Canadians start their day at 9 a.m. or earlier, so why can this place not function at 9 a.m. or earlier? There was no desire from the opposition benches to have that conversation, but I will once again say that my door is open and I look forward to those conversations because we know that Canadians work hard and that we work hard.

When it comes to the word “always”, I apologize if the word was disheartening to the member. I am saying that there was a theme under the previous government where oftentimes it was the shortened days that were provided to the opposition benches when it came to discussing opposition motions, “supply days” as they are referred to. We know that those supply days are important days. We know that the conversations, the discussions, the advancement of things that Canadians want to talk about are being brought forward by the opposition and are important. That is why we tend to always want to give them long days, because we want to hear those opinions.

We are talking about inclusive growth. We want the whole country to succeed from coast to coast to coast. We are talking about inclusive growth, not just urban areas but rural and remote as well. That is why we are making the investments we are talking about. That is why for the important legislation that we want to advance, we are saying, let us sit a couple more hours every day for four days for four more weeks. Let us debate this legislation and advance the important work that Canadians sent us here to do.

Business of Supply

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to object to the motion but, at the same time, in a very non-partisan spirit, understand what has happened here. I am not part of one of the so-called recognized parties. It exists only in the Canadian parliamentary tradition that there are two classes of MPs, which does not happen in any other commonwealth nation. However, it means I am excluded from the discussion among House leaders.

As someone who served in the 41st Parliament, it was obvious to me that the attitude of the opposition benches were divided and very rarely formed any kind of unified opposition to the Conservatives in power. The House leaders on the opposition benches of the recognized parties in the 42nd Parliament have operated hand in glove to obstruct very frequently, with dilatory motions that the member now be heard or that the House do now adjourn. I could see the time slipping away in an hourglass in front of me as clear as day and I was afraid this would be the inevitable result.

I stand lamenting all of it. It means that as the sole member of Parliament for the Green Party, I will be here every night until midnight, working very hard to do those things that still need to be done.

I urge the government House leader not to adopt the tactics that the other opposition House leaders wish to push her to do. The more the Liberals adopt Harper tactics, the more painful it will be for all of us and, ultimately, for the Liberals themselves. We must not allow the use of late sittings, closure of debate, or reducing the scope of individual MPs to become the norm even when it looks like we are running out of time.

In a very non-partisan spirit, this is lamentable but I understand what has just happened.

•(1555)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the words the hon. member has shared. We have had conversations. I have tried to strengthen and encourage my team to work better with all parties in this place, whether officially recognized or not, because I know every member does important work in this place and there are perspectives we need to hear. Once again, it is important we look for opinions and bring them to the table.

One thing I often do is look around the table to see whose voices have not been heard and ensure we listen to them so we can better represent our entire country. When we hear those perspectives and celebrate the diversity of our country and diversity of thought, we will have better legislation that works better for all Canadians.

I will continue to endeavour to make this a better place for all of us to work better together. We have an ambitious agenda that we need to advance. Canadians sent us here to do important work and that is the agenda I would like for us to debate.

I do not want to take opportunities away from opposition members. That is why some of the dilatory tactics have been played. We have continued to be supportive and allowed members to do so because they have that right in this place. I believe members brought us here to debate legislation. We will continue to provide as much information as we can so we can debate the important bills before us. We would like to see certain pieces of legislation referred to

committees so they can bring in witnesses, stakeholders, and really scrutinize the legislation.

I used the word “allow”, but that is not what I meant, though I am sure one member is definitely upset by it. At the same time, we became aware of it and let it be because every member has important work to do. We recognize that every member has a role to play and we really do appreciate the work all members do.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question on the motion 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.

•(1635)

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

(*Division No. 287*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brison
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chan	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore

Business of Supply

Finnigan	Fisher	Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Fonseca	Fortier	Dusseault	Duvall
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)	Eglinski	Falk
Fry	Fuhr	Finley	Fortin
Garneau	Gerretsen	Garrison	Généreux
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale	Genius	Gill
Gould	Graham	Gladu	Godin
Grewal	Hajdu	Gourde	Hardcastle
Harvey	Holland	Harder	Hoback
Housefather	Hussen	Hughes	Jeneroux
Hutchings	Iacono	Johns	Kelly
Joly	Jones	Kent	Kitchen
Jowhari	Kang	Kmiec	Kusie
Khalid	Khera	Kwan	Lake
Lametti	Lamoureux	Lauson (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Laverdière
Lapointe	Lebouthillier	Lebel	Leitch
Lefebvre	Lemieux	Liepert	Lobb
Leslie	Levitt	Lukivski	MacGregor
Lightbound	Lockhart	MacKenzie	Maguire
Long	Longfield	Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)	Mathysen	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney	McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)		McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
May (Cambridge)		Moore	Motz
McCrimmon	McDonald	Mulcair	Nantel
McKay	McKenna	Nater	Nicholson
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Nuttall	Obhrai
Mendès	Mendicino	Paul-Hus	Pauzé
Mihychuk	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)	Plamondon	Poilievre
Soeurs)		Quach	Raitt
Monsef	Murray	Rankin	Rayes
Nassif	Nault	Reid	Rempel
Ng	O'Connell	Richards	Ritz
Oliphant	Oliver	Saganash	Sansoucy
O'Regan	Ouellette	Saroya	Scheer
Paradis	Peschisolido	Schmale	Shields
Peterson	Petitpas Taylor	Shiple	Sopuck
Philpott	Picard	Sorenson	Ste-Marie
Poissant	Qualtrough	Stetski	Stewart
Ratansi	Rioux	Strahl	Stubbs
Robillard	Rodriguez	Sweet	Thériault
Romanado	Rota	Tilson	Trost
Rudd	Ruimy	Trudel	Van Loan
Rusnak	Sahota	Vecchio	Vierse
Saini	Sajjan	Wagantall	Warawa
Samson	Sangha	Warkentin	Watts
Sarai	Scarpaleggia	Waugh	Webber
Schiefke	Schulte	Weir	Wong
Serré	Sgro	Yurdiga	Zimmer— 138
Shanahan	Sheehan		
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)		
Sikand	Sohi		
Spengemann	Tabbara		
Tan	Tassi		
Vandal	Vaughan		
Virani	Whalen		
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould		
Wrzesnewskyj	Young		
Zahid— 159			

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

RESUMING DEBATE

The House resumed from May 29 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up debate on the motion, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader had 10 minutes remaining in his time for debate.

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, it is a pleasure to rise to address what I just witnessed. I am a little disappointed in the official opposition. Under its new leadership, I hoped we would see a new direction along with that. I was also disappointed with the New Democratic Party. One of the things I have really appreciated over the years is that there is a time when—

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We are taking up debate under government orders now, so I would ask members who are making their way to other business this afternoon that does not require them to be here in the House that they do that now, and we will get under way with the debate and the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader.

• (1640)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, I have been a parliamentarian for a good number of years.

I must say I am disappointed in the opposition for not recognizing that the motion before us is not meant to be a surprise in any fashion. Stephen Harper brought forward similar motions. In fact, this particular motion is almost identical to the motion that the Conservatives raised when they felt it was necessary to have extended hours so that they could get the job done.

When I was in opposition we debated a similar motion. I voted, as did my Liberal caucus colleagues, in favour of that motion. Why? It was because we respect the fact that Canadians expect us to sit even if that means we have to put in a bit of overtime. I do not know why the Conservatives and New Democrats do not recognize the importance of getting the job done. Many Canadians in all regions of our country recognize that, and they at times have to put in a little extra effort in order to get the job done. On this side of the House, the Government of Canada is committed to getting the job done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind hon. members that someone is speaking and there is a rumble going around. The member has to raise his voice so that we can hear him over the noise. I am sure he will adjust accordingly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is not easy having to raise my voice in order to be heard at times.

We have a Prime Minister, a government, and at least one caucus within the chamber that understand the importance of having an ambitious agenda and a productive chamber. That is what we have voted for today, recognizing that there is a need at times to put in a few extra hours. That is what Canadians expect. I believe Canadians would be disappointed with both the official opposition and the New Democrats for their behaviour in voting against having the extended sitting time.

It is an aggressive agenda, and this is nothing new. Whether it is in a provincial legislature or here on Parliament Hill, often parliamentarians are asked to extend sitting hours in the month of June in order to get the job done. What I have seen this afternoon from opposition members is disappointing, but that is okay because when I am back at home I will reaffirm to my constituents the significant amount of effort and work we have been able to accomplish even though the opposition did not want to sit those extended hours. We will continue, because at the end of the day we recognize the importance.

In terms of an aggressive agenda, let me highlight a couple of reasons why we need to extend the sitting hours. A legislative agenda deals in two parts, from my perspective. One is budgetary matters. The other is legislative matters. There is a full agenda on both accounts.

When we look at budgetary measures and what the government has been able to achieve in a relatively short period of time, I believe

Canadians would welcome the type of productivity we have seen from the Government of Canada. We can start off by listing a few of those items that started just 14 or 15 months ago when we had a budget that saw the largest single decrease to middle-class income tax in recent history. Hundreds of millions of dollars were put back in the form of tax cuts to Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it. We saw a special increase in tax for Canada's wealthiest. On the tax break for the middle class, the Conservatives voted against it. On the tax increase on Canada's wealthiest, the NDP voted against it. One has to wonder what they are thinking.

Going further into the budget, we have the Canada child benefit program, which I have talked about on numerous occasions. It is lifting tens of thousands of children out of poverty. Do I need to remind the House how the Conservatives and NDP voted? Once again, they voted together saying they did not want to see that happen.

We had the guaranteed income supplement increase for seniors, again lifting thousands of seniors out of poverty in different regions of our country. Once again, the opposition voted against that.

Then we have one of the most significant investments in Canada's infrastructure that we have ever seen. It has been very interesting. The opposition we are getting from that does not make sense. Canadians understand. They want a government that is going to invest in our infrastructure. By investing in our infrastructure, we are creating opportunities for jobs and for communities to be developed and move forward. We see day after day the Conservatives and NDP taking exception and criticizing the types of expenditures. These are historic levels of infrastructure dollars being spent.

I sit behind the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and I am so proud of the way he is handling the issue of the infrastructure bank that is a part of budget 2017. We need to put into perspective that we are investing more in infrastructure than any other government. At the same time, we are putting aside additional money for the creation of an infrastructure bank. That is over and above, and that is something I believe Canadians would welcome.

• (1645)

There are some municipalities and provinces that will be able to take advantage of that. When those municipalities and provinces are able to do that, we will see more money being created for some of our smaller communities, as the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities talked about in regard to the \$2 billion delegated to rural municipalities. Again, this is something that is completely new, something that Stephen Harper never thought of. We did not see that commitment.

I believe in the last week or so we have had more infrastructure projects approved than the previous Conservative government did in four years. This is a government that is committed to action, because we believe in Canada's middle class. We understand that to support our middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it, we have to invest in Canadians, we have to invest in the infrastructure. That is something this government is prepared to do.

Business of Supply

We have legislation on which I look forward to hearing debate. Today, for example, we are talking about the legalization of marijuana. I heard the naysayers in the Conservative Party demonstrating just how out of touch they are with Canadians. I am glad and grateful that the NDP members seem to be offside with the Conservatives on this, and it would appear they will support us in having the bill go to committee. I applaud them on breaking their voting patterns with the Conservatives, and I look forward to having some ongoing support on this particular issue.

Let there be no doubt that, when we talk about that one piece of legislation—and I am looking forward to the debate—it is time we recognized that something needs to be done. Today we have more young people engaged with cannabis than any other country in the developed world. The status quo has been a total and absolute failure, and yet we have the Conservative Party asking what is wrong with that and who cares if we have the worst record in the developed countries. They are not prepared to do anything on the issue.

We in government are saying that is not good enough. We have faith in our young people and we believe that the time for change is now. After all, we have talked about real change, and this is a government that will deliver real change. We have seen that on numerous pieces of legislation. That is not to mention the air passenger bill that is being proposed and so much other legislation that we want to debate, and I look forward to seeing that debate in the coming weeks.

● (1650)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our colleague across the way has been in the House for much longer than I have. He knows that we do not have to raise our voice to be heard, but he tends to scream a lot. He feels that the louder his voice is, the more we will believe him.

Perhaps we should talk to the Canadians who are tuning in and those who may be in the gallery. The reality is, with regard to what we voted down or tried to vote down, that the opposition parties' stance on this was that supply day motions, for which the opposition was trying to get extended hours, are important too. Supply day motions or supply days for opposition are opportunities for us to talk about important issues, such as the Liberal government's mismanagement of the softwood lumber file, where Canadians from coast to coast are losing their jobs because there is not a softwood lumber agreement in place.

A supply day opportunity for the opposition would allow us an extended period of time to discuss this. There are 184 seats across the way that the government has, and this member continues to be the only one who stands up.

All we are asking is to have the same importance placed on the opposition supply days so that not only the opposition, but indeed the members of Parliament, the backbencher members of Parliament who do not get a say, could talk about how valuable things such as a negotiated new softwood lumber agreement would be so that they are not losing jobs in their ridings.

In the same spirit of debate and loudness, does the hon. member not see that the importance and the value of placing the importance on an opposition supply day should be the same as what he is talking

with extending the hours of the normal days of business for the government?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will not give the definition of “hypocrisy”, but what I will tell the member is that when Stephen Harper was the prime minister, he introduced virtually the very same motion. I would challenge members to come across the way and tell me the difference between Stephen Harper's motion and the motion that we will be voting on.

In that motion, did he give any time? Did those 100-plus Conservative MPs say, “Look, we want more opposition days”? No. When I was sitting in opposition, did I say, “We want more opposition days”? No. Why? It was because we recognize that when it comes to June, often parliamentarians are expected to put in some overtime.

What is wrong with putting in some overtime? Canadians do that all the time. We can do the same thing.

The members asked about these wonderful, beautiful oppositions days. I am a big fan of them. The government House leader is a big fan of them. In fact, we have our opposition days on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Stephen Harper had some on Wednesdays and Fridays, known as the “short days”.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a comment.

The ethical bar has reached such a level that the Liberals have espoused Stephen Harper as their object to meet, which says something about them on many levels, from climate change action to the things that take place here in this House.

Congratulations to the Liberals on measuring themselves to the ethical bar of Stephen Harper.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to provide some comments. I take it that it is kind of open-ended.

I listened to campaigns, as the member across the way has listened to campaigns in the past. We also have the opportunity to provide places for the NDP to provide all sorts of feedback. One of the things I have always found interesting as part of their campaign platform the idea of a balanced budget. I think that brought the Conservatives and the NDP together. In fact, the Conservatives and the NDP vote together more often than not.

At the end of the day, if the member is trying to say that we are no different from the Harper government, I would argue that he is dead wrong. All members need to do is take a look at our commitment to Canada's middle class, including the middle-class tax break, as I pointed out; the increase to Canada's taxes on our wealthiest; the child benefit program; the GIS, the tax-free portion that has been offered; housing programs; and infrastructure. There is so much in there that is very progressive.

Unfortunately, the NDP, the party that claims to be progressive, the same party that said it was going to balance budgets at all costs, continues to vote against these progressive policy announcements.

Business of Supply

•(1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has referred several times to the government's ambitious plan for Canada. Indeed, we all acknowledge that this ambition for Canada was sorely lacking during the 10 years under the Harper government.

Job creation rates hit their lowest point since the Second World War, with GDP growth among the lowest in the G7 and G8. We can see that with the progressive policies the government has put forward, 250,000 full-time jobs have been created in recent months. We now have an unemployment rate among the lowest in recent years, and not only that, but we have also lifted 300,000 children out of poverty through the Canada child benefit.

The parliamentary secretary talked about infrastructure. Does he not think that the reason our colleagues on the other side of the House do not want to sit as long and do not want us to put forward this ambitious agenda, which is working, is precisely that they do not want our government to achieve these results, that Canadians sorely need, and what they voted for in the last election?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciate the question, because it allows me to highlight just how successful this government has been.

We, in a relatively short time period, have been able to generate literally hundreds of thousands of jobs. It is the trends that are really of concern, and the trend is very encouraging for Canada today. I would argue that it is because we have a government that is prepared to invest in our country and invest in education and things of that nature.

Just the other day I was talking with the minister responsible for businesses, the government House leader. There has been an 11% increase in tourism from 2016 over 2015. More international visas are being issued. Canada is growing. We are going in the right direction.

Time does not allow me to be able to talk about all the wonderful things that have taken place in a relatively short time span. One of my constituents said to me, and I made reference to this in the past, that he truly believes that this government has achieved more success in a relatively short time than Stephen Harper did in 10 years in government. Who am I to argue with my constituent? I believe he is correct.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary earlier made some rather disparaging remarks about the idea of balanced budgets. In my riding and in most Canadian households, people operate on the principle of balanced budgets, as do most businesses. If they do not, they are not around very long.

I would like to correct a statement I made earlier in the House today. I indicated that on May 13, 2016, the government allotted the official opposition an opposition day, and I said it was a Monday. I was incorrect. It was a Friday, so we actually had two and a quarter hours on an opposition day, in spite of the House leader's comment that they "always" provide longer days on opposition days. I would

like my colleague to comment on the idea of allowing the opposition day to have equal time when it comes to discussing issues that are important for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way has to understand that he was one of the members in the government that moved the very same motion. Today he voted against the motion that he voted in favour of when Stephen Harper was the prime minister. The member did not stand in his place back then and argue that the opposition should have additional days. As I said, I will not give the definition of hypocrisy.

In regard to the issue of deficits, the Liberal government does not have to take any advice from the Conservatives. Stephen Harper inherited a multi-billion-dollar surplus, and before the recession was even under way, he turned it into a multi-billion-dollar deficit. The Conservatives ran a deficit from then on, despite trying to give the impression of a balanced budget. At the end of the day, that was not necessarily true either.

We do not need—

•(1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order. The hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, if you review the ruling of Mr. Speaker Parent on December 1, 1998, the word "hypocrisy" is considered unparliamentary language. I think the member should withdraw it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if we look at *Beauchesne's*, we see that everything depends on the context in which a word is used. That is my understanding of it. I am sure you will find that at times the word "hypocrisy" has been stated in the House. I was very gentle to my Conservative friends in using it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will look into that and get back to the House if necessary. Thank you for bringing that up that point.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton and I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

I will talk about something that no one wants to talk about. When a party is elected on a promise of real change, and then the time comes to move a motion to extend the sitting hours, when its only defence is that another party did the same thing, well, that is completely ridiculous.

I did not expect to hear such a thing from the parliamentary secretary. That member always has a lot to say, and it is almost always him who deals with issues related to the rules and motions. I will have the pleasure of quoting the parliamentary secretary extensively for the next few minutes, because some of his past statements have been rather surprising.

Business of Supply

I listened carefully and with great interest to the parliamentary secretary. As difficult as that may be, I actually did. I made a point of listening. I found myself tapping my fingers a few times. I heard something that really surprised me. He seemed to say that we on this side of the House did not want to work. He seemed to say that we would be voting against the motion so as not to extend the sitting hours. That is not at all true. We want to work hard and we are willing to work until midnight. We want to roll up our sleeves and get to work passing bills. We want to ensure that our voice is heard on every botched bill this government has introduced. On the contrary, the longer we have to do this, the happier we will be. We can work until midnight, or until two or three in the morning. That is no problem.

There is a problem when the government decides that it is not important to hear what opposition members have to say about issues they care about, such as autism and Canada's position on softwood lumber. That is the problem. Why make that distinction?

The Liberals want to extend the sitting hours, make their case, and show that they have good bills that are worthwhile passing. In that case, why does the government not let the opposition make good suggestions and prove it would be worthwhile spending more time debating certain files? For example, on the whole autism spectrum disorder issue, the Liberal members did not have enough time. They did not hear our message or that of Canadians and families living with autism. That is why this afternoon the Liberals voted against the opposition motion to help people and families living with autism. They needed more time.

Unfortunately, paragraph (j) of Motion No. 14 states:

...proceedings on any opposition motion shall conclude no later than 5:30 p.m. on the sitting day that is designated for that purpose, except on a Monday when they shall conclude at 6:30 p.m. or on a Friday when they shall conclude at 1:30 p.m.;

They are very willing to talk about their bills, but they are not interested in what opposition members have to say. That is the problem.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member.

[*English*]

I just want to remind the hon. members that debate is taking place. It is nice to see the conversation happen, but it would be nicer to have it at a lower level. There is no need to talk loudly.

The hon. member.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I invite the parliamentary secretary to listen to the rest, as it is very interesting. I would add that I was hanging on his every word throughout his speech,

As I was saying, when we want to voice our points of view, on the opposition side, it does not work. The Liberals do not want to hear them, and as a result, they make serious mistakes, like the one they made this afternoon when they voted against the autism motion. It would be very much to the government's advantage to demonstrate good will and allow the opposition the time it needs during these long, hard sittings we will be starting shortly.

This evening, I am going to talk about Bill C-46, after motion No. 14 is passed. I have things to say to the government about what has been done badly in the bill. I am pleased to have the time to do it and to stay here late tonight to voice my disagreement on several aspects of Bill C-46. However, I would also have liked the government to acknowledge, with just as much enthusiasm, that when we have something to say, it may be equally interesting.

I understand why the government is in a hurry and absolutely wants to extend sitting times. It is because few government bills have received royal assent since the start of the session. By contrast, in the first 18 months of the Harper government, more than twice as many government bills had received royal assent.

In short, the Liberals are in a bit of trouble, because the bills they present to the House are slipshod and do not really reflect what Canadians expect. Canadians expect that the government will prepare good bills. This is not because of a shortage of consultation, however, since the Liberals have done nothing else since the beginning. They consult a group on the left before making a decision, then they go and consult another group to find out whether the decision is satisfactory. Then they raise the subject in the House and we discuss it. For some time, however, they have been preventing the opposition from talking about it. They pass a closure motion, and they send the bill to the Senate. That is where the big problems start for the government, because its bills come back with amendments.

That is the new way that things are done. They wanted to elect independent senators. They told them that they would be able to state their opinions and their wisdom would be used to improve bills, but what happens when there are amendments to the bills? Everyone is up in arms, the government sends them back, telling them that this was not their job and it does not accept their changes. The result is that the government is unable to get its bills passed.

If the goal was to embark on an ambitious agenda to speed up the passage of crucial programs for Canadians, then why not? However, that is not happening. They are being asked to attend to urgent matters. For example, this afternoon, the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities had a discussion about the defunct Bill C-30, which is set to expire in August. The government addressed this very recently through the Minister of Transport's Bill C-49, an omnibus bill that changes just about every transportation-related law imaginable. Then the government realized that part of the bill absolutely had to go through before August or western grain producers would run into problems, so the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was told there had been a little mistake and it would have to speed up its study of the whole bill in order to pass this one little measure.

We moved a motion to split the bill so the government could get the job done faster, achieve its goals, and deal with grain producers' concerns. I am looking forward to its response. We have come up with some good, reasonable proposals to move this country's legislation and files forward, but nothing the opposition suggests is good enough for the government. That is the problem.

Business of Supply

The government wants our trust, but that is hard. Remember Motion No. 6 and the attempts to change the rules of the House, not to mention the consultations that never happened on partisan appointments as in the case of Mrs. Meilleur? The government wants our trust and says it is going to work hard, but it is making no promises not to take full advantage of this extraordinary measure to change the rules of the House. That brings me to our other condition: the government must pledge not to move a motion to change the rules of the House. Maybe then it will have the people's support.

● (1705)

In short, we are ready to work. To conclude, I am going to quote the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, who told the *Hill Times*, in an article published on May 29, that their goal was to feel productive inside the House of Commons.

Giving the impression of being productive does not produce anything. It simply gives the impression of work. What we want is some real work. We want to work late, and we are prepared to do that and to collaborate with the government, but we are asking it for two little things. If the government really wants us to recommend its bills and if it really wants us to help it move its agenda forward, which is not as ambitious as all that, I would note in passing, then let it give us, too, the opportunity to make our motions and to present our concerns as they relate to Canadians. The government will then certainly have the support of our party and the official opposition.

This is an invitation to collaborate that I know will go nowhere.

● (1710)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

It is sad to see that this party, which prorogued the House and was accused of contempt of Parliament, is now calling for a debate on bills. In addition, the member's party spent seven days debating a question of privilege instead of focusing on legislation and the tangible things that we do here in the House to improve the fates and lives of middle-class Canadians.

I would ask my hon. colleague whether he could clarify the approach he intends to take, now that we are probably going to be sitting for extended hours here. Will his party commit to having a somewhat more constructive attitude toward debate, to participating, and to offering real alternatives to this government to improve the lives of the middle class?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I will commit to one thing: every time I rise to speak in the House, I will speak for taxpayers, the people whose grandchildren are going to have to pay the enormous deficits the Liberals will be leaving us over the next few years. That is a commitment I can make.

The other commitment I can make is to get my colleague to understand that the role of the official opposition is not to always agree with what the government says or to agree with how it does things. Its role is to make the voices of Canadians who do not think like them heard.

My colleague from Sarnia—Lambton, all my colleagues here present, and I, personally, make that commitment before the House.

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague intently, and he made a number of very good points.

I would like to ask him to elaborate a little on the consultation process the government has been using. We have heard time and time again, on whatever piece of legislation, that there has been intensive consultation and discussions. However, what is the government hears through this consultation is not reflected in the legislation.

For example, the Canadian Medical Association says that marijuana should not be made available to youth until at least age 21 and that it still poses a risk up to the age of 25. However, the consultation was not reflected in Bill C-46. That is just one example.

I have yet to see the consultation process the government uses show up in actual legislation. Is the member concerned that the consultation may be just smoke and mirrors?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question.

The government talks about consultations. Rather, I think it is trying to conduct validation exercises. It seems like the government is omniscient and omnipotent. That is certainly how it seems to feel, in any case.

The Liberals say that they are going to meet with Canadians and tell them that they should think like them and that if they think like them, they will agree and if they do not think like them, they will reject the consultation conclusions that do not fit with their plan. However, this government does not hesitate for a second to throw out its election promises and commitments, particularly when it comes to the deficit and electoral reform.

A consultation is a public relations exercise for the Liberal government. It is not really about listening to Canadians.

● (1715)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the debate concerning motion No. 14 is not about having a problem with working until midnight each evening—except, obviously, on topics raised by the opposition. I agree with what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said in the House yesterday, that most of us are already working every day on a similar schedule.

In my previous career, I was already used to long hours. When I ran a global business, my European colleagues began calling me at 4 a.m., and my days would often stretch until midnight. This was necessary so I could meet with my employees and people in the plants and businesses in the Pacific region I was responsible for.

As the head of a North American refining and petrochemical company, I realized that maintaining customer relations and meeting deadlines to submit applications made for very long days.

Business of Supply

The Liberal government said it wanted to make Parliament more family friendly in order to encourage women to get into politics. I support encouraging more women to get into politics, but I do not believe that many women would choose to work until midnight each evening, away from their kids.

Now, why did this government introduce such a motion, when theoretically it should oppose it?

[English]

As I have said, I am not opposed to working long hours. I said earlier today, and will say it again, Einstein was quoted as saying that the definition of insanity was repeating the same action hoping for a different result. The government has not accomplished a lot in the way of legislation. If we think about the 19 bills that have passed versus 52 in the same time frame when the Conservatives were in power, really not much has been accomplished. There is no prioritization of what is coming forward.

I want to take a moment to talk about what has already passed because it shows something important.

So far in Parliament the transparency for first nations has been removed with Bill C-1. Bill C-2 gave back to the middle class \$932 a year in taxes and then Bill C-26 increased their CPP payments by \$1,100 a year, with no benefit. Bill C-10 gave Air Canada a deal to get maintenance jobs out of Canada and escape a lawsuit. Bill C-14, medically assisted dying, was passed without protecting the rights of conscience. Bill C-17 addressed environmental items for Yukon. Bill C-18 was environmental change for Rouge Park in Toronto. Bill C-30 was a CETA deal that now has to be renegotiated with Brexit happening. Bill C-31 was the trade deal with Ukraine. The rest were all maintenance budget items that needed to be done. That is all we have accomplished in 18 months of the Liberal government's agenda. Everything else is lost in process, being amended in the Senate, and not coming forward.

What is the government going to achieve by making us sit every night until midnight, which, as I said, I am fully willing to do? I really do not think it is getting anywhere. Why is it not getting anywhere? Because it does not listen to the opposition's points of view.

The job of the opposition is to bring reasoned and intelligent arguments on why a government proposal is not good for Canada and to make helpful suggestions about what would make it better.

When bills are sent to committee, the committee's job is to make helpful suggestions and amendments that would make them something all Canadians could embrace. That is really what is happening. The government is not accepting amendments, not listening when the opposition talks, and again and again, when things go to the Senate, the Senate comes up with the same amendments and spends more time studying them, doing exactly the same thing that committees of the House are supposed to do. That is one problem.

Another problem is that there has to be trust when parties work together.

● (1720)

I am going to compare the antics that I see happening here with what I see in the business world. In the business world, people work together. People have to be able to trust one another when they make deals. They have to be able to follow up on things as they said they would.

From what I have seen, the opposition House leaders are trying to work with the government House leader but she is not keeping up her end of what she has agreed to. Every day I watch her stand in the House and misrepresent to Canadians that she just has a discussion paper, when really a motion has been rammed through PROC. I have seen her avoid answering questions that she is accountable to answer.

I would suggest that there has been a huge erosion of trust in the government House leader and sometimes that cannot be fixed in order to restore the ability to work together. The government should really consider changing up that position and coming back to a place where we can work together and trust that agreements that are made, amendments that are suggested, and motions that are brought forward are as agreed. That is really important.

There is another point that I would like to make that has not been discussed much here. I have listened to the debate on Motion No. 14 and I have heard a lot about the blame game. I hear from the Liberals that when Stephen Harper's government was in place, it did this bad thing or that bad thing, or whatever. Honestly, two-thirds of the Parliament are new. Some of us were not here in the previous Parliament. We have an opportunity to do things differently now. If we think something was previously done wrong, we have the opportunity to do it differently in the future.

When items come up in the business climate, not everything needs the same amount of time to be talked about. I have sat in the House and heard Liberal members stand up and say they support such and such a bill and I have heard Conservative members and NDP members stand up and say they do too, and then we talk about it for days.

This is not the way we should be spending our time. If the government had not squandered all of the time in that way, we would have more time and we would not have to sit late. In the same way, there are things that need to be discussed longer that cannot be rammed through, things such as the budget bill that has been combined with the infrastructure bank. When comments come forward, the government needs to lead. It needs to separate those things out so that the things that can be quickly passed get passed on. When I say passed on, I am saying that if we all agree on a bill at first reading and we do not need to change anything, then the legislation should be sent right away to the Senate. Why are we spending time doing second and third reading and committee and everything else? We need to be able to update some of the processes here.

Business of Supply

I am not about just criticizing without providing recommendations for how I think we could make this better. Here are my recommendations, which I think the government could use to change some of the things that it is doing and which would result in getting legislation passed through in a better way.

When it comes to the rules of the House, I see an opportunity to modernize those rules but a change would need to honour the tradition of Parliament and have all-party consensus or at least the consensus of a majority of members to change things, because those things influence our democracy and they are important. Doing some of those things would, as the suggestions I have made about passing things we all agree on and everything else, clear the legislative agenda in a way that would move things forward more positively.

I also would reiterate that you have to have someone working with the opposition leaders who can be trusted, and I think that trust is broken.

The other point I would make is about amendments that are brought forward and are agreed to by the opposition members. It is not often that the NDP and the Conservatives play on the same team and sing from the same song sheet. That does not usually happen but lately it has happened a lot. When that happens, it should be a signal to government that this is an amendment that Canadians want to see.

The government needs to say what it is going to do and then it needs to own up to it. Some of the credibility loss that has happened has happened because the government said it was going to do something and then it did not. The government maintained it was going to be open and transparent and then facts have been hidden or things have not been well represented. The government said it was going to be accountable but then every day when we stand up and ask questions we get the shell game. It does not answer our questions, and this would not be acceptable in the business world.

These are some of the things that would help to get the legislative agenda flowing through. As a member of the opposition, I want to see the right things happen for Canada and I am willing to work with the government to see that happen.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I expected, the member for Sarnia—Lambton gave an eloquent speech on the ways of doing things in the House and on trust. I think she put her finger on something that concerns me a lot. I am also a new member elected in October 2015, and we constantly hear about the actions of the previous government.

It hurts to say this, but Canadians passed judgment on some of the actions of the official opposition. We are here to learn and to listen to Canadians, and I think we are learning pretty quickly.

I would like my colleague to comment on the importance for members to listen to Canadians, and then to take action.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the issue of trust and Canadians, being new to Parliament I was surprised to find that we cannot imply that someone lied in the House. That is something that is not allowed under parliamentary procedure. When

I sit and listen to the partial facts and sometimes very wrong facts that are quoted on both sides of the House, I am very disturbed for Joe Public, the people who are working hard every day who do not have time to read all the dossiers and files, sort through all the media, and sort through who is really telling the truth in this place.

I sometimes see part of the story here and part of the story there, and it seems to me that Canadians have put us in this place to speak on their behalf, and we should be speaking honestly. There should be some way of calling people to account when, clearly, Canadians are being misled.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had to jump up quickly to prevent my colleagues across the way from complaining once again that somehow some of us are silenced by the extraordinary efforts of my colleague from Winnipeg North. We like listening to him. That is a difference that separates many of us from the opposition.

One of the things that has been front and centre in this session is Fridays. One of the reasons is that Friday is being looked at as a day to try to get people to our constituencies, where we do important work, talking to stakeholders and constituents, managing case files, and looking at where improvements to federal services or investments could make our communities better. Getting people into the communities more often on a more regular basis is the goal. It is not about taking time off work. No one is really honestly suggesting that. I do not know any MP that does not work seven days a week.

It is also about some MPs from remote areas, from Yukon, Northwest Territories, and parts of remote British Columbia. Often, in the winter they have to travel hours upon hours, not just to get back and forth to airports but to get all over their ridings, some of which are the size of countries in Europe. The goal here is to make sure that MPs are in front of their constituents as often as we are in front of each other. That is the triangulated dialogue that needs to happen.

In light of the fact that the debate about Friday has been distorted into some party wanting to take Fridays off, and again, I know of no MP who has ever been re-elected who took Fridays off, there is a legitimate question here to explore. I would like to hear the member opposite's views on taking Fridays off to accomplish more time with constituents, more time with stakeholders, and safer travel for remote MPs, who we know need to get back and forth to family events, let alone political events. Is there any space to have that conversation in a rational way, without pointing fingers back and forth saying that it is about one party being lazy and the other wanting to work harder, which we know is not true?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I would refer the member to my speech on the day we talked about changes to the Standing Orders. Personally, I think it is ridiculous that at any given time here in the House of Commons when debate is going on we have one-fifth of the members actually hearing the debate. Then things go to committee, and a lot of times committee members have not even heard the debate that is going on.

Private Members' Business

My suggestion was that all day on Tuesdays, all members should be sitting here listening to the discussion so that the committees can take advantage of that. Thursday would be a great day for opposition days and private members' bills. Wednesdays would be a great day for us to actually interface with the ministers and get the money and support we need for our ridings. That would allow travel opportunities for those people who have long distances to go. It would be much more family friendly. It would be much more efficient in terms of achieving Parliament. That is my two cents on that.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

FRAMEWORK ON PALLIATIVE CARE IN CANADA ACT

The House resumed from May 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-277, An Act providing for the development of a framework on palliative care in Canada, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-277, an act providing for the development of a framework on palliative care in Canada.

The legislation would require the Minister of Health to develop and implement a framework designed to give all Canadians access to palliative care provided through hospitals, home care, long-term care facilities, and residential hospices. The bill would also require the health minister to convene a conference within six months of the act coming into force, with provincial and territorial governments and palliative care providers, in order to develop a framework on palliative care in Canada. Finally, the bill would require the Minister of Health to table the framework in Parliament within a year and post the framework online within 10 days of tabling it.

New Democrats will be supporting the legislation because we believe that palliative care is a vital part of comprehensive health care provision, and we believe that every Canadian has a right to high-quality end-of-life care. New Democrats have a long history of strong advocacy for better palliative care services for Canadians. We are proud of the New Democrat motion adopted in the last Parliament with all-party support, which laid out a pan-Canadian strategy for palliative and end-of-life care. Launched October 31, 2013, my colleague the member for Timmins—James Bay's Motion No. 456 called for the establishment of a pan-Canadian palliative and end-of-life care strategy in conjunction with provinces and territories on a flexible and integrated model of palliative care. It passed with almost unanimous support on May 28, 2014.

At present, only 16% to 30% of Canadians have access to formalized palliative or end-of-life care services. Even fewer receive grief or bereavement services. With the subsequent legalization of physician-assisted dying, the provision of high-quality palliative care services has now become more important than ever, since it provides

meaningful options for end-of-life decisions. It is well past time for the federal government to act.

Palliative care is the health discipline focused on improving the quality of life for people living with life-threatening illness. The World Health Organization defines it as follows:

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual. Palliative care:

provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms;

affirms life and regards dying as a normal process;

intends neither to hasten or postpone death;

integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;

offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death;

offers a support system to help the family cope during the patients illness and in their own bereavement;

uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling, if indicated;

will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness;

is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.

There is consensus among academics, health professionals, and the public that improvements in the palliative care system in Canada are desperately needed. Without clear national standards, individual jurisdictions are left to develop their own policies, programs, and approaches, resulting in inconsistent and inadequate access across the country. In Ontario, for instance, 40% of cancer patients do not receive a palliative assessment in their last year of life. In some regions of Atlantic and western Canada, data shows that less than half of people who die in a hospital receive palliative care.

• (1735)

The number of individuals actively caring for a friend or family member is expected to increase as Canada's population ages. On average, Canadians estimate that they would have to spend 54 hours per week to care for a dying loved one at home, and two-thirds say they could not devote the time needed for this care. Currently, family caregivers provide more than 80% of care needed by individuals with long-term conditions at home, in long-term care facilities, and in hospital. Replacing family caregivers with a paid workforce at current market rates and usual employee benefits has been estimated to cost about \$25 billion.

Furthermore, according to a synthesis of the empirical literature, palliative family caregiving for older adults is gendered. When acting as caregivers, women experience a greater degree of mental and physical strain than their male counterparts. This is linked to the societal expectation that women should provide a greater degree of care at the end of life for family members.

Remarkably, there are many jurisdictions across the country where we do not even know how many Canadians receive quality palliative care. We lack consistent and ongoing data collection at a systemic level, which leaves us unable to effectively hold our health care systems accountable.

Indicators such as location of death, use of acute care before death, and referrals to formal palliative care show that there is significant room for improvement. Many Canadians who require palliative care receive it in acute and emergency care, if they receive it at all. Not only are acute care settings more costly than dedicated palliative care, but they are also not as well equipped to provide the most appropriate treatment and care for patients and their families.

It is vital that any national palliative care strategy take into account the geographic, regional, and cultural diversity of urban and rural Canada. It must also respect the cultural, spiritual, and familial needs of Canada's first nations, Inuit, and Métis people. According to Dr. Mary Lou Kelley, research chair in palliative care at Lakehead University, the federal health care dollars that would help indigenous people receive end-of-life care at home have not kept up with the increasing demand. Health care for first nations is the responsibility of the federal government, of course, and it does provide some home care services, but the system was never designed to provide complex health care to people with chronic or advanced terminal diseases.

Finally, I would be remiss if I failed to note that, although the bill is sponsored by a Conservative member, the previous government eliminated the federally funded national secretariat on palliative and end-of-life care when it first took office in 2006. If it had not been for this cut, we would have developed a palliative care framework a decade ago.

From 2001-06 the federal government funded the secretariat through Health Canada with an annual budget ranging from \$1 million to \$1.5 million, virtually nothing in terms of the federal budget. However, when the Conservative government disbanded the end-of-life care secretariat, it stopped working on a national palliative and end-of-life care strategy.

In 2011, the Conservative government made a one-time commitment of \$3 million to fund the study and framework creation of community integrative models of hospice palliative care. This initiative was led by the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association, but according to Dr. Greg Marchildon, Ontario research chair in health policy and system design at the University of Toronto:

There is no national policy on palliative care in Canada. Instead, there are national guidelines developed by community-based palliative care organizations operating at arm's length from government.

Although Conservative support for palliative care had previously been absent, it is certainly better late than never. That is why New Democrats reached across the aisle at the health committee to successfully move an amendment to the bill requiring the federal

Private Members' Business

government to evaluate the advisability of re-establishing Health Canada's secretariat on palliative and end-of-life care.

I will give credit where credit is due. The member for Sarnia—Lambton responded to our proposal thoughtfully, saying: “I'm a fan of doing that. As I said, I was not here during the Harper regime, so I can't fix the past. I can only improve the future.”

New Democrats, in keeping with that sentiment, will work together to improve the future. I will conclude my remarks by reiterating the NDP's support for this vital initiative and affirming that all Canadians deserve to live their final days in dignity and comfort. We look forward to contributing to the framework development process and sincerely hope that it will provide the strongest possible palliative care strategy for every Canadian from coast to coast to coast.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1740)

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL C-46—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2), with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-46, an act to amend the Criminal Code (offences relating to conveyances) and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings of the said stage.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

FRAMEWORK ON PALLIATIVE CARE IN CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-277, An Act providing for the development of a framework on palliative care in Canada, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today in support of Bill C-277, which calls for the development of a framework to increase access to palliative care. I would like to personally thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for introducing this private member's bill.

Private Members' Business

Years ago, while I was living in Victoria, I had the honour of serving as the president of the Greater Victoria Eldercare Foundation, Vancouver Island's largest seniors foundation, supporting six extended care hospitals. The Greater Victoria Eldercare Foundation, under my good friend executive director Lori McLeod, has developed leading community programs to assist seniors, including the annual Embrace Aging month, with initiative raising awareness about the wealth of resources and opportunities available year-round to help seniors and their families navigate the journey of aging.

I was pleased to hear recently that it has added additional palliative care facilities at its Glengarry facility. It was through my involvement with the Eldercare Foundation that I encountered firsthand the many issues that seniors and their families face now: the difficulty of obtaining proper care for seniors, proper facilities, and proper understanding of the unique situations and issues they face. I owe a lot to the many volunteers and staff whom I worked with at the Greater Victoria Eldercare Foundation, and I know they too would be supporting this excellent bill.

Alleviating the suffering of Canadians is a collective duty of the House, regardless of political agenda or party affiliation. Whether in hospitals or at home, Canadians should not have to go without the care they need simply because there is not sufficient support. Our society is capable of providing the best care for our citizens, and Bill C-277 provides a framework to utilize and implement these resources. This bill helps to promote good health while preserving the independence of Canadians in need of health support. As a Conservative, I am a proud supporter of this bill, which will invest in long-term and palliative care, which the Liberals have failed to do despite their many promises.

In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Carter v. Canada* established that Canadians have a right to physician-assisted dying. We debated Bill C-14, and while I opposed the legislation, the House and Senate passed it and it received royal assent almost a year ago. One of the key aspects of the *Carter* decision, however, was its call for an advancement of palliative care as a means of increasing Canadians' access to compassionate health care. The *Carter* decision is intended to ensure that Canadians can make a legitimate choice regarding their own health care, and one of those options is to receive adequate palliative care, care that is focused on providing individuals who have a terminal illness with relief from pain, physical and mental stress, and the symptoms of their illness. It is intended to ensure that those who are at the end of their life can pass peacefully, with dignity and without pain.

The *Carter* decision enabled Canadians to pursue assisted dying, but it also established an obligation on the government to ensure all Canadians can access proper, adequate, and compassionate end-of-life care. Right now, we are not getting the job done. We are not in any imagination fulfilling our obligations as a society in caring for those in need of care. For example, a survey of pre-licensure pain curricula in the health science faculties of 10 Canadian universities shows many would-be doctors receive less training in pain management than their counterparts in veterinary medicine. I am sure my dog Hailey, who is no doubt at home on my couch right now as I speak, finds this reassuring, but as someone formerly involved in senior care, I find it quite distressing.

A survey of more than 1,100 doctors and nurses shows that those who treat fewer terminally ill patients, therefore knowing the least about symptom management, are most likely to be in favour of assisted suicide, while those with more experience in symptom management and end-of-life care tend to oppose it. Dr. Max Chochinov, a noted specialist on palliative care, explains that the will to live is directly inverse to the amount of pain, and that loss of dignity drives wanting to die and treatment of pain can improve sense of dignity.

We also have to remember the impact of terminal illness on a family: the emotional, physical, and financial struggle of caring for a loved one at the end of their life. Under the current regime, it is up to families to carry the overwhelming bulk of this burden. This system is not fair. People should not have to choose between paying bills and caring for their spouse, their parents, or their siblings.

We have heard horror stories time and time again from families who were completely ambushed by palliative and in-home care costs after their loved one got sick, and these instances are becoming more and more common. The health minister herself has acknowledged many times that Canada has a deficit in access to quality palliative care, yet despite her pledges to do more and provide more, she has neglected to take meaningful action to date. Canada's population as a whole is growing older, and seniors now outnumber children.

● (1745)

I said before in my speech to the RRIF financial security act—another bill that would have helped seniors, which the Liberals voted against—that we need to be ready to have the proper programs and mechanisms in place to adapt to our shifting demographics.

A recent *Globe and Mail* article states that according to the 2016 census, we have seen “the largest increase in the share of seniors since the first census after Confederation.” Across Canada, the increase in the share of seniors since the 2011 census “was the largest observed since 1871—a clear sign that Canada’s population is aging at a faster pace.” That figure is projected to rise even more in the coming years. The proportion of those aged 65 and older climbed to 17% of Canada's population. This is not a new phenomenon obviously.

A September 2015 Statistics Canada report noted that by 2024, 20% of our population will be over the age of 65, so we need action plans in place to address this shift, this massive wave that is going to be overtaking our health care systems. The provinces are going to be faced with an epidemic soon enough of people trying to access systems that are not capable of supporting the demand. Less than 30% of Canadians have access to this vital service, which allows them to choose to live as well as they can for as long as they can.

Private Members' Business

It is time for the government to fulfill its obligations to provide quality palliative care to all Canadians. This framework answers some of those calls, and it represents the needs of the aging population across Canada, including those in Edmonton West. The percentage of individuals in Edmonton aged 65 or older has risen to 14%, a significant figure representing thousands of individuals who will benefit from universal palliative care.

I know this bill will serve the aging population in my own riding, particularly those who find comfort in knowing that their family members and loved ones will receive the best care. No one should have to suffer through ailments alone, without the support of well-trained and compassionate health care practitioners.

Bill C-277 is required to define the services covered, to bring standard training requirements for the various levels of care providers, to come up with a plan and a mechanism to ensure consistent access for all Canadians, and to collect the data to ensure success. Good palliative care can cover a wide range of services, such as acute care, hospice care, home care, crisis care, and spiritual and psychological counselling. The creation and implementation of a palliative care framework will give Canadians access to high-quality palliative care through hospitals, home care, long-term care facilities, and residential hospices.

We need to ensure that our communities support the aging population with respect and dignity. As parliamentarians elected by our respective communities, reacting to this shift should be a priority and cannot be ignored. When I introduced my private member's bill last fall, which sought to help seniors who were being disproportionately targeted by an outdated tax measure, I heard from countless seniors across Canada who felt they were being left behind. While it is important to ensure the provinces are not pigeonholed by federal legislation, we need to acknowledge a legislative gap when we see one. Seniors need help, and no amount of discussion papers, working groups, or committee meetings will make this issue go away. We know what the issue is and we need action.

Bill C-277 is a step toward providing the much-needed support for seniors today and seniors to be. Palliative care is good, compassionate, and meaningful. Providing access to quality and affordable palliative care can help make painful decisions a little more manageable for those suffering from a terminal illness. It can also significantly help the families of those suffering, who carry the disproportionate financial and emotional burden of end-of-life care. The government needs to pass this legislation to begin the development of a framework on increasing access to palliative care.

When the Supreme Court's decision in *Carter v. Canada* was delivered, it included a significant and serious obligation on the government to ensure that Canadians could make a real decision on their end-of-life care. The ability to make that decision requires that the options are actually available, and today's unfortunate reality is that our palliative care system is inadequate.

As I mentioned, I would like to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for bringing this fantastic private member's bill forward. I am very pleased to hear my colleagues in the NDP speak so favourably toward this, and to hear that they will be supporting it. I am extremely proud that I and other members of the Conservative caucus will be supporting this very important bill.

• (1750)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak about Bill C-277, an act providing for the development of a framework on palliative care in Canada.

I first want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Sarnia—Lambton, for bringing this forward. I also want to congratulate my fellow members on the health committee for working so collaboratively on this bill at committee stage. I think our work and amendments improved this legislation to become something positive for all Canadians.

It is essential for us to be talking about palliative care. It is something I heard about a lot during my election campaign and continue to hear about from community members. Palliative care and access to end-of-life care are important issues for all Canadians.

Brampton South is a riding with a significant population of seniors, who brought this forward as an issue of dignity and quality of life. A strategy to address this need is an important step. I want to thank them for raising their voices and for championing this in my community.

As members know, palliative care is for all, regardless of age, who are approaching the end of life. It is for all people who desire a compassionate and comfortable place to receive care. In our conversation about medical assistance in dying, I raised the need for palliative care and home care to be involved in that discussion. That is why I am extremely proud that our government responded to all aspects of this issue in our relatively short time, so far, in government.

As members know, we will be investing \$6 billion in home care through the provinces and territories; \$2.3 billion will be going to fill needs in Ontario, which I hope will serve to fill the gaps that exist in our rapidly growing Peel region. Home care is about responding to Canadians' overwhelming desire to be at home, to receive care at home, and, sadly, if needed, to live out their end-of-life stage at home when possible. Palliative care is the other option that serves to make life more dignified for our most in-need people.

I would like to mention that palliative care workers and PSWs deserve our utmost respect for the difficult but important job they do for people in our communities.

Private Members' Business

I strongly support Bill C-277's goals to make a strategy and to incorporate work governments have been doing on this already. A strong evidence-based approach will deliver real results. That is the approach our government ran on and the one Canadians endorsed when they elected us.

Please know as I give my comments today that we recognize and respect that the provinces play the principal role in the delivery of health services, including palliative care. This bill, with the proposed amendments, understands that the federal role in health lies in coordinating and ensuring that there are the same services available for all. I am very pleased that the government will support this bill, with amendments.

The proposed amendments respect the intent of the bill but seek to align it with the scope of federal roles and responsibilities in relation to palliative care. They also seek to build on existing palliative care frameworks, strategies, and best practices being undertaken by provinces, territories, and stakeholder groups.

To ensure that Canadians have access to the best quality of palliative care, it is important that we do not reinvent the wheel. In many provinces, there are existing frameworks and policies. As such, it was important to me and my colleagues on the health committee to ensure that any new work on this would build on what exists already.

We also know that when it comes to caring for Canada's seniors in need of palliative care, the job falls not only to health care professionals but to other caregivers, including family members. As such, our committee made changes to the bill to ensure that all who provide care at this stage are supported and have their needs considered in the establishment of a framework for palliative care.

With our government's focus on evidence-based policy, it was also very important to ensure that any new work on this issue include the promotion of research and data collection so that we can ensure that the care provided to Canadians is based on the most relevant research, best practices, and up-to-date evidence in this area.

• (1755)

This is a very important part of the picture, as we all know very well that the incredible ongoing research in the Canadian health care field is innovative, leading to new opportunities for greater care. It is essential that this new knowledge be considered as we develop and maintain a framework for palliative care across Canada.

Our proposed amendments would facilitate federal support for improved palliative care in relation to three pillars, which are aligned with the objectives of the bill: training for health care providers; consistent data collection, research, and innovation in palliative care; and support for caregivers.

We continue to support pan-Canadian initiatives that enhance Canada's capacity to provide quality palliative and end-of-life care as well as a range of programs and services, such as family caregiver benefits and resources, that address the actions proposed in the bill.

Our government's investments in the provinces to in turn deliver health services are outpacing inflation, ensuring that they can deliver better health outcomes. I want to commend the Minister of Health on the recent health accord agreements.

I am also very proud to say that we are also working with first nations and Inuit stakeholders to identify options for building on current resources and services to provide increased access to palliative care.

It is crucial that any work we do regarding the health of Canadians reflects the different realities of the many communities across the country. Specifically, we know that the health care needs of first nations and Inuit communities deserve special attention to respect the traditions and existing frameworks that have been developed from community to community.

Overall, I cannot say enough how pleased I am that this important discussion is happening in this place. I do not doubt that this conversation will and must continue. The health committee, on day one, agreed that this was something we should look at, because it is an important issue for seniors and for us, too.

We have many important pieces of business before us at committee, but I imagine that a review of this strategy and of strategies stakeholders or provinces currently are using could be a full study in the future.

Palliative care and end-of-life options are the kind of hard but real topics that are our responsibility as leaders to address. These are the things that make us think of our loved ones and our own futures in personal ways. Regardless of our own views or choices, we are setting up a system that is fair, compassionate, and just. By taking a public health approach to issues like this, we are doing the responsible thing that serves as a framework for all Canadians.

I want to thank the parliamentarians in this House for supporting the bill and for all the contributions so far. It is something I have followed closely in the House. Today we continue to move this forward towards action.

Again, I congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton on Bill C-277 and her work to promote its aims. It is a noble quest that aligns with the priorities of this government to bring positive change to our health care system and with my own priorities to ensure that Canadians have access to the best possible health care services. I hope all members will join me in supporting the bill again at the next opportunity to vote for it.

Private Members' Business

• (1800)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to speak in favour of Bill C-277, an act providing for the development of a national framework for palliative care in Canada. This bill is important. It would benefit Canadians right across the country and also at home in Lakeland. I would like to congratulate the member for Sarnia-Lambton for her steadfast advocacy and for highlighting this priority need across the country. I know that this bill is the result of months and months of hard work and dedication by the member, and I congratulate her.

Canadians work hard, live busy lives, and expect one day to have the option of end-of-life care. The goal of this bill is to support improved access for Canadians to palliative care by creating a national framework, with the intent of expanding the availability and quality of front-line services in communities across Canada. That result would increase options and reduce the burden on family members by providing vital end-of-life care for their loved ones. This aim supports the dignity and comfort all Canadians deserve in the final stages of their lives.

This bill is also the distillation of the work of my colleagues on the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care. The committee published an excellent report, which outlined the current Canadian landscape with respect to palliative care. Through studies and assessments, the committee conducted a full review of current palliative care options in Canada while identifying specific areas that require improvement. All Canadians and all political parties can and should support this bill.

Right now there are only 200 hospices across Canada, so there is clearly a need for universal palliative care options. The framework provided in this bill would provide a definition of palliative care and identify the training needed for palliative care in Canada. It would also consider amending the Canada Health Act to include palliative care as a guaranteed health care option. Additionally, the act would outline periodic report releases from the Minister of Health highlighting gaps and recommendations for the framework of palliative care.

I am concerned about the Liberals' approach to palliative care in Canada so far. Although the Liberals are supportive of this initiative to date, they started their mandate by making a significant promise to Canadians: an immediate \$3-billion investment for home care, including palliative care. However, the Liberals have changed course a bit. They are using the urgency of palliative care in communities as a bargaining tool, a stick, in negotiations with provinces. Those provinces that have agreed to the Liberals' terms when renegotiating the health accord were given funding for both mental health and home care, while others that had not yet agreed to those terms received nothing.

This priority is too important to use as political leverage like that, because the need for palliative care will never go away. In fact, 80% of Canadians receiving palliative care are cancer patients. Right now, two out of five Canadians will develop cancer in their lifetimes, and that statistic is expected to increase by 2030. These patients deserve a comfortable end-of-life option. The problem is that 30% of Canadians do not have access to palliative care services.

The Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians says that palliative care should be available in homes, hospices, hospitals, and long-term care centres throughout Canada, but it is not. Availability depends on where one lives, how old one is, and what one is dying from. This needs to change. The CSPCP goes on to say that strategic investments in palliative care have been shown to reduce the cost of delivering care by about 30%. Presently it costs about \$1,200 a day to remain in the hospital, \$400 a day to remain in hospice care, and \$200 a day to receive home care. To reduce these costs by at least 30% would offer more opportunities for Canadians, free up scarce resources in health care facilities, and ultimately improve the quality of life and care for patients suffering from serious and terminal illnesses.

This is important, because Canadians are suffering from chronic and terminal conditions in growing numbers. Good palliative care covers a wide range of services, such as acute care, hospice care, home care, crisis care, and spiritual and psychological counselling.

Support from Canadians is evident across the country. There have been 83 petitions on palliative care presented in the House by members of Parliament in this session alone. Thousands of letters have been received by members of Parliament on all sides of the House. I personally have received dozens of letters from constituents across Lakeland outlining the need for palliative care options, particularly for seniors, who have limited options for end-of-life care. Right now, Statistics Canada confirms that there are more seniors in Canada than children. With an increased demand for health care, hospitals, and clinics, the option for hospice care has clearly never been more important.

• (1805)

Communities in Lakeland are fortunate to have access to health care and consultants in all regions of the riding, but more can be done and needs to be done to ensure greater access for everyone. Remote and rural regions of the country like Lakeland do not always offer the same robust services as urban centres and highly populated areas. Regional accessibility is an important consideration for a national strategy, and one we cannot ignore.

The current palliative care options in Canada are inadequate and do not meet the needs of Canadians. That is what this framework seeks to address.

In 2011, it is estimated that only 16% to 30% of those in need were receiving proper palliative and end-of-life care. The current health care system favours short-term acute care, which it does extremely well, but experts report that the system lacks the capacity and the funding to properly and consistently provide quality long-term palliative care. The cost of acute care is four times that of hospice palliative care, so clearly there is an opportunity to provide long-term, consistent care responsibly. It is a challenge that provincial governments and elected representatives at all levels face and must take on.

Private Members' Business

The proper training of medical practitioners and nurse practitioners is an important step in creating a comprehensive and well-equipped palliative care structure. On average, medical and nursing students spend as little as 20 hours of their four years of study learning about palliative and end-of-life care. In 2011, there were fewer than 200 geriatricians in Canada. Today, the estimated need is upwards of 600.

Bill C-277 would also have a positive impact on the lives of caregivers. In 2011, there were an estimated four million to five million family caregivers in Canada. They contribute \$25 billion to the health care system. These same selfless caregivers often bear a heavier financial burden and have to miss one or more months of work because of their duties. Family caregivers provide 80% of all home care in Canada, and 77% of these caregivers are women.

These numbers are not to be taken lightly. Caregivers experience financial, social, and physical burdens that can have lasting effects on their lives. The Canadian Cancer Society says that Canadian caregivers are the invisible backbone of the health care system, providing \$25 billion in unpaid care.

This added support would encourage palliative care in the home, which has been demonstrated to be beneficial for everyone involved. Allowing patients to stay in their homes for as long as possible is a compassionate choice that should be available to every Canadian. We have a duty to those Canadians.

Many Canadians who require palliative care are seniors or veterans. Seniors built our communities, founded our businesses, created opportunities for future generations, and supported our economy. Seniors built this great country, fought in wars, raised their kids, and laid the foundation for the free and prosperous Canada in which we are so fortunate to live.

It is our fundamental responsibility to ensure that the most vulnerable are taken care of, and when these individuals, who have done so much for us, need the most support, it is Canada's turn to give back to them. That is a core reason that I support this important bill. I encourage all members of the House to do the same.

I thank my colleague again for all of the good work she has done in bringing forward this pressing need.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is quite a privilege to speak to the important issue of palliative care. It is something I have dealt with in many different capacities, whether in the Manitoba legislature as a health care critic or here in Ottawa, both in opposition and now in government.

One of the most passionate collection of speeches that I have heard occurred when we had the debate on the medical assistance in dying legislation. I am sure you, Madam Speaker, and other colleagues on both sides of this House can recall the emotions that flowed in that particular debate as members stood in their place and articulated why it was so important that we move forward.

One of the greatest concerns that was expressed was that we needed to recognize that we can do so much more. It was not a partisan issue. It was not just Liberals, New Democrats, Conservatives—or the Green Party member, for that matter, or even quite possibly a Bloc member—who were saying it.

I applaud my colleague across the way for proposing her bill and for taking the initiative to continue the discussion that we had in the House on this very important issue. As an important issue, it goes far beyond the chamber or the House of Commons. I suspect that each and every one of us can relate to the importance of this issue. All we have to do is think about visits to our constituents. During elections and between elections there are some issues that gravitate to the top, and I suggest that this is one such issue.

The government is going to be supporting the bill—with amendments, as my colleague across the way has indicated—and I will pick up a bit on those amendments, but for now I want to talk about the principle.

As parliamentarians, we want to get a fairly good understanding of the needs of the constituents we represent, and this is definitely one of those needs. Every one of us can cite specific cases. I can tell of my own personal experience with my father.

My father was fortunate enough to have palliative care service provided to him, and what an incredible, loving, and caring environment he was able to be in for his dying days. I was so grateful that we had such quality health care providers and others who are associated with Riverview, who were there not only for him but for all individuals who were there. I can remember the very moment of his passing, which touched me personally.

However, it is not just because of my father. I go to many viewings or funerals. I knock on doors and I talk to many individuals. We often think that it is just seniors, but it is not, even though the vast majority would be of an older age. It provides a great deal of comfort, not only to the individual who is having to seek palliative care but also to family and friends. We all want to ensure that there is a sense of passing with dignity and we look at ways in which we can improve the system.

Through that debate that we had when we were talking about medical assistance in dying, numerous areas were advanced strongly by a number of members. We even saw petitions being introduced. When I talk about strong, I mean issues that we felt it was necessary to give more attention to. One was the issue that in the different regions from coast to coast to coast across the country, care experiences varied between urban centres and rural centres and in larger communities versus smaller ones.

● (1810)

It really varies in terms of the types of services available. When we think of end-of-life care, palliative care, hospice care, we like to think there is some sense of equity out there in the many different communities that make up our country, but what I learned and what was really hammered home during that debate was that there is a great deal of inequity and that there is a stronger role for us to play at the national level.

I suspect that the government is going to propose some amendments that would facilitate federal support for improved palliative care in relation to three pillars that are aligned with the objectives of this particular bill. Training for health care providers is of the utmost importance, as well as making sure that quality health care delivery is available in a tangible way.

Private Members' Business

That does not take away from the type of care that has been available over the years; the efforts that health care providers have been performing for many years are amazing.

We want to look at consistent data collection. Consistent data collection is critical, because it assists in research and innovation into palliative care. In other words, it is important that we do not stop here.

We need to continue to look at best practices. As an example, we need to look at where the demands are and how we can meet those demands going into the future, and of course provide support for caregivers.

When we look at making amendments, these are the areas we want to put some emphasis on. When the legislation goes to the standing committee, I suspect there will be a good opportunity to hear a number of ideas from other members that they believe might improve the legislation itself.

I appreciate the fact that the member who introduced the legislation has said that this is something that would in essence get the debate going. She is open to ways to improve the legislation. Our government, and even individual members, take the member at her word and look forward to the bill going to committee with the idea that some amendments will be brought to the table in anticipation of improving the issue.

I have often had the opportunity to talk about the importance of health care as a general topic of discussion. Home care is an important aspect of health care. When I think of issues that Canadians really identify with as part of our Canadian identity, I think they would identify our health care system and the services that we provide.

It is important that we respect jurisdictional responsibility. I recognize that Ottawa has a significant funding role, since we spend literally billions of dollars on health care every year.

It is with great pride that the current Minister of Health has gone out of her way, has worked overtime, trying to get all provinces and territories on side with the new health care accord. The last time we saw this was back in 2003 or 2004, when all provinces and territories signed up. That was a good initiative. We saw a commitment, a tangible commitment, to national funding of health care in return for other things. It was a commitment that saw federal funding for health care grow year after year, transferring a record amount of money to provincial and territorial jurisdictions to provide something Canadians feel passionately about, that being health care.

Let us fast-forward to today. There are a few things that come to my mind in regard to this issue.

● (1815)

The Minister of Health has been very aggressive and progressive in pushing several issues. One of those issues has been palliative care. She has met with the provinces and has had that discussion. She also has met with individuals. Home care has been, and will continue to be, a priority for this government. Palliative care is really important, and we recognize that.

● (1820)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a honour to speak to Bill C-277. I want to congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton on her good work.

I was honoured to sit on the special legislative committee that dealt with assisted suicide and euthanasia in response to the Carter decision. From that came a number of witnesses who highlighted two prominent needs.

First, there has to be a national palliative care strategy in Canada to prepare for our aging population. People who need palliative care are primarily elderly, at end of life. People do not have to be old to die, though. Palliative care provides those basic, dignified needs of people at the end of their lives, whether they are young or old.

The second issue was that we needed to provide conscience protection for physicians and health care institutions.

I am thrilled the member for Sarnia—Lambton received a low number in the private members' business draw and was able to have this bill presented. I am also thrilled this basically has been unanimously supported in the House and will very soon go to the Senate, with some very constructive changes.

This is needed in Canada. Right now there are more seniors in Canada than there are youth. One in six Canadians is a senior. In 12 short years, and I have been here 13 years, one in four Canadians will be a senior. Right now, 70% of people who need palliative care do not have access to it; 30% do.

As a civilized democracy, a western democracy, we need to provide for the basic needs of dignity. In testimony we heard different terms. We heard "medical aid in dying", which is not assisted suicide. It is helping somebody die by reducing the pain and making them comfortable. That can be through visitation, drugs, palliative sedation, or medical apparatus. There is a number of ways.

I was shocked that our medical professionals received very little training in palliative care or end-of-life care. There is a very large interest in taking care of babies, in pediatrics, but for geriatrics, not so much. Babies are very cute. We desperately need to train Canadians in geriatrics.

With the massive change in our demographics in Canada, the aging population, where one in four will be a senior, it is not possible to build enough care facilities. Therefore, we need to train people so we can provide that home care.

Palliative care includes all of that, medical care and required infrastructure. We need to create this national seniors strategy. Again, I thank every member in the House who supports Bill C-277.

Then we need the investments in the infrastructure and the training to see this happen. The aging population is coming. It will be here in 12 years. We are not ready for it. I encourage the government and I thank it for supporting the member for Sarnia—Lambton and for its commitment to this bill. We all look forward to the investments in the next budget. Next spring when the government introduces the budget, there have to be those investments.

Government Orders

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been heartwarming to see the way members of Parliament have worked together, from the beginning when the all parliamentary committee first studied palliative care, to the work of the Special Committee on Assisted Dying, to the discussions and the many heartfelt testimonies in the House from all parties as we studied this, to the amendments at committee and the collaborative way people worked together to bring improvements to the bill, to the Minister of Health who pledged \$11 billion for home care, palliative care, and mental health care in the 2017 budget. This is how Parliament ought to be, addressing needs of Canadians and doing it in a way whereby we work together and come up with a better solution.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

A growing number of individuals of all ages in Canada suffer from chronic pain or deadly diseases. Palliative care services can replace a wide ranges of services, such as short-term care, home care, crisis care, and psychological or spiritual assistance services.

[*English*]

Canadians need palliative care. It is hard to know how much palliative care is really available because the data is not that good. We have heard discussion tonight about the need to do more in collecting data on this situation. At least 70% of Canadians have no access to palliative care. We do not have enough palliative care physicians. Certainly from a cost perspective, palliative care done in different ways, by home care, by paramedics, can reduce the cost from \$1,100 a day in a hospital down to \$200 for hospice or \$100 a day or less a day by paramedics. There is an opportunity to get more with our health dollars.

When the bill went to committee, the members were very happy about the language around the defining of service. We modified some language to clarify the federal and provincial jurisdictions. We had discussion around the collection of the research data and made a slight adjustment there. We had some great additions to restore the secretariat for palliative care to ensure that action was driven as we move forward into the future. I was very happy with the amendments that were brought because they made the bill stronger. I think this measure will be supported in the Senate.

Everyone has shared a personal story and throughout all the times I have been here, I have never shared any stories.

First, I thank the member for Langley—Aldergrove for being my seatmate when he was on the Special Committee of Assisted Dying and for giving me a book called *It's Not That Simple*, which talks about palliative care. It was made me interested in bringing this bill forward.

Within my riding of Sarnia—Lambton, we have a hospice called St. Joseph's. My father-in-law died of cancer, and he was in hospice. As I watched him wilt away like a sparrow, at least he was surrounded by a caring environment. He was pain free. He was surrounded by his family. I began to appreciate the services. We have 20 palliative care beds, a great hospice, and an integrated home care system. To find out that most Canadians did not have that was just a shock to me.

I am happy to see the bill move forward. This is the right direction.

I want to thank the many organizations that supported the bill throughout its journey. I want to read them because there are so many. It is just amazing. These organization include the Canadian Medical Association; the Canadian Cancer Society; the Canadian Nurses Association; the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians; Pallium Canada; ARPA; the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association; many member hospices like Bruyère Continuing Care, St. Joseph's Hospice, West Island Palliative Care Residence; the Heart and Stroke Association; the Kidney Foundation; the ALS Society of Canada; the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists; more than 50 organization members of the Coalition for Quality Care and the Interfaith Groups, including the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Council of Imams, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, the Armenian Prelacy of Canada, the Canadian Conference of Orthodox Bishops, and the Ottawa Muslim Association Ottawa Mosque. I thank them all for their ongoing promotion and support of the bill.

It is these kinds of organizations across our country that will help us to integrate palliative care and leverage our best practices.

I want to also thank all my colleagues for their support and encouragement. I want to encourage everyone to vote yes to Bill C-277.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:30 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1830)

[*English*]

EXTENSION OF SITTING HOURS

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

Government Orders

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sad to see some people shifting seats now. I was hoping to get questions from them. We shall see where they sit up and take note.

I find this debate about extending the hours to finish the spring business and the concern that the opposition has expressed to be mind-boggling, quite frankly. I have been watching this particular session and I was here for the end of the previous one, and I have never seen this level of obstruction. It is the opposition's right to obstruct. It is its job to get in the way of government. I have no problem with that. However, the degree to which it has wasted time is quite remarkable. I am going to go through some of the examples that I think really show who is working hard and who is trying to work hard not to work hard.

The most popular form of obstruction right now is really ironic, considering the opposition members keep talking about how we want to take Fridays off. They have tried to effectively shut down debate more than a dozen times by moving motions of closure and by moving motions of adjournment. My favourite one was when the Conservatives could not decide which one of their backbenchers should talk, so they asked the rest of the House to come back from wherever they have been and make a decision for them, cancelling the important work that committees were doing. Sometimes up to five or six committees have had their work stopped for the entire afternoon while these games are played, yet what they want to talk about now is efficiency and working hard for Canadians inside Parliament.

The reality is that they have done everything they can to adjourn debate this session. Then the irony is that they complain about closure being moved. They move to adjourn debate and not have any debate, and then get mad when government says, "Okay, let's vote on the issue and put it to rest." They say, "No, we wanted to debate. We were just moving motions of adjournment to show you we weren't happy." Talk about sheer hypocrisy.

On March 21, there was a motion to have the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands now be heard. Even though he had spoken just moments before and spoke moments afterward, he needed to speak one more time in between. It was urgent, urgent enough to stop the work of 338 members of Parliament so that he could get a third shot at saying the same thing three times.

On March 22, there was a motion to return to orders of the day, again, to upend the government process and to stop the process moving through. I get it. Their job is to not let us do anything. However, the reality is that we have a responsibility to deliver government processes and deliver on the budget and deliver on a whole series of things, including sending critical legislation, sometimes even private members' legislation, to the committee so that the committee can deal with it.

We just had unanimous consent to pass a private member's motion, something which I did not see once in the previous Parliament for an opposition motion. The Conservative government voted against every single private member's motion, regardless of what it was. The Conservatives were militant about it and proud about it. We have seen unprecedented co-operation in this House, yet

somehow we are labelled with this notion that Parliament is not working. I did not see a single private member's bill, save for the one on feminine hygiene products, pass in the last session of Parliament.

When opposition members bring forward legitimate motions trying to accomplish things where there is consensus, we have seen parliamentary secretaries like myself, backbenchers from across the country, given total freedom to support them, even when cabinet stands in opposition. This is parliamentary form at its finest, yet the opposition continues to see a problem in this kind of dialogue and, quite frankly, productivity.

On March 22, we had to return to orders of the day. Then, on March 23, we had a number of different motions where nine different committee meetings were interrupted by procedural shenanigans. There was a motion that was moved that yet another Conservative member be heard again.

For folks who are listening in the larger part of this country who are wondering what all the procedural ringing of bells and votes are all about, it is really about shutting down debate, slowing down Parliament. It is the opposition members' right to oppose what the government is proposing, but they do not even want Parliament to consider it, as a way of thwarting the changes we are trying to make. Again, I respect their opposition. I understand it comes from a position of ideological, parliamentary, or even electoral promises they have made, but the reality is that this is what has slowed Parliament down, not the government's ambition to get more pieces of legislation through.

Then after they move to adjourn the debate, when we move closure, they get upset that somehow we are truncating the parliamentary process and we are the ones abridging parliamentary rights. What do they think a motion to adjourn would accomplish? It would do exactly the same thing, but with no result at the end. That, to me is sheer hypocrisy.

● (1835)

Then, on March 23, we had another motion moved to adjourn the debate. There was a 40-minute debate after each one of these motions. They had a 40-minute motion to adjourn debate and then when we moved closure, they get upset that they wasted their 40 minutes and did not get a chance to debate the issue properly. In fact in total, I added it up and there have been almost 24 hours of debate on adjournment. Instead of debating legislation, instead of putting the views of their constituents forward for us to consider as a government, what they have been debating is their right to end debate so that they could protest the fact that the debate is ending. It is absurd.

The next thing that happened was the concurrence motions. These have enormous length of debate. There is sometimes up to three hours of debate when a concurrence motion is moved, and it is moved, as I said, not to actually deal with the legislation but to try to not deal with the legislation. Again, that is the opposition stalling tactic.

Government Orders

On April 5, we did not sit. On April 6, we came back and what happened? Another motion to adjourn, another 40-minute debate about the value of not talking about things as the opposition pretends to defend the value of talking about things. Again, a lot of these had to do with and circulated around the question of privilege that was raised around the budget process. One went for about 36 hours. That is almost two weeks of debate. We debated whether somebody was on a bus or not on a bus, capable of walking or not walking to vote, in comfortable shoes or not in comfortable shoes. We debated effectively a red herring. Instead of dealing with the opioid crisis, instead of talking about transit, instead of dealing with the fisheries, instead of dealing with softwood lumber, all these lofty goals that this government is hard at work trying to achieve, what we had was effectively a unanimous vote on a question of privilege.

We all understand the critical importance of getting to the House, being allowed to vote, representing the views of our constituents. None of us disagree with the question of privilege that was raised. We all agreed that if anything impeded a member, they had the solemn right, a fundamental duty and privilege, to be in the House. We all agreed with that, but we debated it for 36 hours anyway. Then it turned out that the story that was delivered to the House about the interrupted vote was not necessarily the way it was initially presented. There was no motorcade blocking somebody on a bus to get here. The facts of the matter were completely different.

What we had was a filibuster, and I get it. It was a filibuster because we were trying to change the rules to make this place more efficient. The opposition thinks there should be unanimous consent to that. We disagree, and we will try to find a way to get forward on that issue and find ways to modernize this Parliament.

I understand that the opposition has a fundamental duty and rights and privileges in that conversation, and we will get to some point of future amendments to the House procedures that modernize this place, but the processes and the delays and the tactics and the sanctimony in which the opposition often wraps itself is just not founded.

What do we end up with? A wasted number of days, hours, and weeks debating something that actually did not happen, all over some fantasy of a point of principle that quite frankly is about whether or not the government has the right to limit debate, and the government does have the right to limit debate in order to make its presentation of legislation and its passage of legislation more efficient. We have a majority rule Parliament, and Parliament's will sometimes is to move on to the conclusion of the debate rather than to sustain debate until all 338 members are heard. That is part of our tradition here, and the previous government was criticized for it, by myself sometimes on critical issues where quite clearly there was a need for more debate, but on other issues, we understood the efficiency and we went along.

In this Parliament it has been different, but let us get back again to what happens when the party opposite pretends it wants to have a debate. In fact, again, on April 10, because one of our members wanted to speak and a Conservative stood up and said that they should have the chance to speak, we had to vote on that issue. There was a 40-minute debate on April 10 as to which MP should be allowed to speak, even though it was a Liberal turn.

That was the priority for the Conservative Party, which one of its MPs got to interrupt a Liberal. The fundamental priority was not softwood lumber, not what would happen on international trade deals, not the situation in the Middle East with Daesh, not the issue of the opioid crisis and safe injection sites and how we protect the lives of Canadians who have that medical condition, not the provision of more affordable housing, not the establishment of the infrastructure bank to deliver the infrastructure this country needs for the next century. None of those things were priorities, but what had to be sorted out was which Conservative got to speak next.

For that 40 minutes, the time of 338 parliamentarians was held up while we waited for everyone to come in and cast their ballots. People who travelled across the country to present their views to parliamentarians in committee were told to go home and not even talk to parliamentarians about it. That money was completely wasted, and what happened? The Liberal whose right it was to speak was allowed to continue to speak.

Members may think that is protective. They may think it is good politics. They may think it is good opposition. I understand that from the opposition's perspective, anything they can do to stop things is good politics, but it is bad parliamentary procedure and it needs to be fixed and modernized.

● (1840)

We have to get to that question and deal with those issues, but at the same time we have to get to that other list I just referenced. We have to deal with this budget. We have to deal with the delivery of infrastructure dollars to the cities. We have to deal with a move to legalize marijuana so that we can start to regulate this country's situation with good, strong legislation, and not simply talk about it in Parliament forever. It is time to move on some of these issues.

The Canadian system we work within has delivered us a majority to allow us to do that as an elected body. We have to do it with Parliament and we have to do it with the opposition in as respectful a way as possible, but at the end of the day, our responsibility is not just to make Parliament work but to make the country move forward as we make decisions here in Parliament. That is a responsibility that we take just as seriously as the opposition's opportunity to obstruct us.

On April 10, immediately following the 40-minute debate over who should talk next, even though the Conservatives wanted to talk, apparently, they brought a motion for adjournment. Therefore, we had a Liberal member standing up who wanted to talk, and the Conservatives said that they wanted to talk, and as soon as the Liberal member had the floor, someone stood up and said, "Let's adjourn the whole debate because we're really upset about closure and the fact that we don't have a chance to talk. If we can't talk, nobody should talk. Let's shut the whole thing down."

Government Orders

Again, that had nothing to do with the issue on the floor. It had nothing to do with the serious issues confronting us on an economic, international, or domestic level. It had nothing to do about the quality of life in any one of their constituencies. It was simply a move to stop the process of Parliament moving forward. I think that most Canadians watching this, and looking at it on a point-by-point factual basis, will understand that this is obstruction and complaint for the sake of complaint, and though it is opposition that may be loyal, at the end of the day it is not really accomplishing anything.

Later that day, as soon as we got back from that debate and as soon as five committees were once again disrupted, what did we do? We had another 40-minute debate on adjournment. As if the decision of the House a half an hour earlier was not good enough, the Liberals had to go back and re-prosecute the question of adjournment. That was two adjournment motions in one day debating whether or not Parliament should be allowed to close quickly when we had legislation to pass. Therefore, the party that claims it wants to work hard keeps trying to go home continuously, almost on a daily basis, while the party that is trying to govern is sitting here methodically, carefully, moving forward with its agenda.

I understand that the opposition will criticize it. I understand they will vote against it. It is the opposition's prerogative to play politics the way they are playing politics, but in reality, what they are accomplishing is simply delay and more delay. That is fine. If that is what they want to be defined by, if that is their contribution to this Parliament, that is fine. It is motions of adjournment, and that is that.

On April 11, we again get into a very important debate on the status of women. We have great work being done by this committee, an all-parliamentary committee, with some extraordinary work coming out from the NDP around pay equity, and pushing us to make sure that gender-based analysis actually changes the outcomes of women's lives in this country and moves us forward toward a more equitable society.

We are engaged in that debate, the NDP is engaged in that debate, but there is one party that is absolutely upset that anything like that might happen, so what happens? A motion for adjournment of the debate is once again introduced by the Conservatives, not because they are trying to force a decision on the issues raised by the member of the NDP, not because they are actually trying to change the lives and the yardsticks on this issue, but because they want to go home again. They need to leave. They need to protest the lack of debate by having no debate.

My mother used to say to me at times that lots of people are accused of cutting their noses off to spite their faces, but we rarely see someone without a nose. In this case, I am beginning to think that the nose may be coming off the bloom.

This is another fascinating one. After we get through that 40-minute debate, a motion is moved to tell the human resources committee effectively how to do its work on a maternity benefits bill, a bill that will allow women in dangerous occupations to get support so that they can continue to earn income while they deliver their child and start their family, a bill that has unanimous consent in committee. What happens? They move to stop all of the debate, and move a motion to instruct the committee to do something the committee is already doing and that the members at the committee

had already consented to do. In other words, it was a redundant motion, but it was felt that it had to happen.

That was another 50 minutes of debating something the committee had already agreed to do. The person who moved this was a member of that committee, so they knew that the committee had already said yes. Then they came back here to say, "Could you make sure the committee says yes? We would like to debate telling the committee to say yes, even though the committee has already agreed to say yes. This is our idea of efficiency and progress." That is the party opposite.

• (1845)

It is their prerogative to try to oppose us. They sit here and say that they did not get time to debate the budget bill or did not get time to debate the important legislation in this House and represent the views of their constituents. If they had not wasted 15 minutes at a time day by day, week by week, trying to help us help them decide which one of them should talk next, they could have actually debated the issues of the day that have been tabled as legislation in this House. Instead, they chose not to do that, and that, to me, is the fallacy of the whole argument they present to us. They want to talk about the issues—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I just want to remind members that they will have a chance to ask questions and make comments. I would say to please refrain for now. The parliamentary secretary has the floor, and we owe him that respect to listen to what he has to say, and I am sure he is looking forward to hearing members' questions and comments.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, on April 13, we got yet another amendment to debate the question of privilege, which was about not whether someone actually was blocked, because we now find out that this might not have been the case, but whether walking or taking the bus is a choice that should be available to a member of Parliament and whether a privilege was apprehended, even though there was no motorcade involved in any of the situations. What we got then, again, was another three hours and 15 minutes of talking about absolutely nothing, with the complaints being that if we do not get to the more important issues of the day, we do not get to represent our constituents and all our work here will be for naught.

The reality is that all the members are talking about is talking about what they are talking about, which in the end is just about adjourning the debate and moving on to absolutely nothing. They are not representing anyone's views but their own selfish approach in wanting to tell each other how to talk.

Figure that out in your caucus room. Get your House leader to make a decision. You have a new leader now. I hope it ends. I hope the new leader can now decide which order you—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the parliamentary secretary to address his comments to the Chair and not to the opposition members.

Government Orders

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, we take a break—

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Resign.

Some hon. members: Shame.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: You wanted a different MP, you have one.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to address the comments to the Chair, and I want to ask the official opposition to refrain from shouting out. They will have an opportunity to ask questions or make comments.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, between May 3 and May 10, there was a constituency week, or as the Conservatives call it, taking time off not to do any work, because apparently, on Fridays, if we are not in the House, not sitting in this seat right now, we are not working. A call to a constituency is not work. A call to a minister's office to get a problem fixed in our riding is not work. Meeting with stakeholders, that is not work. Unless we are sitting in our chair, we are not fulfilling the obligation of our salary. That is the position opposite, that if we take Friday off to travel to see our constituents, that is not work. If we meet constituents on a Friday, that is not work. Apparently, the members of the party opposite think that if we are not in Parliament, we are on holiday. That is their perception. I disagree with that fundamentally. I work seven days a week, as do most of my colleagues. It is one of the reasons we beat them so easily in the last election.

The issue that then came up was on May 10. They came back and immediately there was a movement to concur in another report. This was the third time in the last three weeks they have done this. It had nothing to do with the actual fundamentals of the report that was being referred back to a committee and agreed to in Parliament. What it was, effectively, was another vote. What do we do? We spend another 40 minutes debating whether a committee should do work. We know that committees are doing work. The only reason they are not doing work is that every time the bells ring, they have to stop.

Right after that, we had “that a member be now heard” for an additional 40 minutes. We had, right after that, the same member of Parliament moving adjournment, because I guess the member they wanted to have heard was not going to be heard, so they thought they would shut down all of the debate. Again, the debate was to not talk about things they do not want to talk about, so they adjourned the debate, because they did not want to talk about something.

The most categorically ridiculous strategy I have ever seen to complain about not being able to talk is to start moving motions of adjournment so nobody can talk, but that is the passive-aggressive behaviour of the opposite party.

We then had another five committees disrupted as a result of those bells ringing, and Canadians who travelled across this country—in my committee all the way from Iqaluit down to Ottawa to talk to us about poverty in the north—were sent back without ever being able to talk to the committee they were brought here for, because one of the Conservatives could not figure out if it was his turn next or her turn next. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

In the end, what we ended up with in this entire spot was 36 hours, six weeks of wasted time. We are moving forward with a motion tonight that will get us to the end of the legislative calendar on some critical legislation. I have no problem supporting closure, and we are—

• (1850)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this year, the Liberals put forward what was affectionately referred as a discussion paper, which was not a discussion paper. It was a manifesto. It was the second time they had done this. It was to fundamentally change the rules of Canadian democracy through things like ensuring that the Prime Minister was only going to come to question period once a week, shutting down Parliament on Fridays, and permanently curtailing debate on certain bills.

The member opposite has put forward a great deal of frustration about his government's inability to move its legislative agenda forward. I am just going to be frank. Contrary to the member's belief, this place does not belong to him or the Liberal government. It belongs to the people of Canada. The people of Canada also voted for an opposition to oppose the government. For us to raise motions in the House of Commons in protest of these changes, as many Canadians want us to do, should not be an affront to his timetable. It is actually part of the function of Parliament.

The member talked about concurrence in the report this morning. Will the member vote in favour of concurring in the report from the electoral reform committee?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, it is the right of the opposition to oppose. No one is questioning that. No one is putting the opposition in a situation where that is not being facilitated.

I am just going to quickly address the list of misinformation that was presented. When the proposition was put forward for the Prime Minister to attend question period for one day, it was for him to take all the questions in one of the question periods one day a week. It did not excuse him from attending the other sessions.

On this deliberate misunderstanding of the proposition, I guess the opposition is entitled to mislead themselves. However, the reality is that what the Prime Minister said was that he would answer all the questions on one specific day so that backbenchers could ask the Prime Minister questions and not just party leaders.

Government Orders

On the issue of Fridays off, I have been explicitly clear about this. It is not about taking time off. The Conservatives may not do any work when they are not in the House. I do not know. That may be the way they view the schedule. However, I can assure the House that the goal here was to compress the time we sit in the House to get work done, to compress the time we have with our constituents to get our work done, and to try to find a better balance around that. That may mean some hours are chopped from one day and added to another day.

On the final issue of whether we could frame the work of committees to be more productive, yes, that is what we are trying to do. We would like to have that conversation.

Finally, on the issue of concurrence around electoral reform, I have been just as crystal clear with my constituents. We have priorities in this House on housing, the opioid crisis, transit, and infrastructure investments that now have a shortened time as a result of all the ridiculous hijinks. We have other priorities, and we are getting to those. I will be supporting our government's position on this.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member opposite is accusing us on the opposition side of not working hard, which is rich, given that the average number of new bills a new government brings to the House in its first year is 45, yet the Liberal government brought in 14. That is 14 in its first year of work.

Tonight we are debating the government's motion to extend hours to work until midnight, which we are all happy to do. However, the problem tonight is that the fact of the motion being on the floor has actually cancelled my ability to have a long-scheduled debate on the long-standing issue of abandoned vessels.

This is an environmental crisis on the west coast and on the east coast. We have had local governments calling, for over 15 years, for federal leadership. The government keeps saying that it is going to take that leadership, but it has been about 14 months now that they have been saying that the legislation is coming in the coming weeks. I have quotes from almost every minister on the file saying that they are working on it. I have asked the government to consider supporting my bill, Bill C-352, instead.

Does the member opposite not see the irony in the government's motion tonight, which is actually decreasing transparency?

• (1855)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, I am not sure how a public motion decreases transparency.

On the issue the member raised, I would be happy to debate the issue of derelict vessels. I think it is a critical issue. If my comments reflected back to the NDP, I assure the member that they were directed straight at the Conservatives. The NDP have been a little more productive and co-operative and focused than the loyal opposition.

On this issue, if her house Leader would like to concur in the extension of the hours, I am sure we would not have to have this debate. The trouble is that there was one party that simply wanted to debate this and did not want to simply agree with us and move forward with a unanimous verbal vote.

On the issue of the amount of legislation, one of the criticisms I have of the NDP is that when the government moves without consulting, it says the government went too fast, and when the government moves with consulting, the NDP says it is not going quickly enough. I appreciate that its job is to just provide criticism to us at times, but the reality is that “no” is the easiest word in politics. They can say “no” to something because it is too fast or too slow. The reality is that it is the quality of the legislation that matters.

We are going to get the legislation on derelict vessels right, along with an ocean protection plan. We are engaged on those issues and will hopefully provide a suitable answer—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a serious question for the member. He knows, I think, that the government tried to make unilateral changes to the Standing Orders through the procedure and House affairs committee. Of greatest concern to us was the fact that they wanted to make time allocation on legislation automatic. The government would, through so-called programming, automatically allocate time in advance. We said that would be fundamentally injurious to a democratic institution. Yes, we used every single tool available to us to fight against the designs of the government, including dilatory motions, and we were right to do so. There was a groundswell of public support from Canadians, which was in part driven by the tactics we used in the House. Yes, there were dilatory motions, and we were right to use them, because that brought this issue to the fore.

We successfully forced the government to back down from its anti-democratic designs. We can be very proud, and the interim leader deserves a lot of credit for the incredible work she did and that all of us did on that issue. We saved the House from the direction the government wanted to go.

Now the member wants to list those dilatory motions. I am very proud of what we did there. Will the member acknowledge that the government was wrong to try to unilaterally ram through these changes? He knows that as soon as they backed down and agreed with the opposition position, all of those tactics stopped.

Government Orders

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, we brought a discussion paper to a committee. We asked the committee to consider these ideas. We had no final decision or final goal enunciated, beyond the fact that these were the subject areas we wanted to talk about. If members and the public want to go back and read that letter, what they will see is sometimes contradictory ideas in the same letter, saying do this or do that and let us discuss which option might be better. The opportunity for the committee to put even a third option forward was there.

Parliament can sometimes, in its collective wisdom, find a way forward. What we talked about was how to get more efficient and effective debate on issues. How do we make sure the votes happen in a scheduled way so we do not interrupt committee work? How do we frame the work so that it is both fair and effective but also productive and efficient? That is the conversation we want to have. If they do not want to have that conversation, and they play their games afterward to pretend it is really about that instead of just about shutting down our legislative agenda, that is their prerogative. I can explain it differently to my constituents.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is time for a brief question. The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, anyone watching the debate at home would see that the parliamentary secretary laid out a very logical and truthful analogy of how this place has been running to date.

When I wake up in the morning, I think to myself, “What can I do today to help the Conservatives and the NDP?” I get seized with that question.

I just want to share with the new members that this does not play well back home. We had an opportunity to bring Bill C-4 forward in the House, but the NDP stood up and split the vote on whether the member should be now heard. We know that the CLC conference was going on in Toronto, and the NDP members were seen as being part and party to delaying Bill C-4 coming to the House. It is very important to organized labour, and they were taken to the woodshed.

I would like to ask the member—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will ask the member to respond to your comments. As I said, there was a brief time, and usually that means please ask the question and do not make a whole speech.

The hon. parliamentary secretary, please.

• (1900)

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Madam Speaker, I am pretty sure I can see where he was going. Sometimes the NDP surprises us and moves with us, as on the opioid crisis, and gives us consent. It is welcome. When we see that, Parliament is working. Other times, it obstructs for the sake of obstruction.

There is a saying in Toronto. It is Dippers, Tories, same old story. The opposition, based on ideology, is so automatic and predictable it is quite frankly funny to see how parallel their voting records are. They may be motivated by different goals, but the same—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time is up.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have listened to some of the things that were said in the previous debate, but I did not get a chance to ask a question or make a comment, so I will just say this.

Many of the points mentioned by the parliamentary secretary are just ducky. The opposition does not need to submit anything to get permission from the government to oppose anything, or how we oppose it, or when we oppose it. We will likely get an opportunity to oppose this right into late evening if the motion passes.

I will also say that a breach of privilege is not a red herring. It is a matter that is taken up by the entire House. Every member who wants to rise should be allowed to rise. No member on this side of the House is ever stopped from speaking to a motion, such as Motion No. 14, and no member on this side is ever told what to say.

A concurrence report debate allows the opposition to highlight important issues of the day in the amount of time that is allocated for that type of debate.

The will of Parliament is tested at times by the opposition, by the government, by the third party, and even by individual members. We should never take it for granted that Parliament thinks one thing or another, including on Motion No. 14. Perhaps members of the government caucus will decide to dissent once more, saying they do not wish to sit late into the evenings. I have no problem working overtime. I have no problem working extra. I have no problem debating into the late evening, because I have done so already at the procedure and House affairs committee, participating in the debate. I know there were other members there with me. I remember spending the entire day, almost 10 straight hours of debate.

We have a responsibility to oppose legislation. It is clear why we are opposed to parts of Motion No. 14. We are not opposed to the entire motion. We do agree with the principles of it. We just want to see minor amendments.

I always worry whenever I hear the word modernization, because modernization in the context of what the government is proposing means ramming through any changes that it wishes at any time. I am worried about passing many parts of Motion No. 14. I am worried that we will not have an opportunity, if the government chooses to advance changes to the Standing Orders of the House, to oppose those changes in the future. One member mentioned programming. Other members mentioned other things that might happen.

Government Orders

Modernization does not include changing this place into a slot machine, where we simply drop in a law, pull the lever, and out pops a law at the other end in a fixed amount of time. That is not the point of this place. The point of this place is to debate, and I am happy to debate late into the evening. I have no problem whatsoever doing that.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Cariboo—Prince George, who I am sure will have more amazing comments to make than I could ever make. He is one of the bright, new, shining members of the House, a great new rookie who has joined this side.

I really think that Motion No. 14 highlights the incompetence of the Government House Leader. Her complete inability to move legislation through shows a lack of planning and a lack of foresight. The government has barely passed any bills. These days are being extended to allow more time for members who wish to partake in a debate. I still feel that the government will likely squander this extra time.

As I said, I am happy to do overtime. I have done lots of overtime in the private sector, both working in human resources at the chamber of commerce and also as an exempt staffer working for ministers where overtime and working weekends was simply a given.

I am also happy to clean up the mess left by the government House leader in her legislative agenda, the one that the government has obviously failed to push forward. Now the government needs late sittings into June in order to clean up the mess that the House leader has gifted to the House. The House now has to respond and sit late into the evening.

I urge the government to take this time to get its legislation right the first time around. I urge it not to rush legislation through the House in late sittings just to send it to the Senate, where it will be amended and come back here once more. I urge the government to do it right the first time, listen to committees, and listen to the opposition.

Members of the Conservative Party and members of the New Democratic Party have proposed amendments that are worth consideration. The government should not send legislation to the Senate where it will be amended once more to point out errors that the government has made. Rushing legislation through now will only result in even more delays. The Senate might sit through the entire summer and bring back legislation in the fall. Where is the gain in that? Are we going to have late sittings into December as well? Will this become a normal practice of the House, simply squandering three months and then rushing things through in the final months before a session ends? That is what I am worried about.

● (1905)

The opposition members on this side of the House have been fixing errors, rewording poorly written sections of legislation, and we are making a stand on principle as well as drawing attention to evidence that contradicts the government's position, as is our right, as is our responsibility both to Her Majesty the Queen and to the Constitution of Canada.

For too long the government House leader has been trying to basically—now I will use a Yiddish proverb because I know many

members know my great love for Yiddish proverbs: trying to outsmart everybody is the greatest folly. We saw previously at the procedure and House affairs committee attempts to outsmart everybody in this House by trying to push through changes to the Standing Orders. On a Friday is when the discussion paper was dropped. The motion notice to the committee was also on that Friday, and I am concerned that if we have these late sittings, will the government commit to not moving any changes to the Standing Orders in a late sitting? Can we agree then to have it in a regular session of the House in the fall? Can the Liberals schedule it six months ahead of time? Can they also agree to only pass it with unanimous consent of the House?

That is what we asked at committee. I remember being there till 3 a.m. one time asking exactly the same thing: a simple request to the government caucus members and to members of the executive, the cabinet members. Taking the summer to get it right and drafting legislation that opposition parties can support, that all of us can support, that the Senate will not amend, and that committees will not amend is a really reasonable thing to do. Take the time. We are not rushing the Liberals in any way. We have not been rushing them so far.

The parliamentary secretary who spoke before mentioned dilatory motions. They were the motions that slowed down the House. Adjourning debate in the House moves on to another piece of debate that the government controls. The government controls the entire agenda. It is up to the Liberals to decide what comes forward for debate. The opposition rarely gets an opportunity to do that.

That is why one of the things we would like is an opportunity to see opposition days go into the late evening as well. If we are extending the hours for government business, with which the government House leader desperately needs help, obviously, why not do the same for opposition days? Why not have the opportunity to have another four, five, or six hours of debate on an opposition day, or what is called a supply day? I am sure that, if we had an extra five hours, we could have perhaps debated the Canadian autism partnership to the point where we could have convinced members of the government caucus, those who are not in cabinet but are working so hard to join the cabinet, to perhaps vote for the autism initiative brought forward by the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin. I think that would have been more than reasonable. We could have had a debate late into the evening. Sometimes they are quite productive. I learned quite a lot of things being on a committee that sat into the late evening. I learned lots about the views of Liberal members of the backbench, both on the main motion and about the Standing Orders and how the House worked or did not work.

The government has basically moved to cut off debate before it even got started. The Liberals cannot say or pretend that we are obstructing. Oftentimes I have heard them say—“them” being both members of the cabinet and the government caucus—that we are obstructing when we are simply debating. Members are simply rising in their seats to offer 10 minutes or 20 minutes of their thoughts, commentary, sometimes from constituents, sometimes their own based on experience, based on judgment, based on principle. I do not think it is obstruction to allow every member who wishes to rise an opportunity to speak.

Government Orders

An effective opposition can indeed slow down government business, but as I said, this is not a slot machine. At the end of the day, we cannot just drop in a law, pull the lever, as I mentioned before, and out comes a law and the government wins. That is simply not the way it works.

My concern is that the government will use the late sitting hours again, as I said, to ram through those changes to the Standing Orders. It does not help anyone. It will not help members of the opposition. It will not help members of the government backbench, the caucus members, so not members of the government. I know that is confused oftentimes. Our requests or demands on the opposition side are reasonable. Any changes to the Standing Orders must be unanimous. I really think that this motion is more about the government being half as productive as the previous Conservative government, and we know that the previous Conservative government was far more productive in the shorter amount of time it had.

It is a failure of leadership on behalf of the government House leader, and this is why we have been brought to this point today where we are debating Motion No. 14 and late sittings. I, on this side, speak for myself. I have no problems working overtime in sittings late into the evening, but I do want to see an opportunity for opposition days to be considered the same as government business.

• (1910)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): First and foremost, Madam Speaker, I do not believe for a moment that Stephen Harper's first few years were anywhere near as productive as the first 18 months of this particular government.

The member talked about dilatory motions and said that the government has control and it can actually say what is going to be coming next. It is important that the Conservatives in opposition have moved that the House do now be adjourned, as an example. That means that if the Conservatives get what they propose, the House comes to an end; there is no more continuation for that day. We sit the following day, so we do lose time. We never see the opposition moving that on an opposition day, but only on government days. The opposition members use dilatory motions to prevent government legislation from passing. Would the member not at least acknowledge the fact that when they move that the House adjourn for the day, the House business comes to an end?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I have heard from that member quite often in this House, and he makes a contribution to his caucus, most definitely. What I will say is this. The opposition—Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, official opposition, and the New Democrats and the Bloc and the single member of the Green Party—does not need to get the permission of the government for us to oppose and for how we choose to oppose. At the time that the Liberals were trying to rush changes to the Standing Orders of the House through the committee, and in the manner and the way they did it and their complete, sheer, reckless unwillingness to compromise, they deserved the response they got from the opposition. We will defend this Parliament. We will defend the rights of every single member to oppose in the way that he or she chooses to.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am glad that the member for Calgary Shepard mentioned the Senate in

his speech, because I believe that one of the main motivations for sitting until midnight is to give the government enough time to clean up the mess that its new model Senate has created. By appointing supposedly independent senators, the government has emboldened the other place not only to review legislation passed by the House for things that might have been missed but to actually disagree with policy decisions made by elected MPs in this chamber.

I would be very curious to hear from the member for Calgary Shepard what he thinks about the Liberal government's approach to Senate reform and its spending of \$1 million per year on a committee to appoint supposedly independent senators.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, it will probably come as no surprise to that member that I support an elected Senate. I always have and I always will. I will also say there are many elected senators, great Conservative senators who were elected from the province of Alberta, and I hope that would be adopted throughout all of Canada. In terms of this model Senate—that is great terminology from the member, a model Senate—at this point the changes they are trying to ram through to how the official opposition can do its work there is reckless to the extreme. It will not do justice to Parliament, and it will not do justice to Canadians when the business of the House has ground to a halt because the Senate is busy fixing the errors of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech because it highlights what we are hearing on the ground. I know in Oshawa, we are hearing about the laziness of the current government, the incompetence, how basically nothing is getting done, and when the Liberals do want to get something done they are just pushing it through. They do not want debate. The Prime Minister does not want to show up. The Liberals do not want to show up.

The Prime Minister actually said he admires the basic dictatorship of China. Would the member please kind of put that into perspective and let us understand what that means today with the government trying to force these things through?

• (1915)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member for Calgary Shepard, give a brief answer in 40 seconds.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, thank you for the 40 seconds that you have given me to answer. I could use 40 minutes, probably, to answer this one. In brief, we saw it with Motion No. 6. We saw it with the behaviour of the Prime Minister in the House in the previous breach of privilege. I think it was called the molestation of the member, to use the really complicated parliamentary term for it. We saw the behaviour in the House, how they treat the House, and how they treat parliamentarians. It is the treatment that members of the cabinet give to the House and members of the government caucus give to the House. It comes also with a lot of them being new to this place, and it is a process of learning. Over time, I would hope that the Liberals would pick up the respect that this Parliament deserves.

Government Orders

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague pre-empted my speech by talking about how riveting he thinks this one is going to be. I will offer this: I am not as articulate as my hon. colleague and I will keep this simple. Canadians from coast to coast to coast are watching this, and sometimes in Ottawa we get carried away with language that perhaps Canadians may not understand. Let us keep it plain and simple.

Yesterday I congratulated the member for Spadina—Fort York for his maiden speech and I will now congratulate him on his second speech in this session. It was interesting. He waxed on about all of the dates, the dilatory motions, and how the opposition is wasting time.

I want to remind him of something, through you, Madam Speaker. If I step out of line, I am sure you will keep me in order, because it has been a while since I have stood in the House, unlike my hon. colleague the hon. parliamentary secretary, who seems to be the only who stands and actually speaks. There are 184 members of Parliament across the way, and he seems to be the only one, time and time again, although the member for Spadina—Fort York stood today, for the second time this session. That is great, and I applaud him for that.

He talked about all of the dilatory motions and the opposition dragging its feet. That brings me back to my days in school and Newton's third law: that for every action, there is a reaction. That was exactly what the government saw on March 10 when the government House leader tabled this discussion paper about new ways to modernize Parliament.

She felt that this discussion paper was going to revolutionize Parliament and released it to the media. It was not a discussion paper with parliamentarians. She thought that by releasing it to the media, she would get a favourable response. In fact, she saw quite the opposite. The media's response was quite negative. A couple of comments were that Liberals will always do what Liberals do and that they showed one thing, which was that they cannot be trusted.

When they stand in the House, they have it almost to an art. Perhaps that is because the Prime Minister is a former grammar teacher. Maybe he has coached them about talking with sincerity. When they stand in the House, they say this is for the best interests of Canadians. They say they want to debate the things that matter most. They say the opposition is dragging its feet and really making things hard.

That is our job. Our job is to stand up for Canadians and those who put us in the House. I remind people that this House does not belong to the Prime Minister or to the government; it belongs to all Canadians, the electors, those who put us in the House. I will get to that a bit later.

On March 10, the discussion paper was tabled, if we can call it a discussion paper, and I want to talk about that quickly. I have been a member of Parliament for about 19 months now, and far be it from me to be bold enough to put forward a discussion paper about how I suggest we modernize Parliament. I believe the House leader is a newly elected member of Parliament as well, a rookie MP, as am I. She said it was her discussion paper. This is what she has seen throughout the course of her being a member of Parliament and

sitting through the debate. She feels there are things we could do better.

There are always things we could do better, but I can say that I would never be so bold as to put forward a document such as that, a document that would fundamentally change the way democracy and this House operate, without all-party or unanimous support.

● (1920)

I believe her comments were that they were elected on a campaign promise of making Parliament more effective, and she would not bow down to the Conservatives or give the Conservatives a veto. Essentially, what she is saying is that those who elected the Conservatives and those who elected the opposition do not really have a say and really do not matter, but those are the electors that the House belongs to.

The dilatory motions that took place from March 10 to just a short while ago at all committees, and some of the actions that took place in the House, occurred because we were standing up for Canadians. We were defending democracy. We were making sure that opposition voices and the voices of those who elected us were not muzzled.

All we are asking for is an amendment to Motion No. 14. We agree. We agree to work longer hours. Bring it. I said it earlier this week. I am okay working until midnight. I work until midnight anyway. I will be in my office anyway. That is what Canadians expect us to do.

One of the things we are asking for with this amendment, and the opposition was unanimous in this request, is opposition supply days. There are very few times we get an opportunity to debate matters that are not on the government's agenda. I brought this up earlier. Whether it is softwood lumber or pipeline approval or the plight of the Yazidi women, these are examples of opposition supply day motions that we have debated or would be able to debate. All we are asking for with Motion No. 14 is that the government, in a most sincere way, see its way to allowing opposition supply days to be extended as well.

We are not saying we do not want to work longer; what we are asking for is the same opportunity, the same value weighting, on the government's legislative agenda so that the opposition supply days are weighted the same and we have the opportunity to bring forth the voices of our electors.

It is not just the voices of the opposition during supply day motions. We see backbench MPs from the government speak and voice their views and their opinions and their constituents' opinions on things that matter most for everyday Canadians.

The Liberals like to say that we are again dragging our feet and delaying progress on their legislative duty. They say that the government is trying everything to work hard for Canadians, that it is just the opposition that is dragging its heels and causing all the grief. Well, I offer this: for 19 months now, the government has done nothing. We have seen one side do nothing but point fingers and blame others and never take credit for the mismanagement of its legislative process or its budget or the softwood lumber file. It has blamed others. It is not going to accept any blame.

Government Orders

It is disappointing. I came here as a new member of Parliament who was willing to work collaboratively and try to build relationships. Indeed, we have done that on certain issues, but I am also a small business owner and I believe there is a time when one has to take charge and lead. How does one lead and build trust? It is by being honest, taking responsibility, and admitting it when one is wrong.

I have not even brought up May 17 of last year, when Motion No. 6 was brought forth, because I wanted to keep it relevant here, but if the government wants to know why trust has been broken and why we have been doing the dilatory motions and the opposition has been standing forth, it is because the government has broken trust and faith with Canadians and those who elected all of us in opposition in the House.

• (1925)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have now heard a member of the Conservative Party stand to say that they agree with extra sitting hours and earlier I heard a member of the New Democratic Party stand to say the same thing. They agree with the additional hours we are adding to the June calendar and the additional days that we have proposed.

I guess I am kind of curious. If both sides agree, why, when it came forward for a vote, did we not just say yes and get on with the business of the House? Instead what we get is a debate in which everyone agrees with the outcome, but the opposition would rather debate who is working and when and why we are working than actually resolve the issue.

On the issue that the member raised about the number of supply days for the opposition, at the start of the session we asked how many they wanted, they said how many they wanted, and we gave them to them. Now they want more. I am not sure why. Maybe what we should do is give them one, move an adjournment motion, and pay them back.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, we are not asking for more supply days. If we are extending the days for government business, then why can we not extend the hours for the opposition supply days?

We are willing to do that. We are willing to work hard to try to do whatever it is that the government is trying to do and pass that legislative agenda that it is trying to put forth. We all agree that we should be working hard and doing what we have to do. We should be working around the clock if that is what we need to do. I am willing to do it and I am here, so let us do it.

We disagreed because again the government said it would like to work with the opposition parties and consider the amendments, but it is not considering simple common sense amendments to just allow the opposition supply days to be longer in extended sittings, the same as government business.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I certainly agree with my colleague's characterization of the reason we are having this debate at all. The need to extend hours is a result of the Liberal House leader not managing the file well and not

working co-operatively with the opposition to bring matters of public interest forward.

However, this is just a funny time, because this very same tactic was used by the Harper Conservative government as well. I understand, although I was not in that Parliament, that often the Conservative government did not even show up for the debate at night. It was just an extension of time and it was frustrating for all of us to watch.

The NDP moved amendments at that time, trying to protect the opposition's powers in those extended hours, but the Conservatives opposed that motion.

How does the member feel about the irony of this debate?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I wish I had been here in the last Parliament. I wish I had had the privilege of being able to see what the amendments were. She is asking me to comment on something I have not seen. I was not part of that Parliament.

However, I would like to again talk about the government pointing fingers at the opposition for dragging its feet and moving dilatory motions. I would offer to my colleague from the NDP that at this point we seem to be some of the last voices standing up for Canadians. Pointing fingers and bringing up things that happened in the past is what we have heard the government doing. The Liberals are blaming the Conservatives for what was done when we were in power, so they think it is okay for them to do it. I think that is the wrong thing to do.

We should be looking forward. The Liberals are in power now. For true leadership, it is their responsibility to do whatever they can to give voices to Canadians and to make sure they are protecting the voices of Canadians.

• (1930)

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when considering whether to allocate additional time in the House for debate, it is important to consider the significance of the legislation being debated.

Bill C-45 is important legislation that proposes to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to cannabis. Despite decades of criminal prohibition, Canadians continue to use cannabis. In fact, Canadians have some of the highest rates in the world.

Currently, cannabis is grown and sold illegally, generating profits for criminals and organized crime with no concern for public health or safety. The current approach to cannabis is not working. Scientific evidence shows greater risks associated with cannabis use for youth than for adults. Moreover, risks are greater the younger a person starts using cannabis and the more often they use it.

The objective of the legislation is intended to delay the first use of cannabis and reduce the frequency of use. A sustained education and information campaign is also part of the approach. The bill would also impose serious criminal penalties for providing cannabis to young people or enlisting them in committing cannabis-related offences.

Government Orders

The bill is also about creating a legal and regulated market for cannabis, taking profits out of the hands of criminals and protecting public health through strict product requirements for safety and quality. The key components of our government's approach are first, protect youth; second, education and public awareness; third, product safety and quality controls; and fourth, goals and responsibility and implementation.

Let us begin with protecting youth.

We know that too many youth have easy access to cannabis. In fact, during the task force on cannabis legalization and regulation consultations nation-wide, a trend became clear: how easy it was for young people to obtain cannabis.

[*Translation*]

Young people are at the heart of the government's strategy to regulate cannabis and restrict access to it for three reasons.

First, there are risks associated with the use of cannabis. Even though some people use it for medical purposes, it can still be harmful to a person's health.

Second, young people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cannabis on the development of the brain and brain function because their brains are still developing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly on a point of order.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's enthusiasm on this subject. However, if I am not mistaken, he is talking about Bill C-45, which is on the agenda for later this evening. Right now, we are talking about Motion No. 14.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Does the hon. member for Winnipeg North wish to respond?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will find that the member is relevant. Part of the case being made here is that we need to have the extended sitting hours so we can ensure there is a thorough debate on a wide spectrum of legislation. My colleague is making reference to one of that legislation. It is the same as when the government House leader introduced the issue. She made reference to various legislation. All my colleague is doing is making reference to a bill that was brought forward earlier today.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I think this was an honest mistake. The member was simply reading the wrong script that was provided to him by the PMO. If he flips a couple of pages, I am sure he would get to the appropriate speech for this debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): One of the things we do quite often is allow latitude, and I have said this often. I have sat here and unlike members in the chamber, I do not have the luxury of walking away when I do not necessarily enjoy what is being said, but often I will listen to the speech. It is interesting how individual members will take a speech, wrap around and come back to make their point and make it relevant.

I will give the hon. member the benefit to finish his speech and we will see where it goes. I thank all members for bring this up.

● (1935)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why we want to extend the hours, so we can pass the bills that are urgently needed to push our agenda forward.

[*Translation*]

At the same time, adults must have access to clear and objective information in order to make informed decisions about their consumption.

[*English*]

Therefore, the legislation would permit only information-type promotion. This means it would allow factual, accurate information about cannabis products, such as the ingredients and THC levels. Information allowing consumers to differentiate brands would also be permitted, provided it could not be seen by youth. Penalties for violating these prohibitions would include a fine of up to \$5 million, or three years in jail, or both.

When it comes to enforcement, the bill seeks to avoid criminalizing youth and subjecting them to the lifelong consequence of criminal records. To this end, I should note three points.

First, individuals under the age of 18 would not face criminal prosecution for possessing or sharing very small amounts of cannabis, up to five grams.

Second, violation of the proposed legislation by youth would be subject to the Youth Criminal Justice Act and addressed in the youth justice system.

Third, provinces and territories would have the flexibility to prohibit the possession of any amount of cannabis by youth, thereby permitting police to seize any cannabis youth have in their possession.

[*Translation*]

I will move on to education and public awareness. We know that Canadians need information about cannabis. We have to talk about it with our children, make informed and responsible decisions, and ensure that our roads are safe. That was the very clear message that our government heard thanks to the working group's consultations. We have a plan to address the situation.

*Government Orders**[English]*

In budget 2017, our government committed \$9.6 million to a public education and awareness campaign to inform Canadians, particularly young people, of the risks of cannabis use and for health surveillance activities. This campaign has begun and will continue over the next five years. In collaboration with the provinces and territories, the campaign will raise public awareness about the risks associated with cannabis use and monitor the impacts of providing strictly controlled access.

To do this, we have launched the Canadian cannabis survey. This annual survey includes detailed questions on how often and how much Canadians use cannabis, how they acquire it, and whether they consume it with other substances before driving.

[Translation]

I will now talk about product safety and quality requirements.

[English]

Adults would also be able to legally access cannabis through one of three mechanisms. They could purchase it from a provincially licensed retailer, they could share legally grown or purchased cannabis with another adult, or they could grow it themselves at home.

The sharing of cannabis would be limited to no more than 30 grams of dried cannabis, or its equivalent, and personal cultivation—

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate the latitude you are allowing in this debate, but I do not hear anything about the current bill being debated. I do not know how much latitude needs to be given before we get back to the original bill about which we are talking.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is not legislation being debated, per se. We are talking about the need to extend hours so we can debate a series of legislation, whether it is the budget or what the member is talking about. The issue of cannabis is of great importance. We want more members to be able debate it. My colleague is bringing to the floor the issue of extending hours. It is up to the member as to how he justifies the extension of hours. He has obviously chosen to emphasize a particular issue to justify the extension, and we should hear him out. The last time the member stood, he referenced extending the sitting hours. It is up to the member whether he focuses more attention on why we need to extend the hours.

● (1940)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid I will have to side with the hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner. I have been listening intently to the speech and not a lot has pertained to Motion No. 14. On the other hand, I am sure the hon. member will have the opportunity. He still has 10 minutes to bring it around to the topic at hand.

The hon. member for Miramichi—Grand Lake.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly expand my speech. We can talk about the budget implementation bill. We can talk about the tax break that has been announced, and all the infrastructure projects we have. This is along with all the economic opportunities this will create.

I am certainly happy to expand on those fronts. This legislation is not only about the right thing to do, but it is about the business of it and our budget, which will help to deliver the promises we have made to all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Historic investments.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

[Translation]

We will be using the authorized production system in place as the plan of action to control cannabis production under the proposed cannabis legislation.

[English]

Over the coming weeks, Health Canada will introduce changes to its program overseeing the medical cannabis industry to accelerate the licensing of—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was a staffer in a former life. Sometimes I delivered the wrong speech to my former boss. If you ask the member, I think this is what has happened in this case. He is reading the speech on Bill C-45 and not on what we are to be debating.

I wonder if you, Mr. Speaker, can rule on this.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I thank the member for bringing that up, but I am afraid I am going to have to leave that to the hon. member for Miramichi—Grand Lake. I will let him continue.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, again, this is more than just about the cannabis speech. It is about our budget. It is about passing legislation that needs to be passed to move along our agenda. This is part of it.

Over the coming weeks, Health Canada will introduce changes to its program overseeing the medical cannabis industry to accelerate the licensing of producers and enable the industry to meet an increased demand for cannabis. This is a great economic generator. We have two examples in my home province. A lot of businesses are excited about this. It is about taking money out of the hands of criminals and putting it into the government's coffers. It will help with the budget.

The existing rules surrounding product safety, good production practices, and restrictions on which pesticides may be used will remain in place. Health Canada will continue to inspect producers and enforce the regime. I can talk about that because I am a producer myself, not of cannabis but of other crops. Being a certified grower, we want to ensure that no pesticides or foreign substances enter the product. The example of organic production is certainly applicable with this bill.

[Translation]

As I already mentioned, the proposed cannabis law would establish a rigorous national framework to limit the production, distribution, sale, and possession of cannabis in Canada.

Government Orders

[English]

All levels of government in Canada would be able to—

● (1945)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As a member of the third party, and it is not something I like to brag about, we have fewer speaking spots. We can look at the fact that a closure motion was presented on Motion No. 14. There are no more New Democrats speaking tonight, so if the member is going to skip ahead to the business that is going to take place later with Bill C-45, perhaps he could sit down and allow others to speak, those who wish to talk about the important work we do here, which is part of Motion No. 14, the extended sitting hours, and other pieces of procedural rules.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Once again, I am sure the hon. member will bring it around to Motion No. 14. I am trusting that his judgment will bring him back to the order we are discussing.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly conclude at this time, but this is an example of what we need to discuss. This is an important topic for all Canadians. We will get back to it of course, but I am anxious to have the members opposite give their views. This is why we need to extend the hours: to pass the important legislation that Canadians want us to pass.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech. It seemed to be on Bill C-45, the marijuana bill. He talked a little about the budget implementation bill, but I thought we were debating the extension of sitting hours. Perhaps I will ask a question on that since that seems to be what we are debating.

My question is fairly simple. Why is it that the Liberal Party is so intent on all of a sudden ramming legislation through the House after having such a lax legislative agenda thus far, sending it off to the other place where they amend it and send it back our way? Why do we not just take the due diligence here and actually accept opposition amendments, rather than sending it to the other place and having them amend it and send it back here?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, we do have an aggressive agenda. We want to pass this legislation. My colleague just expressed why we are having to extend the hours. It is because of all the delays we have experienced over the past couple of months.

Canadians want us to get to work. We want to work until we have this legislation passed. I hope the other side will also sit with us and pass this important legislation.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member on Motion No. 14, which is the motion to extend sitting hours until midnight until the end of June. I note the government House leader's mandate letter from the Prime Minister last fall reads, "Work with Opposition House Leaders to examine ways to make the House of Commons more family-friendly for Members of Parliament."

Also, on the New Democrat side, we are concerned that this workplace on the Hill be family friendly for staffers as well. Therefore, my question is this: how does the member feel that

extending sitting hours for four weeks to midnight is family friendly for either members of Parliament or staffers with young families?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that not so long ago, last year, we had the exact same thing in Parliament. We had extended hours. This is not new. I agree that it is not family friendly, but that is also part of what we want to do. We want to make this place more productive and family friendly. That is why we are here today having to extend the hours to pass legislation that Canadians are counting on us to pass. It is something to get our country moving again.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really believe that the member has hit the nail on the head. He is right on. We need to have extended hours. We within the Liberal caucus are not scared to put in some overtime. I look forward to how my colleagues across the way will ultimately vote. If they were listening on that side of the House perhaps they will vote in favour of what the government House leader has put forward.

My colleague made reference to and put a lot of emphasis on the cannabis legislation. He also referenced the budget legislation. There are a number of pieces of legislation. We have a fairly aggressive legislative agenda, which includes both legislation dealing with budgetary and non-budgetary issues. I wonder if my colleague would not agree, and possibly provide some further comment, that Canadians have an expectation that when we come to Ottawa we will be productive and look at ways we can improve our communities as a whole.

One of the best things we can do is to work a little extra. Stephen Harper did the same thing. In the last 10 years we have seen it happen seven times. There is nothing new here. Why would the opposition not vote in favour of this extension? Let us work a little harder and be a little more productive. Would the member not agree?

● (1950)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I certainly want to finish this session by going back to my riding and telling Canadians that we have moved this agenda, that we have passed legislation, and that we have passed good measures for Canadians.

What better way to celebrate Canada Day than to go back and say that we have been productive, even with all the difficulties we have had? I respect the opposition's right to question, but we have to make it serious. We have to make sure that what we are working on is for the benefit of the whole country.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member opposite might agree that the reason we have seen such a paralysis in the legislative process is due to the conduct of the government House leader and the House leadership team.

I want to share a quick quote from that notorious Conservative right-wing newspaper, the *Toronto Star*. Robin Sears writes:

Government Orders

The Liberals have installed one incompetent house leader after another, inflicting serious wounds on their own credibility. Perhaps a seasoned veteran will remind the newbies that exceptionally deft and silk smooth house management was always part of the Liberal DNA. From Alan MacEachern, through Herb Gray, to [the member for Regina—Wascana], and Don Boudria, Liberal house leaders were the gold standard.

Those veterans must wince at the mess [the government House leader] has made for this government of parliamentary reform, let alone any cross-bench goodwill.

Would the member agree that the incompetence and the mismanagement by his own party's House leadership team has put us in the state we are now, where we are seeing a trickle of government legislation actually being passed through this place and sent to the other place and then having it sent back here again?

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I have nothing but respect for our House leader. She has worked tremendously hard to work with the other side. We have seen all kinds of delay tactics. We have seen guests from all over the country being denied the right to speak at committee. Even with that, we are sitting here today with the potential to pass very productive legislation, including the bill that I partially described and I am hoping will come back again.

I have nothing but respect and I think we have a very good House leader. I, for one, am ready to work until this session is ended in order to have a productive record to bring back to my riding. I hope everyone on the other side feels the same.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the key questions in this debate is whether extending sitting hours until midnight is the best way to facilitate a focused and attentive discussion on legislation before the House. I wonder if my colleague across the way is concerned that it might instead result in members becoming fatigued and reading the wrong speech by mistake.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, if the member wishes, I can finish the speech right now. It is the speech that I intended to read. I do agree that working until midnight is going to be very tough and very tiring, but I am ready to do it. We are in this situation because of the delay tactics that happened over the session. I will drink 10 cups of coffee if I have to, but I am ready to work and tell my constituents that I have worked hard and we have moved this agenda forward.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the great privilege to work with members on all sides of the House on a book called *Turning Parliament Inside Out*, about how we could improve decorum in this place. One of the problems that we now see ourselves facing, and it is very much in front of us, is the prospect of sitting until midnight through every day of June. It is one thing to work hard, but I have been through this before. Every June of the 41st Parliament we sat until midnight every night, and unlike other members who had parties where they could trade on and off, I sat until midnight every night. I can swear to members it was not all that productive. I am not allowed to speak of the absence of members, but let us say there was lots of room in here.

The difficulty we face is that it is absolutely right, as the member for Miramichi—Grand Lake says, that the House leaders on the opposition side decided to run a campaign of dilatory motions, that this House now adjourn, that this member now be heard, that we lost lots of time, and it is as if the punishment for that is sitting until midnight until we get through an agenda.

I do not know the solution, but I can say that I can identify the problem. The problem is allowing backroom political strategists to

decide what we do in this place for the benefit of the next election instead of, as members of Parliament, standing in our places on our own two feet and deciding what we should do for our constituents to make them proud.

It is a sad moment when one side of the House decides to monkeywrench and the other side of the House decides to punish. It is not what our constituents want to see. It is not productive. It is not the best solution, but I do understand how the government House leader feels forced into this by the loss of time through the tactics of the last few weeks. I do not support any side in this. I just think it is a bloody shame that we cannot work together more effectively and more collaboratively.

• (1955)

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I have lots of respect for my colleague, the leader of the Green Party, because at times I cannot even hear, and I know my hearing is going down.

I have a lot of respect for her stand on how to make the House work better and more efficiently. If we had done that, we probably would not have to sit until midnight. However, I am ready to work. I am hoping that everyone else is.

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary for Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the motion to extend the sitting hours in the House.

Our government believes that good, corporate governance is one of the mechanisms that help support economic efficiency and growth. We recognize that our country is at its most prosperous when everyone has a fair chance at success. That is why, in September 2016, we introduced Bill C-25, enhancing business frameworks and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Bill C-25 makes important adjustments to the framework laws that govern the Canadian marketplace. It would increase shareholder democracy and participation, increase women's representation, as well as diversity, on corporate boards and in senior management, improve corporate transparency, reduce regulatory burden, and increase business certainty.

Both official opposition parties have expressed support for this legislation, as have many stakeholder groups. However, the bill has been stuck at report stage since early April. I would like to take this opportunity to share with the House some of the key elements of this important piece of legislation. Specifically, I would like to focus on competitiveness in our economy.

Government Orders

Bill C-25 makes a number of targeted amendments to our economic framework laws in an effort to bring them up to date for our modern economy. Keeping our laws relevant is beneficial in a number of ways. It allows us to embrace best practices, remove ambiguity and minimize regulatory burden, just to name a few.

Competitiveness is a word that we hear a lot when discussing the economy, but it is also one of those words whose meaning may change a fair amount, depending on the context. When Red Wilson's competition policy review panel undertook an examination of Canada's competition and investment policies in 2007 and 2008, it set out to provide recommendations to the government on how to enhance Canadian product—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We have a point of order from the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I can anticipate already what the parliamentary secretary will say. Once again we have a reprinted speech on another bill so that they can argue about how they are pushing their legislative agenda. The member is specifically referencing Bill C-25.

We were looking at who the next speakers would be, and some, including me, I dare say, actually have things to say about Motion No. 14, which is before the House.

I understand the leeway you give, Mr. Speaker. I have tried to benefit from that leeway myself, as we all have, but unfortunately, I think, we have talked so much in the last few months about the way this place works, that at the very least, if we are to invoke closure, it would be nice if we could actually deal with the motion in the limited time that we have.

• (2000)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I have been sitting here listening for the last, at least, half an hour while the Liberals have been completely off topic on an issue that they brought forward. They are giving us lectures about how the House should work effectively. They refuse to even stay on target, on the motion that we are supposed to be talking about.

They have wasted a number of minutes of time. The parliamentary secretary runs back and forth giving speeches out to people on the other side so that they have something to say. Why do they not let some folks over here who want to speak to this issue get up and speak to it?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will allow the hon. parliamentary secretary to continue, and I am sure she will bring it around to the topic at hand.

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, yes, this is the topic at hand. I mentioned that Bill C-25 has been stuck at report stage since early April. That is the point. We want to continue to make sure that we get through our agenda. The fact of the matter is that we have not been able to do so because of the opposition's tactics, so in fact we are here.

It is eight o'clock, and I am quite proud to be here and will continue to be here until midnight tonight, and again midnight tomorrow night if necessary, because I agree that it is important to continue to talk about the government's agenda and what we have to accomplish.

Of course, the budget is so important. There is so much that we have to get through so that we can, in fact, do what Canadians voted us in to do. It is so important that we continue the amount of work that we have. We have talked about the budget. We have talked about tax fairness and historic investments in infrastructure that we must move forward. If we do not, we will not be able to complete our agenda. That is what Canadians expect of us and that is what we will continue to do.

In fact, I will continue to read this. I know it is a speech that has been prepared, but it has important information that I think we all need to hear. I will pick up from where I left off, talking about Red Wilson's competition policy review panel.

I could possibly continue on, if you would like me to, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am not sure if the only objective of the Liberals this evening is to mock the opposition members on this side. As mentioned, it is the motion that we are talking about, since we talked about the last point of relevance here. Obviously she is not going to discuss it. Maybe it would be better if she did and her House leader would allow people on this side to speak directly to Motion No. 14. We are running out of time, people have some things they would like to say, and we would appreciate that opportunity. It is almost as if the Liberals are mocking members on the other side of the House by the way they are handling this issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am not quite sure how to answer that. I will repeat what I have said before. It is up to individual members to debate their own way and bring forward what they believe is relevant. I have to leave it with the hon. parliamentary secretary, with the understanding that I am sure she will bring it back to the topic at hand tonight, which is Motion No. 14.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, it does make for a long evening—I understand that—but we are all here for the right reasons. Certainly, this whole notion of extended hours is something that we are forced to deal with. It is important that all of us have a chance to talk about it and have a say in whether extended hours are necessary. I certainly believe they are.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 8:05 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of Government Business No. 14 now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Government Orders

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.

• (2045)

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 288)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Aubin	Barlow
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boudrias	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard
Brousseau	Brown
Cannings	Carrie
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Davies	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeschen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Egliniski
Falk	Finley
Fortin	Garrison
Généreux	Genuis
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Hoback	Hughes
Jeneroux	Johns
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kusie	Kwan
Lake	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Laverdière	Lebel
Leitch	Liepert
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
Maguire	Malcolmson
Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Moore
Motz	Mulcair
Nater	Nicholson
Nuttall	Obhrai
Paul-Hus	Paupé
Plamondon	Poillievre
Quach	Rankin
Rayes	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Ritz	Saganash
Sansoucy	Saroya
Scheer	Schmale
Shields	Shipley
Sorenson	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Stewart
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Thériault
Tilson	Trost
Trudel	Van Loan

Vecchio
Wagantall
Warkentin
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

Viersen
Warawa
Watts
Webber
Wong
Zimmer — 134

NAYS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brisson
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chan	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehssasi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fry	Garneau
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Harvey
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Jones
Jowhari	Kang
Khalid	Khera
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemieux	Leslie
Levitt	Lightbound
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
May (Cambridge)	
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Mendicino	Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morneau	Murray
Nassif	Nault
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
O'Regan	Ouellette
Paradis	Peschisolido
Peterson	Petipas Taylor
Philpott	Picard
Poissant	Qualtrough
Ratansi	Rioux
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Rudd
Ruimy	Rusnak
Sahota	Saini
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)

Government Orders

Sikand
Spengemann
Tan
Vandal
Virani
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Zahid— 157

Sohi
Tabbara
Tassi
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

Iacono
Jowhari
Khalid
Lametti
Lapointe
Lebouthillier
Lemieux
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Soeurs
Monsef
Murray
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Samson
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sohi
Tabbara
Tassi
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

Jones
Kang
Khera
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lefebvre
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
MacAulay (Cardigan)
Maloney

McDonald
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-

Morneau
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sangha
Schiefke
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Spengemann
Tan
Vandal
Virani
Wilkinson
Wrzesnewskyj
Zahid— 156

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the amendment defeated.

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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

• (2055)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 289*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bains	Baylis
Beech	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bossio	Bratina
Breton	Brison
Carr	Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chan	Chen
Cormier	Cuzner
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyolfson
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fry	Garneau
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Goodale	Gould
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Harvey
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Aubin	Barlow
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boucher
Boudrias	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brassard
Brousseau	Brown
Cannings	Carrie
Chong	Choquette
Christopherson	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Davies	Deltell
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Duvall	Eglinski
Falk	Finley
Fortin	Garrison
Généreux	Genius
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Hardcastle	Harder
Hoback	Hughes
Jeneroux	Johns
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmieć

Government Orders

Kusie	Kwan
Lake	Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Laverdière	Lebel
Leitch	Liepert
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacGregor	MacKenzie
Maguire	Malcolmson
Marcel	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Moore	Motz
Mulcair	Nater
Nicholson	Nuttall
Obhrai	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Plamondon
Poillievre	Quach
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Ritz
Saganash	Sansoucy
Saroya	Scheer
Schmale	Shields
Shipley	Sorenson
Ste-Marie	Stetski
Stewart	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Thériault	Tilson
Trost	Trudel
Van Loan	Vecchio
Viersen	Wagantall
Warawa	Warkentin
Watts	Waugh
Webber	Weir
Wong	Yurdiga
Zimmer— 135	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

CANNABIS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-45, An Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House of Commons to express my support for Bill C-45, the cannabis act. With this bill, our government is fulfilling the promise that it made in the 2015 throne speech to legalize, regulate, and severely restrict access to marijuana for adults and keep it out of the hands of young people.

[English]

Let me begin my remarks by noting that three separate parliamentary reports have concluded that Canada's policy on criminalization creates harms that are disproportionate to the harms associated with cannabis use.

[Translation]

We first need to recognize that the existing system is not working. Canadians, including children and youth, have some of the highest rates of cannabis use in the world. The existing system allows the underground market to thrive, a market that is not regulated or tested and can be dangerous.

[English]

By providing regulated access to legal cannabis for adults only through a well-regulated industry or grown in limited amounts at home, our government's legislative proposal will address the disproportionate harms caused by the criminal prohibition of non-medicinal cannabis. Our goal is to protect public health and public safety of all Canadians, particularly young Canadians. Let me be clear. Bill C-45 would restrict youth access to both legal and illicit cannabis.

[Translation]

I would like to use the time I have been given to provide an overview of Bill C-45. The purpose of the bill, as set out in clause 7, is to protect public health and public safety. This bill is a departure from the approach based solely on criminal justice in that it provides a new regulatory framework to regulate and severely restrict access to cannabis while punishing those who conduct their activities outside the limits imposed by the bill.

● (2100)

[English]

Bill C-45 was developed bearing in mind our government's key policy objectives: to protect youth and to prevent them from accessing and using cannabis, to enhance public awareness regarding the risks of cannabis use, to deter illicit activities through appropriate measures proportionate to the crime, and to reduce the burden on the criminal justice system for minor cannabis offences.

Bill C-45 is divided into a number of parts.

Part 1 of Bill C-45 sets out the main criminal prohibitions, obligations, and offences relating to cannabis. More specifically, part 1 of the bill prohibits the possession, distribution, sale, production, importation, and exportation of cannabis.

For example, clause 8 of Bill C-45 establishes a general prohibition on cannabis possession, subject to certain restricted exceptions. One such exception permits adults aged 18 and older to possess, in a public place, 30 grams or less of dried legal cannabis or an equivalent amount of another form.

A young person would commit a criminal offence by possessing more than five grams of dried licit cannabis and would be subject to the application of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which is based on principles of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Nevertheless, we are not supporting, nor are we promoting, the idea that youth should be allowed to possess five grams or less of cannabis. We are encouraging the creation of provincial and territorial offences for possession amounts below five grams for young persons, thereby providing authority for police to seize the cannabis from young persons. Provinces would also have the ability to increase the minimum age for possession that would apply in their respective jurisdictions.

Government Orders

Clause 9 of Bill C-45 creates a distribution offence. “Distribute”, as defined in section 2, includes administering, giving, transferring, transporting, sending, delivering, providing, or otherwise making available in any manner, whether directly or indirectly, and offering to distribute. Needless to say, this is a definition that restricts a wide range of activities.

Before I move on any further, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with hon. member for Scarborough Southwest. It is very important that we do that.

Distribution of any amount of cannabis that is known to be illicit is prohibited. So is any distribution of cannabis, whether licit or illicit, to a person under 18 years of age. Adults would be permitted to distribute or give up to 30 grams of legal dried cannabis or an equivalent amount of another class to other adults.

Part 1 of the act also sets out restrictions related to promotion, packaging, labelling, display, and sales of cannabis, as well as the obligations on those licensed to conduct activities under the act.

[Translation]

For instance, clauses 17 and 26 of the bill contain promotion and packaging prohibitions where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they could be considered appealing to youth.

Clause 29 also prohibits the display of cannabis, including its labelling and packaging, in any way that would allow youth to see it. Clause 30 contains a similar prohibition regarding the display of all cannabis accessories. Promotional information regarding the ingredients and THC and cannabidiol or CBD levels will be permitted.

[English]

The proposed restrictions on promotion are intended to protect youth from being persuaded through marketing or advertising to consume cannabis. At the same time, consumers need access to clear, objective information to help make informed decisions about consumption.

Part 2 of Bill C-45 sets out a general ticketing scheme applicable to adults who commit minor offences. This part would enable a peace officer to issue tickets to individuals who were 18 years of age or over or to organizations. A ticket would be issued to a person who committed a less serious offence related to possession, distribution, sale, or production.

For example, public possession over 30 grams and up to 50 grams of dried illicit cannabis or its equivalent would be subject to a ticket under proposed paragraph 51(2)(a). If the accused pays within the period set out in the ticket, it will be considered a plea of guilty to the offence described in the ticket, and the conviction will be entered into the judicial record of the accused. However, this judicial record must be kept separate and apart from other judicial records, and it must not be used for any purpose that would identify the accused as a person dealt with under the cannabis act. That is under clause 52.

The ability to issue tickets would limit criminal prosecution for less serious offences and reduce the burden on the police and the criminal justice system, resulting in fewer court delays. I know all members are very concerned about that.

Part 3 of the proposed act sets out a general licensing scheme for the production, distribution, sale, importation, and exportation of cannabis. Setting the parameters for the creation of a legal cannabis industry, part 3 would provide the Minister of Health with authority and discretion to process applications and to issue licences and permits for otherwise prohibited activities and to add licence conditions. Part 3 also includes grounds for the Minister of Health to refuse to issue or amend or to suspend or revoke a licence.

For example, under proposed paragraph 62(7)(a), the powers provide that the minister may refuse to issue, renew, or amend a licence or permit if doing so is likely to create a risk to public health or public safety, including the risk of cannabis being diverted to an illicit market or activity.

Part 4 of Bill C-45 includes general authorizations for some cannabis-related activities. Clause 69 sets out minimum measures for the protection of public health and public safety that would need to be included in provincial legislation governing sale. In particular, a person who is authorized to sell cannabis under a provincial act must be required to only sell cannabis that has been produced by a person authorized under the federal cannabis act for commercial purposes, not sell cannabis to young persons, keep appropriate records, and take adequate measures to reduce the risk of cannabis that they possess being diverted to an illicit market.

Part 5, finally, would authorize the Minister of Health to issue orders to verify compliance, prevent non-compliance, and address issues related to public health and safety.

There are many other parts to this cannabis act to which my hon. colleagues will be speaking. I look forward to hearing their remarks, as I am sure my colleagues across the way do.

● (2105)

[Translation]

In closing, Bill C-45 delivers on the commitment our government made in the 2015 throne speech.

The bill proposes an effective and balanced framework for the legalization of cannabis and strict regulations that correspond to our government's objectives with respect to health and public safety, protecting children and youth, as well as criminal justice.

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how does the government propose to handle the production and distribution of cannabis from first nations? We have done a very poor job of controlling tobacco from first nations, to the extent that 62% of the product that is consumed in Canada is contraband tobacco coming from operations on first nations. How does the government propose to govern and handle the production from first nations?

Government Orders

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, in fact, my hon. colleague put his finger on what is a central concern around the status quo of access to illicit cannabis. The whole objective of this act is to take cannabis out of the possession of criminal organizations and gangs, which pose a threat not only to indigenous communities but also to our youth, and to put it under a strictly regulated and governed distribution process.

Therefore, in answer to my hon. colleague, we will be working very closely with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure a robust regulatory system is in place to ensure the safe distribution from seed to sale.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

As members of the House are aware, one of our concerns, one that we have been talking about for some time, has to do with the decriminalization of marijuana and the amnesty that will be granted subsequently. The Prime Minister himself has illustrated how his family's privileged connections allowed a member of his family to escape criminal charges that could have resulted from his recreational use of marijuana.

Can my colleague tell us why the government suddenly changed its tune? During the election campaign, the Prime Minister specifically said that amnesty and the possibility of wiping out the criminal records people could be saddled with for something that would be legal moving forward would be a cornerstone of the process to legalize marijuana. Now the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is saying the opposite.

Can my colleague explain why the government changed its mind?

● (2110)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague, and I thank him for his question.

[*English*]

The question is a relevant one. What we have said is that to ensure there is proper regulation of cannabis, we need to remove it from the hands of criminals and ensure it is properly and safely regulated in co-operation with provinces and territories.

The problem with the decriminalization proposal put forward by the NDP is that it does not address that risk. As an interim measure, I do not think colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to see our youth or any community put at risk. That is why we are moving forward with Bill C-45 in this fashion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you will probably not be surprised to hear me say that I am very much opposed to this slapdash bill. Considering everything the experts, including health professionals, have said about it, it is hard to understand why this bill even exists.

I have a very simple question for the member. I have been hearing from landlords all over Quebec and especially in my region. They all want to know if the government, which we know had some kind of plan, has given any thought to measures to support landlords who do not want people growing or using cannabis in their buildings. Is

there anything at all in this bill, even just a single line, to protect landlords?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. What he said is not true. A lot of research, expert testimony, and work went into drawing up this bill. We on this side of the House are very proud of this bill. We are working with the provinces and municipalities to create a regulatory system.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to support this bill.

First, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Justice and her parliamentary secretaries, especially the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest, for all their work on this bill.

[*English*]

Bill C-45 is important legislation that delivers on a core commitment of our government, to introduce legislation to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis in order to keep it out of the hands of youth and to keep profits from gangs and illegal elements of society.

Bill C-45 would move Canada forward in addressing the health and social harms that result from the current failed approach to cannabis. It would help reduce the role that organized crime currently plays in the production and distribution of cannabis in Canada. In addition it would place our government in a better position to protect the health and safety of Canadians, particularly youth.

Last spring, our government established the task force on cannabis legalization and regulation. The task force was given a mandate to consult broadly across Canada with experts in law enforcement and public health, as well as with community groups and ordinary Canadians. Over 30,000 responses were received by the task force through an online consultation. In its final report, released this past December, the task force was clear that the current approach to cannabis was simply not working.

Canadians, both youth and adults, use cannabis at high rates. Many do so without fully understanding the associated risks. They obtain their cannabis illegally, to the benefit of organized crime. The products they obtain are often produced in dangerous environments, without any regard for quality or the health of the consumer.

● (2115)

[*Translation*]

The science is clear: there are risks associated with cannabis consumption. Although some people use cannabis for therapeutic purposes, it can pose a serious health risk, especially for young people.

We know that these risks notwithstanding, a portion of the Canadian population chooses to consume cannabis just as they engage in other behaviours that can be detrimental to their health.

Government Orders

[English]

The question for us, then, as parliamentarians is how best to mitigate these risks and better protect the health and well-being of Canadians.

Our government believes that the answer is not in continuing to criminalize the possession of small amounts of cannabis. Such a policy would only serve to compound its public health and safety risks. Instead, Canadians will be better served by adopting a public health approach. Such an approach would involve a controlled and strictly regulated system, with clear standards and requirements and backed with appropriate oversight and strong public education efforts. It is precisely this type of framework that Bill C-45 sets out to establish in Canada.

[Translation]

I will repeat that the consumption of cannabis is not without risks.

[English]

These risks have the potential to increase significantly, depending on a number of factors, including age at which use begins, frequency of use, duration of use, and the amount used. For example, youth are especially vulnerable, as their brains are still developing, and this health risk increases when they begin to use cannabis in early adolescence.

Particular health risks are also posed by illegally produced cannabis. Criminals do not worry about producing cannabis in a clean environment so that it is not contaminated with mould, bacteria, or heavy metals. They do not label their products to clearly communicate information about potency. They only care about making a profit and not getting caught.

[Translation]

Our government is serious about mitigating the risks and dangers of cannabis consumption. That is why an education campaign about cannabis for the general public is already under way.

Our government has adopted a proactive approach to education and public awareness by using social media to convey messages about drug-impaired driving and by inviting parents to have conversations with their children about drugs.

[English]

Through this public education campaign, our government is also addressing the issue of addiction. We want to enhance the knowledge that the public has about addiction to help Canadians understand the risks associated with cannabis use, especially for youth and other vulnerable populations. Our government also wants to provide Canadians with the information they need to make informed decisions about the choice to use cannabis.

Minimizing the harms and risks associated with cannabis use is also why Bill C-45 includes a number of powers that would allow our government to regulate the legal market. Under the bill, the Minister of Health would have the power to set regulatory requirements to address a broad range of health and safety issues. This includes requiring that cannabis be produced in a clean and sanitary environment and that it be appropriately packaged, with

clear information on the label with regard to product potency and important health information.

[Translation]

Until now, my comments have focused on the effects of cannabis on health, and I explained how a public health approach would be better for mitigating those risks.

However, I now want to talk about how the existing approach to cannabis poses a unique threat to public health and safety. The existing approach aggravates the risks of cannabis because it creates a dynamic in which Canadians who decide to use cannabis are forced to do business with criminals, some of whom may have ties to organized crime. That exposes Canadians to the risk of violence and other criminal activities, including illegal drugs that are even more harmful than cannabis.

● (2120)

[English]

There is also a danger posed by large illegal grow operations, including those that are found in suburban neighbourhoods. This underground illegal activity can result in serious public health and safety issues, including explosions, fires, and damage to property.

Concern about these public health and public safety risks is shared by many Canadians, which is why our government is moving forward with its commitment to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis within a co-operative framework with the provinces, territories, and municipalities.

[Translation]

By introducing Bill C-45, our government is making Canadians' health and safety a top priority, as demonstrated by the fact that the very essence of this bill is based on a public health approach.

The regulatory measures set out in Bill C-45 are consistent with the recommendations made by the working group. They seek to better protect Canadians from the health and safety risks associated with marijuana, restrict access to cannabis, particularly for young people, and reduce the profits generated by the black market.

[English]

Bill C-45 would put strict rules in place across the entire commercial supply chain for cannabis production, distribution, and retail sales. It would provide the government with the ability to strictly regulate the safety and quality of cannabis products and to place limits on its promotion, packaging, and labelling in order to reduce its appeal to youth.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

With this bill, our government will also put in place a seed to sale tracking system in order to monitor cannabis products as they pass from one stage to another in the supply chain, from the growing of marijuana to its retail sale. This system will prevent cannabis from being diverted to an illicit market and prevent illegal cannabis from entering the legal supply chain. The system will also make it possible to order the recall of products and remove them from the market.

[*English*]

Bill C-45 proposes a comprehensive approach for the oversight and control of cannabis that would provide Canadians with access to a legal source of cannabis that is strictly regulated for safety and quality. As with all products regulated in Canada, including food, medicine, and consumer products, Canadians should be able to have access to cannabis that they know meets minimum standards for safety and quality.

Colleagues, by establishing a robust regulatory framework for legal access to cannabis, supported by a strong public education and awareness campaign, Bill C-45 provides an opportunity for Canada to significantly reduce these risks and to better protect its youth.

[*Translation*]

My three children are 20, 18, and 16, so I deal with this challenge every day. I sincerely believe that this science-based, evidence-based bill is the best way to regulate and control cannabis.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will not repeat how utterly opposed I am to this bill because I think everyone here already knows. However, I would like to ask my colleague a question. He said something very interesting at the end of his speech, when he touched on his personal life.

I too have three children. His are older than mine. He talked about how important it is for this bill to be based on science, research, and real data, but there is a universal consensus among scientists that consuming marijuana is dangerous for people under 25. Nevertheless, the bill will make it legal for 18-year-olds to use marijuana.

If my colleague is really sincere, then if nothing else, he should turn to his colleague who sponsored the bill and ask him to raise the minimum age to 25. If he does that, then he can go ahead and talk about science.

• (2125)

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, everything I said was very sincere. It is clear that the existing system is not working for teenagers. They can get cannabis anywhere. It is very easy to find.

At 18, they have the right to vote and fight for their country. At 18, they are adults capable of making all kinds of personal choices.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back in March, I held a telephone town hall in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, and 3,300 people stayed on the phone for an hour. There was a great deal of interest in the riding. I had a panel of experts that they could phone as well.

One of the concerns that was really prominent in my riding was trying to ensure that small growers, which are very prevalent in parts

of my riding, continue to have a role in the future of legalizing cannabis in Canada. If not, I can pretty well guarantee that there will continue to be a black market for marijuana.

I am interested in the member's views on trying to ensure that co-ops and small growers are part of the future.

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, we will have to work with the provinces. In terms of the actual distribution system, we will work closely with the provinces, territories, and municipalities to ensure that a system is put in place that takes into account the desires of the province in terms of distribution.

In this particular case, we have given the right to individuals to have up to four plants. After that, we will work with our partners to fill out the rest of the system.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity to rise in debate on Bill C-45. I do think the government has achieved a good balance on this overall. It is appropriate that there are many gaps to be filled in by provincial regulation.

I am particularly concerned that a product that has such high profit margins not be overtaken and run by the cigarette industry or any of the existing large corporations that could force out, as my colleague the member for Kootenay—Columbia mentioned, smaller producers. In my own area of southern Vancouver Island, there are many people in what might be described as a craft industry of edibles for pain relief. They are enormously rigorous about what they produce. I would not want to see them forced out by large corporate interests.

However, I do have one concern about the legislation as drafted, and I wonder if it is open to amendments. The punishments found in the bill for those who violate provisions of this bill could involve indictable offences and prison sentences of up to 14 years. These strike me as excessive. I wonder if the government is open to amendments.

Mr. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I will leave the amendment process to our committee, under the guidance of our parliamentary secretary and the government generally.

However, I do note that as a rule there is some flexibility in sentencing through the discretionary power that judges have. I think that we will, at the end of the day, strike the appropriate balance throughout all of our legislation.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, for the benefit of all hon. members I will remind members that during the time for questions and comments—which, by the way, have been quite subscribed to this evening, since there is lots of interest in questions and comments—we will try to keep interventions to no more than one minute. We will go by the usual rotation, giving preference to parties that are not the party of the member who has just presented his or her speech, but rather to the others. The same thing will happen, of course, when the speech moves to the other side of the House.

That is the usual rotation. It is not to the exclusion of the party of the member who just spoke, but for the most part it will go to the parties that are not his or her party.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

● (2130)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to speak in the House again. I spoke last night to Bill C-46, and tonight I will speak to Bill C-45.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, who introduced Bill C-226, which dealt with impaired driving. The Prime Minister, interestingly, provided a letter to an organization made up of people who had lost loved ones to impaired drivers. They have asked for tough legislation, with mandatory minimums. The Prime Minister signed a letter prior to the election promising to introduce legislation with mandatory minimums, and Bill C-226 was that bill. Sadly, the Prime Minister has broken another promise by not supporting it.

The legalization of cannabis in Canada is being proposed through this bill, Bill C-45. Bill C-46 deals with the new impaired drivers who are expected to be on the road.

I listened intently to the justice minister and members on the other side, made notes, and tried to summarize what they were saying over and over again, which is to trust them and that they want to keep cannabis out of the hands of children, young Canadians, and organized crime. That is their motive.

This bill is being rushed, rammed through, with a promised end date of a normal two-year process. It will not be a two-year process. It will be ready and in place by July 1, Canada Day, of next year. Why the rush? Why are we telling the Senate, the new appointed, independent senators, that they must rush this through?

Why are we ignoring science? The government said it consulted thousands of Canadians. A parliamentary secretary of the government is a former police chief and clearly had a position that legalizing marijuana would not take it out of organized crime. Why the about-face? Why the one-eighty? We also saw the finance minister do an about-face on old age security once becoming a member of the government. It appears that the Prime Minister has an agenda to keep this as his number one promise: to legalize marijuana and to do it by July 1 of next year.

Is there truth behind the claim that it will keep cannabis out of the hands of children and young Canadians? What are the Liberals proposing? They are proposing that every household, including households with children, will be able to have four producing plants,

and we know that four plants means 12 plants. There would be four producing plants up to a metre tall, then four plants that are halfway toward that, and plants that have just been planted so they can start growing and get ready for being harvested. We know through the medical marijuana program that four plants means 12 plants. Every home across Canada could legally have them. Is that going to keep cannabis out of the hands of children? A reasonable person would say no, that does not make any sense.

Youth aged 18 and older would be able to legally possess up to 30 grams. What is 30 grams? It is 60 joints. Right now, if Canadians are found with 60 joints, or 30 grams, in their possession, are they criminalized? I am sure many of us have spent time with the police and have seen how they handle illegal drugs. Are people stuck in jail and criminalized? No, the drugs are confiscated. Under Bill C-45, the drugs would not be confiscated anymore. People would be allowed to legally walk around with 60 joints in their pockets or backpacks if they were 18 and older. How about the 12-year-olds up to 18? They could have five grams legally. That is what is being proposed. Is that keeping it out of the hands of our children? Absolutely not.

● (2135)

There is a proverb, a wise saying, “A tree is known by its fruit.” What kind of fruit are we seeing in making it easier for children to have access to this? There are many situations where children do not have access to it. They now will have access to it.

Will it take it out of the hands of organized crime? According to the parliamentary secretary, a former police chief, no, it will not. According to experts, police, and people with law enforcement backgrounds in our caucus and in other caucuses, it will not take it out of their hands. Right now it is illegal. What is illegal now will be made legal. That is how they are dealing with the illegality problem. Organized crime will still want to make its money in some way.

We now can have 12-year-olds to 18-year-olds running around with five grams, 10 joints. It will be totally legal. It will not be confiscated. Eighteen-year-olds and older will have backpacks full of joints.

The government is saying that a majority of Canadians believe it should not be a criminal offence for youth to have cannabis. The option would be to decriminalize it. That has not been a proposal presented by the government. It would legalize it and make it available. People can grow it in every home. Children can have it in their possession legally, and it could not be confiscated. This is not what Canadians expected from the government. This has gone far beyond what is reasonable.

Government Orders

The government has also said that this new legislation is based on science and consultation. However, the consultation they received from law enforcement is that this is flawed. It will restrict their ability to take it out of the hands of children. It will restrict the opportunity to deal with children and say, “You cannot have this. This is bad for you.”

Science has said that it is bad for them. We have heard it time and again. The Canadian Medical Association has said that this is harmful for developing minds. The government is saying, “It may be, but we do not want them to have a criminal record”, which they are not going to get anyway. It will be confiscated.

What is being proposed by the government is not based on science. It is based on politics. It is based on political promises made during an election.

Will this make Canada safer? Will this help protect the health and safety of Canadians? Absolutely not. A reasonable person will say that this makes no sense. Why are they going ahead against science, against law enforcement, and risking the health and safety of Canadians?

I do not have time to get into the issue of road safety, with all these new impaired drivers on our roads and the cost to train police officers and the drug recognition experts, the DREs. There are no devices to determine whether a person is impaired. They could have these little strips that will indicate that there is marijuana in a person's system, but they do not determine whether there is impairment. It is going to be very difficult to get people who are truly impaired off the roads. We do not have the policing resources. What we have is legislation, Bill C-45, being rammed through by July 1 of next year, with no enforcement, no funding, no preparation, and no equipment to protect the health and safety of Canadians. I am shocked that the government is doing this, and I think Canadians are shocked too as they listen to this debate.

This will go on to the justice committee. It will be interesting to see whether the government is open to any amendments, because what it is proposing does not make sense. Canadians do not support this. They support taking time to do this right. I hope the government is flexible enough to listen to common sense, to be reasonable, and to base something on science that will be good for Canada and will truly protect our youth.

• (2140)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity over the last 18 months to work very closely with experts in the area of public health, public safety, justice, and problematic substance use. I have read literally hundreds of reports, originating from a number of different scientific and health organizations, and we have worked very hard to develop a policy based on the best advice of experts and the expertise that was available to us.

The member opposite has ascribed certain statements to me, which quite frankly are inaccurate, and I would urge him, if he is going to attempt to quote me, to do so accurately.

I would also ask him this. Canada has the highest rates of cannabis use among its young people in the world. The cannabis our

young people are using they are acquiring from the criminal element, people who have no concern for their health and safety, the contaminants and other dangerous substances in it, or the health effects or social harms that can be inflicted on our kids as a result of this activity. We also know that organized crime that profits from the sale to our kids is making billions of dollars in this country.

I would simply ask the member opposite this. Is he content with that situation, that our kids are in the hands of criminals and that their health is being put at risk? Would he continue to perpetuate a system that has put our kids at risk, or would he take the steps necessary, based on the advice and the expertise we have made available to ourselves and to this Parliament, to put in place a system of strict regulatory controls so that we know the potency, purity, and provenance of what is being consumed by Canadians; that we have a more effective regulatory regime with respect to its production, distribution, and consumption; that we can keep it away from kids; and that we can protect the health of our citizens and the safety of—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his years of service in law enforcement. I respect him and appreciate what he has done throughout his career, and I welcome him to this House.

However, what the member is sharing now I believe is a 180° change. I have spent a lot of time with RCMP on ride-alongs, not drive-alongs. I took the training. I was on the bike squad. They would confiscate these drugs from the kids that were in the park late at night smoking joints. What he is proposing is that we leave those drugs with those kids. They can legally have up to five grams if they are between the ages of 12 and 18. If they are 18 years and older, and they have 60 joints in their backpacks, the police cannot confiscate it anymore. What he is saying to me, and to a lot of Canadians, does not make sense. Why would we allow these youth, with these developing minds, to continue to use this dangerous drug? What is illegal will now be called legal, and that is not the way to deal with organized crime.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question. We have talked a lot in this House about harms. Many substances have harms. Cannabis has potential harms. Alcohol has potential harms. Tobacco has potential harms. If the member wants to criminalize cannabis, what else would he like to criminalize?

Government Orders

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I did not say I wanted to criminalize cannabis. Rather, I would suggest that it become a ticketing offence so that the police can still confiscate the drug. What is the benefit of doing that? The police can already confiscate that drug, but the Liberals are saying, “Leave it with the kids. Leave it in their possession. It is a small amount, and we don't want to criminalize them.” They are not being criminalized now. This is a government of smoke and mirrors. It knows what to say, but it does not do it. It is really a crying shame.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Tilray is one of the largest employers. It was licensed as a medical marijuana grower and distributor under the Conservative government. There is some observation, although they followed all the rules, that it is kind of like growing it in a bunker. The overinvestment that was required for medical marijuana producers has been daunting for the industry. Nevertheless, they have followed all the rules. They are doing chemo-induced nausea research and hire botanists and horticulturalists. It is a highly professional operation. I wonder what the member's comments are on how medical marijuana can fit into this next phase of marijuana legislation.

• (2145)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I know personally of many cases of people who had nausea or other serious medical problems, and they found the use of marijuana oils to be very helpful. I am not a scientist. I do not know, and it will be very interesting over the coming years of research to find out what the benefits are of the use of marijuana oils.

Bringing into our lungs a foreign body in smoke is not good. Maybe we need to look at what the benefits are. What is being proposed by the government would allow our youth to have access, to have our homes filled with marijuana plants. It is not what Canadians expected. It is not what Canadians want.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Langley—Aldergrove for sharing his time with me. I had the opportunity to prepare a bill on impaired driving with that member. As we can see this evening in the bill the Liberals have brought forward, this problem is only compounded by the Liberal approach, which could be qualified as improvisation and the trivialization of cannabis use.

The Prime Minister gives us lofty explanations to justify the legalization of cannabis, but really, it is just a smoke screen. As my colleague explained, it would be very simple to do some ticketing. This would allow us to protect young people, but the Liberals want to line the pockets of their Liberal cronies at the expense of the health of Canadians and the health of our youth.

Our government granted 30 permits for medical marijuana production. We did so without any interference, but we did not do it for recreational purposes, as this government is about to do.

The problem is that, ultimately, the government wants to line the pockets of their Liberal cronies at the expense of the health and safety of Canadians.

[*English*]

That is right. The only kind of capitalism the government approves of is crony capitalism. For the rest of us, it is bread and circuses.

[*Translation*]

We have tightened the rules for political fundraising, but that is not enough. There will be an industry that will sprout billionaires as a result of government largesse. That is how the Liberals will become rich. Unfortunately, that is what lies behind this bill.

It has already happened. People like Chuck Rifici, the former treasurer of the Liberal Party, co-founded Canopy Growth, a company that is now worth billions of dollars. Until last summer, he was the Liberal Party's chief financial officer. In fact, Mr. Rifici still worked for the Liberal Party when he co-founded Tweed, the company that has become the largest producer of medical marijuana in the country.

The same Mr. Rifici, a well-known Liberal, was also a member of the board of directors of Aurora Cannabis until May 8, and he is now the CEO of Cannabis Wheaton, which helps cannabis producers become publicly traded companies.

Is the connection clear? The words “cannabis”, “Liberal”, and “legalization” add up to “a lot of money”.

What about Canadians' safety and protecting our youth from a drug that scientists say has devastating effects on development?

That is not all. Adam Miron is the co-founder of Hydropothecary, the only authorized producer of medical marijuana in Quebec. He is the national director of the Liberal Party and the national director of the Young Liberals of Canada.

In addition, former Liberal minister Marin Cauchon is now a member of the board of directors of DelShen Therapeutics, a Toronto cannabis producer that recently obtained its operating licence from the government.

There is more. Herb Dhaliwal, a former Liberal minister, sits on the board of directors of National GreenBioMed, and Larry Campbell, a Liberal senator, is head of Vodus Pharmaceuticals. These two companies are waiting for a Health Canada licence to produce cannabis. Once again, there are Liberal ties.

I agree with my new Bloc colleague, the member for Longueuil, who is not pleased with this shameful Liberal cronyism.

Government Orders

• (2150)

[*English*]

To add insult to injury, in April 2016, many heads of big medical marijuana companies attended a Liberal fundraiser, where they even had privileged access to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, who was charged with the task of implementing this cannabis legalization act. The Liberals then, since it was made public, had no choice but to reimburse the donations. However, they cannot reimburse Canadians for their misplaced trust in this supposedly transparent, open government. Clearly, the only way to hold the government accountable today is to catch it red-handed. It has proven that it cannot be trusted to come forward and walk the talk.

[*Translation*]

On the campaign trail, the Liberal leader promised millennials the moon. We all know how much he likes a selfie. Meanwhile, he was promising his Liberals friends a goldmine in the form of billions in cannabis sales. The honeymoon phase is over for Canadians, especially young Canadians, who will end up battling more serious drug addiction problems. For some, the only moon they will get is the one they sleep under at night, out on the street, having lost everything because of irresponsible Liberal measures.

Unfortunately, as my colleague from Langley—Aldergrove reminded us, we have seen the harm that comes from legalizing marijuana. Colorado played sorcerer's apprentice with marijuana legalization, and the outcome has been devastating in three ways. First, marijuana consumption among youth went up. We agree with the Liberals that cannabis use by young people is a problem. What we are saying is that the government's proposed measure will increase cannabis consumption, so this is obviously not a good way to solve the problem.

The second consequence, which is tragic, is that there has been an increase in the number of fatal road accidents. My colleague from Langley—Aldergrove and I have been trying to address this problem because impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death in Canada. We already have our hands full with drinking and driving and now the government wants to add drug-impaired driving to the mix. Unfortunately, in Colorado, the increase in drug use among young people was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of motor vehicle accidents attributable to the use of drugs.

The solution is actually quite simple, but it will not help the Liberals' friends who want to make billions of dollars. It is good old ticketing. When police officers apprehend young people or adults who are in possession of a small amount of marijuana, they issue them a fine. It is so simple, but this measure would not make the Liberal members, and especially their friends, richer. That is the problem.

Unfortunately, the Liberals have a hidden agenda. Even MP Erskine-Smith said that he wanted all drugs to be legalized. That does not reassure us with regard to the Liberals' current approach. According to the member—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The member violated the Standing Orders by using the name of another member. I am sure he knows that he is supposed to use the riding name.

The hon. member.

• (2155)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, you are right, and I want to apologize to the member. Indeed, I should have said he was a member from Toronto and mention him by his riding.

The fact remains that he is a Liberal member and he said that he supported the legalization of all drugs. Are we on a slippery slope that begins with the legalization of marijuana? What bill will the Liberals come up with next? Which drug will they want to legalize next? That is the question.

The member said that we should decriminalize the use and possession of all drugs. Understandably, this will do nothing to reassure any parents who are watching us this evening and who want to keep drugs away from young adults. They have something else to offer Canada's youth besides an artificial paradise.

This policy will be harmful for future generations. Allowing people to grow marijuana plants at home makes it easy for kids to access a mind-altering substance that could have serious, harmful effects on their development. There are much better things we could be doing besides giving access to drugs.

In closing, let me just say that this experiment has failed in Colorado. Why go down this dangerous path that will have a devastating effect and serious repercussions on young people, whom we want to protect, when ticketing is an inexpensive solution that could solve the problem?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I visit my riding, I ask young people whether it is easier to get marijuana or beer. They always say marijuana.

An hon. member: That is not true.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: In my riding, it is true, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, I want to ask my colleague whether he believes that the current system works well. If not, why did he do nothing about it in his 10 years in cabinet?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

What I would say to him is that the Liberal government's proposed measure is worse than the status quo because, in Colorado, there has been a rise in drug consumption among youth, fatal accidents, and an increase in the activities of organized crime. The solution is ticketing, which will help us reduce drug use among young people.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have seen in the past that prohibition has not worked. It did not work with alcohol and it is not working with marijuana today. Today our youth are the highest consumers of cannabis in the world. All we are doing is making criminals wealthy. We do not know the composition of the cannabis that our youth are smoking today. The balance between CBD and THC is something that we really need to understand.

Should we be allowing criminals to continue to profit from this? Should we be allowing criminals to continue to manipulate the genetics and biochemistry of this drug just as we used to under prohibition with those who produced alcohol? Should we be using the revenue from this to educate, enforce, and rehabilitate youth, rather than once again compensating criminals?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, the problem with the proposed approach by the government is that it will actually increase organized crime activities, as has been the case in the states of Washington and Colorado. However, more than that, not only would it increase organized crime but, when Colorado legalized marijuana, it became the number one state in the United States for teen marijuana use, with teen rates jumping over 12%. In both Washington state and Colorado, the illegal black market for drugs has exploded with organized crime.

The bill tabled by the government is a way to increase organized crime in this country. Is that what the member wants? I do not think so. I do not think this is what his constituents want. That is why he should not support the bill as it is tabled.

• (2200)

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-45 leads me to speak about Havre du Fjord, a home I recently visited in my riding of Jonquière. This is a home for youth struggling with addiction and alcohol problems. The employees of this house have seen a growing number of people use their treatments. These people also participate in rehabilitation programs. The home tries to provide a quality of life for adolescents and young adults so they can live a sober life, learn to love themselves, gain self-confidence, and then find a job and live a so-called normal life. Unfortunately, dependency is a life-long problem and one must learn to live with it.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about that. Should the government not invest more in prevention, awareness, and treatment centres?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Jonquière for her question, which has to do with prevention and raising awareness.

She is absolutely right. It is important to make young people aware of the devastating effects of drugs, particularly cannabis. Unfortunately, as I said at the beginning of my speech this evening, the government's approach is improvised and trivializes the use of marijuana. Even though the bill has not yet been passed, the government's lazy approach trivializes young people's use of drugs, which is already having devastating effects. We want to achieve exactly the opposite effect. That is why this bill, in its current form, is already having harmful effects on our young people.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

First of all, I want to say how proud I am to be part of a government that has the courage, the audacity, and most importantly the insight to see things as they really are. What is the reality in Canada right now? The reality is that the prohibition of cannabis is not working. According to Statistics Canada, even though cannabis is illegal, 12% of Canadians have used it over the past year. A more recent CBC survey showed that the real number was 17%.

This means that, unfortunately, 17% of Canadians are unwillingly contributing to a criminal-run market that generates staggering profits for organized crime year after year. We are talking an estimated \$7 billion per year. The current system also forces five million otherwise law-abiding, hard-working, tax-paying Canadians to do business with criminals, thereby increasing their risk of exposure to violence and other drugs. Even possession of a small amount of cannabis can saddle them with a criminal record for life.

We are jeopardizing Canadians' health by forcing them to do business with criminals who do not care about the quality and safety of what they sell. Dealers do not care about what they sell, nor do they care about whom they sell it to. Who buys marijuana from criminals? Do dealers make sure their customers are not minors? The way things stand in Canada, it is easier for minors to get marijuana than it is for them to get alcohol or cigarettes, and the prevalence of marijuana consumption is higher among underage and young Canadians than anywhere else in the OECD.

This is a problem because nobody here wants cannabis to be a part of everyday life. We know how it can affect the developing brain, and we need to take a different approach precisely because it is not a harmless substance. The current approach is truly disastrous for our young people.

Everything I just described was the result of prohibition. To those who defend the status quo, who wrap themselves in virtue on the other side of the House by sticking their heads so far down in the sand that they do not see reality for what it is, to them I ask what they would propose.

[English]

What is it that they are proposing? Is it more of the same, the same failure for our kids, the same failure for our communities, the same failure for Canadians?

Government Orders

If we keep doing what we have always done, we will keep getting what we have always gotten. The current approach is a failure. It needs to be changed. It needs to be changed responsibly. This is what we told Canadians, and this is precisely what we are doing.

The proposed cannabis act that we are debating tonight would create a legal framework to allow for the establishment of a regulated industry that provides controlled access to cannabis for adult Canadians. It would establish a system that over time would displace the illicit market for cannabis and keep profits out of the hands of organized crime. It would better protect youth by establishing a strict set of controls designed to restrict their access to cannabis.

● (2205)

[*Translation*]

The new system will also help protect the health of adult Canadians by ensuring that the cannabis available on the legal market is produced in a controlled environment, correctly labelled, and free of any additives or dangerous chemical products.

This framework will also ease the burden on our judicial system, since we will no longer be cracking down on Canadians for the possession of a small quantity of cannabis. Those are the objectives of Bill C-45, which is before the House this evening.

[*English*]

I would like to highlight some of specific provisions in the proposed cannabis act, and describe how these parts of the bill would achieve these objectives. Let me begin with the parameters for legal access to cannabis so that the current illegal market is diminished and ultimately displaced.

Our government has made it clear that it is taking a public health approach to cannabis legalization and regulation, and that the legal production, distribution, and sale of the substance will be subject to strict regulatory controls and standards. This means that any business seeking to serve as a commercial producer or seller of cannabis will need to first have a licence or other type of government authorization.

Under this approach, governments, whether they be provincial or federal, would have the ability to establish licensing requirements for businesses in order to keep criminals out and to allow the participation of legitimate businesses. These requirements are also designed to make sure that legally produced cannabis is not diverted to the illegal market, and that, conversely, illegally produced cannabis does not end up on store shelves.

The government and I, mostly definitely, are confident that Bill C-45 sets the conditions for a legal and appropriately regulated cannabis industry to emerge across Canada that will displace the current illegal market. Our government is also confident that the cannabis available through the regulated supply chain will be safer than the cannabis that is available on the streets today.

[*Translation*]

This brings me to the objective I outlined earlier, namely, to better protect the health of Canadian adults who decide to use cannabis. Bill C-45 proposes to implement a comprehensive regulatory framework that would establish national product quality and safety standards, as well as packaging and labelling standards. This

framework will better protect the health of Canadians. This evening I heard a member across the way talking about ticketing, but that would never happen and organized crime would still be in the equation. What we want to do is remove organized crime from the equation.

Bill C-45 also includes other provisions to better protect young people, including a specific prohibition, as defined under criminal law, from selling or providing cannabis in any form to anyone under the age of 18. Anyone found guilty of selling cannabis to a youth could face up to 14 years in prison.

[*English*]

To further support our government's objective of protecting youth, Bill C-45 would make it illegal to sell products that appeal specifically to youth. Bill C-45 would also enact a comprehensive suite of advertising restrictions designed to protect youth from promotions and other messaging that could encourage them to use cannabis. These provisions, modelled on similar rules that have been used successfully to protect youth from inducements to use tobacco, would prohibit any advertising that could make cannabis appealing to a young person.

Taken together, these provisions in Bill C-45 would establish a system that would provide adult Canadians with access to legal cannabis through a controlled market, would decrease the demand for cannabis from the illicit market, and diminish the role played by organized crime. At the same time, the bill would introduce rigorous controls to ensure that cannabis is not sold or marketed to youth, and that legal cannabis is produced and sold in accordance with appropriate regulatory standards.

[*Translation*]

As I mentioned, Bill C-45 also sets out to minimize the repercussions and social harms associated with criminalizing the possession of small quantities of cannabis. For anyone who ends up with a criminal record for possession of a small quantity of cannabis, those repercussions may include travel restrictions or diminished job prospects. Criminalization also affects the legal system because it overburdens our police resources and our criminal justice system.

Bill C-45 fixes those problems by scrapping the strict prohibition on possession of a small quantity of cannabis and authorizing adult Canadians to possess up to 30 grams of dried cannabis in public.

Government Orders

• (2210)

[English]

For youth, Bill C-45 would also seek to avoid the negative lifelong consequences of possessing very small amounts of cannabis. Bill C-45 proposes that youth under 18 years of age would not be subject to criminal prosecution for possession of up to five grams of cannabis. Our government is also committed to working with the provinces and territories to encourage the creation of non-criminal provincial offences that would prohibit youth from possessing any amount of cannabis. This approach would provide police with the authority to seize any amount of cannabis found in the possession of a young person while not rendering them liable to criminal sanctions, which I think any sensible person would agree to.

[Translation]

Alongside this sea change, another key goal for our government is to ensure that Canadians who need medical marijuana can continue to obtain it.

To conclude, I will say that I am sure about one thing. The current policy, prohibition, is a failure. We need to change how we deal with cannabis, and our very strict regulatory framework for cannabis legalization will have some very positive consequences.

[English]

I think it is an idea whose time has come.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the speech by the parliamentary secretary, except that he continues to ignore the actual facts out there. The Liberals say they want to bring this forward to keep the proceeds out of the hands of criminals and also to keep it out of the hands of kids.

We have seen with the facts in Colorado that as far as the criminal element is concerned, it does not decrease the criminal element. As far as safety is concerned, I do not want to speak from my own opinion, but the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* just yesterday came out with an editorial lambasting the government for the irresponsible approach that it wants to bring forward for legalizing marijuana. It talked about these four plants available in everyone's home. We can have up to four plants. It is just common sense that it will be diverted, or the possibility of diversion will be increased incredibly.

We have seen, in Colorado, increased admittance to hospitals because kids actually get their hands on edibles. The Liberals say they will not be allowing the sale of edibles, but certainly people will be making more and more of these.

Why should Canadians believe anything the Liberals say when we have respected professionals, such as those in the Canadian Medical Association, who say that this approach is silly and that this approach, if the Liberals really cared about the public safety of Canadians, should not pass? Why should we believe them over the medical professionals?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I would answer by simply asking this. How can we believe the Conservatives when the approach that they defended for 10 years, and they still do to this day, has failed so miserably?

When up to 20% of young Canadians under the age of 18 report that they have smoked, that is among the highest rates in the world. For youth 18 to 25, it is 30%. That is the current approach. When criminal organizations generate profits estimated to be \$7 billion a year through the sale of cannabis, that is the current approach. That is the approach they are defending.

The Conservatives can put their heads as deep as they want in the sand and pretend that the current approach is working, but it is not. I am not the only one saying this. The Barreau du Québec, *les directeurs de santé publique du Québec*, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, which is not exactly a leftist magazine, have come out with the quite clear position that prohibition is not working. We need a new approach, and I am very proud to be a part of the government that has the lucidity and the responsibility to move forward with a new approach to cannabis because the current one has failed.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker, the member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis made reference to a number of organizations who are licensed producers in this country, and he made a suggestion. It was more than a suggestion. He actually made a bold declaration that somehow there has been some kind of political preference given to these particular licensees, and he named four of them: Tweed, Canopy, Aurora, and Hydrothecary.

I just wanted to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, who knows something about the licence applications, if he thinks it would surprise the member to learn that all four of the organizations mentioned by the previous member in his speech received their licences from the Conservative government, and not from us. Would the member not be shocked, given the extraordinary declaration made by the member opposite, that somehow there is some area of malfeasance on our part for an action he took?

• (2215)

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for the great question, because if we look at the licensed producers in Canada, out of the 43, 30 were approved under the previous government. I would suggest that the member who spoke before me ask the former leader of his party, who approved most of them, how the process works. He would learn that it is arm's length, that it works very well, and that there is no political interference whatsoever.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary an objective question. This is not a party line.

I read some newspaper articles reporting that there had been negative effects in Colorado. The health of young people and moral issues aside, it seems that motor vehicle accidents are costing the Colorado government a lot of money.

Government Orders

I would like to know whether the parliamentary secretary has an opinion on what is happening in Colorado. Without getting into health or moral issues, what is the government's opinion on the objective facts, such as the costs associated with road accidents?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, I always have a hard time believing any Conservative member who begins by saying that he or she wants to ask an objective question. However, this time, I will take the member at his word. I appreciate his question. I think that he is quite sincere. I really like working with him. To give him a simple answer, I would say that the approach that we are taking in Canada is based on the successes and mistakes that we have seen in other places. We set up a working group that considered the issue. It went to see what was done in Colorado and learned from the mistakes that were made there. What sets Canada apart is that we are the first jurisdiction to adopt a public health and safety approach.

I encourage the member to read Bill C-46 to see how we are going to give police officers the tools they need to detect the presence of cannabis and what penalties we are going to make available to prosecutors who go after offenders. The member will see that any Canadians who currently believe that they can get behind the wheel after using cannabis will find out that there is no impunity. There will be zero tolerance for those who exceed the limits and we are going to provide the tools to ensure that anyone who has the bad idea of getting behind the wheel after using cannabis will risk being severely punished.

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise and speak in support of Bill C-45, an act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts.

At its core, Bill C-45 would allow individuals above the minimum age of 18 to purchase cannabis from a licensed retailer and possess a maximum of 30 grams. This legislation would also allow for home cultivation with up to four plants per residence and would ensure that access to cannabis for medical purposes would be maintained.

The bill has three specific objectives. It would create a legal and regulated market for cannabis to take profits out of the hands of criminals and organized crime. It would protect public health through strict product requirements for safety and quality. It would impose strict serious criminal penalties for those who would provide cannabis to young people.

When marijuana was criminalized in 1923 under the act to prohibit the improper use of opium and other drugs, the reasons that possession, manufacturing, or purchase of cannabis should be illegal were hardly debated. As parliamentarians, it is our obligation to debate to the best of our ability the critical issues facing Canadians in this important institution and to create the laws that protect them and their inalienable rights. Today, we can have the debate that never occurred in 1923.

The prohibition on cannabis has failed. It victimizes ordinary Canadians and it emboldens criminal elements in our society. The current prohibition on cannabis disproportionately targets minority groups in Canada and has altered the lives of individuals who

received a criminal conviction for carrying a small amount of marijuana, including lost employment opportunities, immigration issues, social stigma of being branded a criminal, and imprisonment. It is worse than the problem it was designed to protect us from.

Our government acknowledges that the current prohibition on cannabis does not work, and now is the time to take an evidence-based approach.

As an emergency room physician, I have seen many tragic things. This includes the effects of prohibition on Canadians. The effects that I have witnessed range from organized criminals targeting citizens to instill fear in a community to the murdering of competitors to protect their profits to the killing of innocent bystanders. This is the impact of prohibition that I know and I have seen.

Just as an aside, during my time in the emergency room, I have resuscitated patients who have overdosed on opioids, cocaine, and alcohol. However, never have I had to resuscitate anyone who was only under the influence of marijuana.

The only true beneficiaries of prohibition are the criminals who profit from it. Much like the prohibition on alcohol in America in the 1920s, organized criminals continue to see a lucrative opportunity in today's prohibition. By legalizing and regulating cannabis, we can take revenue away from those who terrorize communities and take loved ones away from their families.

I understand that many people have concerns about this legislation and our youth. Everyone in the House, me included, is concerned about young Canadians using cannabis. However, right now it is easier for children to acquire marijuana than it is for them to acquire tobacco or alcohol, with our youth having some of the highest rates of cannabis use in the world. Drug dealers do not ask to see identification or verify someone's age. When we regulate a product like we do for cigarettes and alcohol, we can restrict its usage to persons above a certain age and ensure there are consequences for those who provide it to them.

The legislation would create two new criminal convictions: giving or selling cannabis to youth and using youth to commit a cannabis-related offence. This legislation would do three things to protect children. It would create a minimum age of 18 years for the purchase of cannabis although the provinces and territories have the right to increase this age. It would provide for public education and awareness campaigns of the dangers associated with cannabis. It would require childproof packaging and warning labels.

The bill would also prohibit product and packaging that would be appealing to youth, selling cannabis through self-service displays or vending machines, and promoting cannabis except in narrow circumstances where the promotion could not be seen by a young person.

At this moment, there is no product safety in the recreational cannabis market. Cannabis sold by organized criminals could be laced with harmful pesticides or herbicides or other dangerous drugs. I am keenly aware of this because I have treated patients who smoked cannabis but were not aware that it contained something else.

Government Orders

● (2220)

The legislation would protect consumers of cannabis by implementing industry-wide rules and standards on basic things, such as sanitary production requirements, a prohibition on the use of unauthorized pesticides, product testing for THC levels and the presence of contaminants, and restrictions on the use of ingredients and additives. These are minor standards that we hold so many companies and producers of innocuous items accountable for, and for too long there was a product used by many Canadians who were not aware if the product used pesticides, contaminants, or was laced with a dangerous substance. Essentially, consumers had to take organized criminals on their word that what they were consuming was not dangerous.

Our government will be investing additional resources to ensure there is appropriate capacity within Health Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canada Border Services Agency, and the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to license, inspect, and enforce all aspects of the proposed legislation.

One of the concerns that has been brought up to me by my constituents is persons who are under the influence of cannabis and operating motor vehicles, and their concerns are completely valid. Evidence shows that cannabis impairs an individual's ability to drive.

Impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death and injury in Canada and rates of drug-impaired driving are increasing. In 2015, there were more than 72,000 impaired driving incidents reported by the police, including almost 3,000 drug-impaired driving incidents. That is why our government also introduced Bill C-46 at the same time it introduced Bill C-45.

Bill C-46 proposes a significant modernization of the impaired driving provisions in the Criminal Code and is designed to protect the health and safety of Canadians by creating new and stronger laws to deter and severely punish impaired driving. The legislation also provides law enforcement with the tools and resources it needs to improve detection and prosecution of impaired driving.

Bill C-46 proposes to strength law enforcement's ability to detect drug-impaired drivers by authorizing the use of roadside oral fluid screening devices. Canadian police forces have tested devices designed to detect cannabis, as well as other drugs, in a driver's saliva. Police have been asking for these resources, and we will deliver.

There have been concerns that this legislation will lead to widespread cannabis use. In fact, there is already widespread cannabis use in Canada and rates of usage among youth and adults are higher than other jurisdictions that have legalized marijuana. Our society is dealing with a myriad of problems due to cannabis, but most of them are in fact caused by its prohibition.

This legislation will take revenue away from organized criminals, implement, for the first time in Canada, safety standards, actually solve many of the problems, and make it harder for our youth to acquire marijuana. The legislation will make Canada a safer place for all.

● (2225)

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said that Canada already has a myriad of problems and that the government has a science-based approach. Nevertheless, in Colorado, there have been not one, not two, not three, but seven devastating effects on the negative social costs related to the legalization of marijuana, including increased consumption by youth, consumption at an early age, and increased numbers of arrests, people in emergency care, hospitalizations, and fatal accidents.

I am wondering if lessons have been learned. The bill follows the Colorado model. Science shows that, contrary to what they say, it is truly devastating. Why go down a path that will create more problems? There is scientific evidence to that effect.

[English]

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I agree that if we are legalizing this, we should be looking to other jurisdictions that have legalized it. As for the data the member has quoted from Colorado, I wonder what sources he has used.

Two sources that I have used from Colorado are a report issued by the chief public health officer of Colorado and a report by the public safety department of Colorado. Both have said that there have been some increases, although the data, they admit, is very hard to interpret. Up until now, they have not tracked this.

Therefore, to compare what was happening before the data was being tracked to what is happening today does not make much sense by way of comparison. Even the comparisons they are making are not showing these effects to be devastating. They are showing there are some negatives effects, but they are unsure whether these actually reach statistical significance.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley for his work as an emergency physician. I used to live in Winnipeg as well.

I do have one question about something I really am confused about. The proposed legislation would allow a young person between the ages of 12 and 18 to possess up to five grams of dried cannabis without criminal sanction. There is also a social sharing provision in the bill where youth can share up to five grams without being accused of trafficking or transport. To me, that just flies in the face of trying to protect youth. I would be really interested in hearing the member's views.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, there is a misinterpretation of that statute. This legislation would not legally permit anyone between the ages of 12 and 18 to carry marijuana. There is basically a ticketing offence that does not lead to a criminal record. Contrary to what an earlier speaker said, the substance is confiscated. There is a sanction for this, just not a criminal record.

Government Orders

• (2230)

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 1920s prohibition of alcohol was a terrible failure. Criminals profited from it. People died from the consumption of it. There was no tight regulatory regime controlling alcohol or its composition.

Fast forward to today and we find the same thing: the miserable, terrible failure of marijuana. Criminals are profiting from it. There is no control over the composition of it. There is a tight regulatory regime over alcohol today, and this has created a much more responsible environment around the consumption of alcohol and, more importantly, the composition of alcohol.

Would the member not agree that it would be beneficial to society to end the prohibition of cannabis?

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the hon. member. As I have said, in my own medical practice I had patients come in who had consumed what they thought was simply cannabis and in fact they had obvious toxic syndromes consistent with other ingestions. It was clear in their mind that nothing else had been ingested. As we have said, there is not a lot of quality control in a substance that is produced by criminal gangs, and people became seriously ill based on the contaminants that were put in.

This would lead to a strictly regulated product that is not available to the public unless it is subject to strict quality controls of the kind we now have today with alcohol.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-45 concerning the legalization of marijuana.

First, I will say to all my colleagues that I am not an expert, a doctor, a police officer, or a scientist. My post-secondary studies do not make me more qualified than others to talk about drug use. Tonight, I am speaking as a father of three children on the marijuana legalization bill.

This evening, I heard the government use so many platitudes and different talking points that say the same thing, that it makes me think that the government wants to legalize marijuana in order to keep an election promise made to a segment of the electorate in order to win the election. It is another of the many promises made by the Liberals to get votes. Today, they are in a rush to keep this promise, but they are forgetting one key thing: if they legalize this drug, people, youth, and families will suffer.

Some people are really going to suffer as a result of this decision. It is a disgrace to this House and a disgrace to all members to simply repeat the talking points provided by Health Canada, or should I say the office of the Minister of Health. Indeed, it was not Health Canada that provided these talking points, I am sure. The Liberal members keep repeating them ad nauseam to try to convince themselves that legalizing marijuana is good for Canadian society.

I thank my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis for comparing this situation with the Colorado experience. I heard the member who spoke right before me questioning my colleague's sources. Colorado teachers have painted a picture of the con-

sequences and collateral damage that legalizing marijuana has had on Colorado. There have been seven consequences. Unfortunately, my colleague did not have time to outline all seven elements during his speech, but since I have some time, I will go over them. I will then move on to the heart of matter.

First of all, in 25% to 40% of all cases of impaired driving, marijuana was involved.

Second, in 2012, 10.4% of Colorado youth aged 12 to 17 were considered current marijuana users compared to 7.5% nationally. Colorado is now ranked fourth in the nation with 39% more users than the national average. That is what happened.

Third, marijuana-related expulsions and suspensions increased by 32% between 2008-09 and 2012-13.

Fourth, in 2012, 26.81% of college-age students were considered current marijuana users compared to 18.8% nationally. This put Colorado third in the nation at 42% higher than the national average.

Fifth, in 2013, 48.4% of Denver adult arrestees tested positive for marijuana, which is a 16% increase from 2008.

Sixth, from 2011 to 2012, there was a 57% increase in emergency room visits by marijuana users.

• (2235)

Seventh, hospitalizations related to marijuana have gone up by 82% in Colorado since 2008.

We want to make comparisons and tell it like it is. I thank my colleague from Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis for giving me this information, which I did not have.

They say they have solved the problems and found solutions, but the fact is that the solutions ended up causing a lot more problems and not meeting the people's expectations. The Colorado situation is taking a heavy toll on young people and families.

My concerns have not changed since the bill was introduced. The government is saying two things. First, it wants to take drug profits away from organized crime, and second, it wants to make it harder for young people to get marijuana.

It makes no sense to give these two reasons when legalizing, and I would instead say normalizing, the use of marijuana in Canada.

Government Orders

Let us first talk about prohibition because that is often the example given. We are often told about the prohibition of alcohol. Profits from the sale of alcohol were taken out of the hands of organized crime. Today, it is a legal and controlled market. On several occasions in recent weeks, I had the opportunity to meet with grade 11 students in my riding. I asked them questions. I sometimes asked their teachers if they would leave the class because I wanted honest answers. I asked how many of them had consumed alcohol. All students raised their hands. In Quebec, grade 11 students are 15 and 16 years old. As far as I know, across Canada people under the age of 18 are prohibited from consuming alcohol. It is a controlled product that is managed by crown corporations and is closely monitored. In addition, everyone knows that consuming alcohol under 18 is illegal. However, all the 16-year-olds I met had consumed alcohol.

The big news is that the Liberals claim that by treating marijuana like alcohol, young people will use it less. What is wrong with this picture? What will happen instead? People will simply trivialize the use of marijuana. It will no longer be a criminal offence. There will be no penalties. Some young person who was hesitating for fear of being caught will have his first joint. I realize that this first experiment might be the last for many young people. It might be just an occasional thing. However, what might happen to kids who have more problems, those who are having difficulties, those who are having a hard time at home and who might try this and feel good for the first time in their lives? They will not use marijuana just one, two, or three times. They will continue to use it. As a father, this worries me. This is what we need to think about. We have to stop thinking about numbers and everything that is going to happen. This is the reality, because this is what is happening on the ground. This is what young people tell us when we talk to them.

I asked these young people another question. I asked them how many of them had ever tried marijuana, how many had tried a joint, and how many had tried it just once. About a third of them, 30%, 35%, or 40%, depending on the class, raised their hands in front of their teacher or even their father. It seemed cool. It is odd, because it is not all that cool, since only a third raised their hands. When I asked them if they supported the legalization of marijuana, even those who had tried it did not all raise their hands. A smaller number support the legalization of marijuana. Among the youth aged 16 and under that I met at high school, between 60% and 75% did not support the legalization of marijuana.

• (2240)

When I talk to them, they tell me that they are opposed to the legalization of cannabis because they have seen what marijuana did to their friend. He started using marijuana, quit school, and no longer hangs around with them. He was a good student and they had fun together, but he withdrew from the group. He became a whole different person. He started hanging around with different people and is now, unfortunately, no longer part of their group. That is what young people are telling me. I am not talking about statistics, studies, or bogus consultations to justify an election promise. I am talking about what young people are saying about this issue.

The second argument really makes me laugh. The Liberals are saying that they want to divert the profits from organized crime. Let us come back to the issue of alcohol. In the old days, alcohol was

illegal and governments had the bright idea to take back control of alcohol in order to hinder organized crime. The result is that, today, organized crime no longer exists.

The silence speaks volumes. Does organized crime still exist? Did organized crime figure out a way to continue to make money? Yes. It found drugs, including marijuana. Organized crime finds a way. If we take away its way of making money, it will simply find other things to sell, which we think is even more worrisome.

Over the past weeks, months, and years, organized crime has been shifting its focus to chemical drugs, which cause people to completely lose control and create instant addiction, unlike marijuana. Criminals will make sure that young people who buy marijuana legally try these other kinds of drugs.

Anyone who believes that organized crime will cease to exist once marijuana is legal is dreaming in colour. This is a problem because these people will never go away unless and until we can tackle who they are and what they have. These are inherently evil people bent on making money, and they need to be locked up, hunted down, caught in the act, and punished. Legalizing the bad things they do will not make those things any better. I cannot accept that.

The worst part is that this bill tells us how marijuana legalization is going to work. It even says that it will be up to the provinces to decide what to do with 12- to 18-year-olds caught with marijuana. The federal government thinks all it needs to do is legalize marijuana. It could not care less what happens to young people. That is what Bill C-45 will do. It will allow young people to possess marijuana. The government says that is all fine and legal. Again, what kind of message is that sending to young people?

Marijuana will be legal for 18-year-olds even though health experts all agree that it is a bad idea. I will have more to say later about the marijuana plants that everyone will be allowed to grow at home. I have family members who died of cancer because they smoked. We hear about cancer caused by second-hand smoke all the time.

What will happen to kids who are only four, five, or six years old whose parents use marijuana? What will happen to landlords whose tenants decide to smoke marijuana in their apartment since it is legal? Anyone who has ever entered an apartment building on the same floor as someone smoking marijuana knows that it smells awful.

• (2245)

You have no choice but to walk through the smoke. It is a bit like what happens on the Hill on April 20. Everyone knows what it is. Imagine the same thing, then, in a small apartment with no ventilation. It is incredible. It is already happening now, but it will be even worse once it becomes legal. That is what worries me.

Government Orders

This bill contains absolutely nothing to help families, young people and parents, who will have to face the problems associated with their kids using cannabis. What is the government going to do to support them? What is it going to do to discourage young people from smoking marijuana? This bill sends a clear message. The government can say that packaging must not be appealing, and indeed, the packaging will not be pretty, but rather plain black with simply the contents and quantity, but pot is still pot, whether it is packaged nicely or not.

What is being done to discourage young people from trying it for the first time? This bill contains absolutely nothing in the area of prevention, nothing to help families who might be struggling with a child who has tried marijuana for the first time or who might have become addicted to pills or chemicals. There is absolutely nothing in the bill.

Then the government will ask us to give it our support and our trust. This is about our young people's lives. We are not here to debate something immaterial that will never happen in our lifetime. This is about my son's life, my daughter's life, and the lives of each and every one of our children. It is all too convenient to simply repeat the talking points provided by the cabinet about legalizing marijuana and how easy that is going to be.

I say "talking points" because the Liberals all repeat the same thing. No one else has said what I am saying now, because, quite frankly, I am speaking from the heart. Have I been reading any notes since I stood up? No, because I am speaking from the heart and I wanted to share this moment with my colleagues, because it is very important. I do not want to convince them to renege on their promise. I simply want them to put that promise aside and think for two seconds about the consequences for our youth. I want them to ask themselves if it is really worth going as far as legalizing marijuana to keep an election promise, considering the major negative impacts it will have on every young Canadian.

My office intern prepared plenty of arguments for me. A Radio-Canada survey revealed that Canadians, especially Quebecers, are opposed to the legalization of marijuana. I have here with me several reports from the World Health Organization showing that marijuana usage has many negative repercussions on the health of young people, teenagers, parents, and adults.

Another study talks about the effects of secondary smoke on unborn babies still in their mother's womb. There are statistics. I could have spent the entirety of my speech spouting numbers that show how dangerous this is, but I chose to speak from the heart instead of doing what the Liberals do and quote studies to try to prove that maybe it is not so bad. This issue concerns me directly because I have children. It concerns directly each and every member of this House who has children. All members should be extremely concerned.

I do not understand how members opposite can accept that the government legalize marijuana without implementing any prevention measure worth mentioning. The money that was announced is ridiculous. No supports for parents who will be struggling with this issue are being proposed. As far as prevention goes, what will we tell our youth? Maybe it is legal, but it is not ethical, and it is not good for them or for their future.

● (2250)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech.

I have been in this House for about two years, and I keep hearing the same arguments. I remember that when the former Conservative leader was minister of health, the approach was based on the economic action plan. It was a commercial-based approach. I remember her saying that they would spend \$1.5 million to reduce the usage rate among young people.

I have only one question for my colleague. Did this approach work?

M. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea if it worked or not. All I know is that what they end up putting forward will be worse.

At least, under the Conservatives, drugs remained illegal. I am not at all opposed to decriminalizing marijuana. I do not think that young people who are exposed to peer pressure or make an error in judgment and experiment with marijuana should be saddled with a criminal record if they get caught. That is something they will have to carry with them for the rest of their lives, on top of not being able to travel to the United States. However, I do think it important for young people to know that it is not good for them or their health. They have to know that consuming too much jeopardizes their future.

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his speech the member for Mégantic—L'Érable spoke of organized crime. I would like to bring to his attention that several articles and studies show that the level of THC will be higher in the cannabis sold by organized crime than in the cannabis sold by government agencies. Organized crime will therefore not be deterred, even though one of the government's arguments is that their system would wipe out organized crime.

What should the government do to put a stop to this?

M. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, as the term suggests, crime will organize and reorganize. If the marijuana sold by the government does not cut it, organized crime will sell more potent stuff at the same price. Consumers will then continue to get their supply from organized crime. Organized crime is not going anywhere. That is what our experience with alcohol has shown.

We must fight against organized crime. Legalizing what it is selling is no way to do that. However, if we decriminalize simple possession of marijuana, police will not be called upon to step in quite so much. In our current justice system, when police officers want to lay charges for simple possession of narcotics, the burden of proof falls on them since that is a criminal offence. The police must then prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the individual in question had the drugs in their possession. With fines, the burden of proof is reversed. The person on the receiving end of the fine has to prove that the drugs were not in their possession. They will have to pay the fine and will get a slap on the wrist. That is sure to scare them straight. On the off chance it does not, however, they will get slapped with another fine later on. The government will still get paid.

Government Orders

The people will know that we do not tolerate the consumption of marijuana, and that, in turn, will help us fight organized crime. Police will remain vigilant and arrest all those who would supply marijuana to our young people. If the bill is passed, we will end up buried so deep in drugs that we will have no way of knowing where it comes from anymore. Does it come from organized crime or from the user's own personal crop? It will become very difficult for police to go after drug traffickers.

• (2255)

[*English*]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's comments. We have some similarities, in our backgrounds in education working with students and in what we are concerned about.

Also, public health is another part that I have been involved in through the administration of large health regions. I mean public health in the sense that the number that has been proposed is in singular millions. We spent that much in a health region for public health to deal with smoking and we were able to drive down the number of people who were smoking, especially teenagers, who are most at risk. The most at risk in that group were pregnant females, who were really at risk from smoking, yet even with singular millions in one health region, we did not get where we wanted to go with our students.

Would the member please respond again about the similar situations we had at schools as we worked with students and how we understand how critical education is, and the amount of money we need, which is sadly lacking in this proposal?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has a majority. Will we be able to prevent this bill that will cause harm—irreparable harm in my view—to our young people from passing? I do not think so. If the government wants to go forward, all I ask is that the members opposite who are mothers and fathers insist that the government make every possible effort to convince young people not to use marijuana and to help parents and family members to cope with the situation.

Some people seem to take this lightly, when it is in fact a very real problem. We know that the Liberals have the power and the members they need to pass the bill, but if they do, they have to take responsibility. For those who are not part of cabinet, now is the time to speak up and insist that the government do things right and give money and resources to those who will be faced with the problems that the government is going to create. The government has to help marijuana users to stop and, most importantly, prevent people from using it in the first place if possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened very carefully to the member opposite. He seems to be focused on a very small, singular aspect of the bill before us tonight; that is, the issue of legalization. He seems quite loath to make any acknowledgement that there are 131 pages here that articulate very strict regulations for the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis, which will be a far more effective regime in responding to

the access that children currently have to cannabis, and dealing effectively with organized crime. I want to assure him that my question does not arise from talking points; it arises from four decades of keeping kids safe and protecting my community in Toronto, as well as over a decade as the chair of the national organized crime committee. Therefore, I do have some experience and expertise in this. I will assure him, and perhaps reassure him, by drawing his attention to clauses 10 through 15 of this bill, that the bill maintains very strong prohibitions under criminal law for the illegal distribution, production, import, export, and use of kids for the sale of these drugs. They are very strong regulations to control organized crime.

I will also share with him my experience dealing with organized crime and gambling, which is an activity that is still on the books as gaming offences. However, over four decades ago, governments across this country began to strictly regulate gambling, and it drove organized crime out of that business. Perhaps more importantly, the revenue from that business is now invested into treatment and rehabilitation for those who suffer the ill effects of gambling. Therefore, I want to reassure the member, with respect to his comments, that this is not a fly-by approach but an exhaustive examination of the evidence and the best advice of experts. He raised a number of issues and quoted a number of statistics that I would hope to have an opportunity to clarify for him in the future with respect to the Colorado experience.

However, given the fact that this a very comprehensive bill, it clearly provides a regime for the strict regulation of the production, distribution, and consumption of cannabis, which in my opinion, based on four decades of experience, will do a better job of protecting our kids. I would urge him to actually read the bill.

• (2300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, first of all, my colleague should not doubt that I have read the bill. I have read it, because I am here to discuss it. I take exception to the member asking if I have read the bill.

It is true that the bill would increase penalties for selling drugs and do all the things my colleague just mentioned. The bill will also legalize marijuana. It will ultimately trivialize marijuana usage. It does not matter if the bill is 100, 200, or 1,000 pages long, the end result is that marijuana will be legalized, its usage will be trivialized and criminal organizations will keep finding ways to do what they do.

I acknowledge my colleague's wealth of experience. However, I think there is something fundamentally lacking in this process, and that is prevention and education. Really, \$1.9 million per year over five years is ridiculous, considering the hundreds of millions of dollars of profit the Liberals will make out of this. It is pitiful.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-45, on which I worked very hard. This bill will allow the Liberal government to legalize marijuana; for those who might not know, the substance has been illegal in Canada for 94 years. To top it off, the government hopes to accomplish all this in under a year.

Government Orders

That is a very tight timeline for a subject as complex as this, especially when we take the time to look at what other countries have done. Why the rush? One has to wonder, given that the government keeps repeating over and over again and shouting from the rooftops that it has two main objectives, which are to restrict the activities of organized crime, perhaps even to wipe it out entirely, and to keep the substance out of the hands of children.

I will speak to a few different points. First, organized crime will not back off. Furthermore, young people will have even greater access to marijuana, there will be an increase in impaired driving, and workplace safety, which is nowhere to be found in this bill, will take a turn for the worse, endangering workers. Many business leaders are quite concerned about this. Housing-related problems will rise too. We will be faced with serious problems, and yet no one is talking about it. Among other things, there will be an increase in hospitalization rates and in calls to poison control centres, while ethical problems will grow.

Conservatives are not the ones saying all this, and I am certainly not pulling these facts out of my hat; these are the conclusions of studies done by experts who are not financed by pro-marijuana lobbies. These are the facts. These studies were conducted by experts and health professionals, and the results were presented by actual scientists. I would also add that there are real examples of places where governments legalized marijuana. I will go through them all one by one.

First, with regard to organized crime and according to my own research, no marijuana legislation will succeed in wiping out organized crime. In Uruguay and in some of the U.S. states that have legalized marijuana, black markets have only grown.

I will now quote someone who is not a Conservative MP or a mean old Conservative, as the Liberals like to put it.

Despite having legalized recreational marijuana use, Colorado has seen a rise in black market activity. The state is the second largest producer of illegal marijuana after California.

Who said this? The chief of the Denver Police Department.

Criminals are still active on the black market. We have a whole range of cartels active in Colorado, and illegal activity has not dropped one bit.

Who said this, now? The Colorado Attorney General.

The decriminalization of cannabis use has not eliminated organized crime. It has merely adapted and managed to gain a foothold in coffee shops, while retaining control over cannabis production.

Who said that? A criminologist analyzing the situation in Uruguay. Again, this person has is a non-partisan opinion.

Let us now talk about protecting children. I think it is completely inconsistent for the Prime Minister to want to limit access to cannabis for young people while allowing people to grow up to four plants in their own house or apartment.

Even worse, he makes it legal for kids under 18 who are not even supposed to be allowed to use marijuana to have five grams in their pockets. It is illegal, but who cares, kids can have five grams. It boggles the mind.

This government claims to make science-based decisions, but what does the science say? It says that marijuana is dangerous for

young people under 25. What is the government's response? It says that it does not matter and that the legal age will be 18. If they had the courage, the Liberals would stop quoting scientists and stop trying to sell this nonsense to Canadians.

I have a few more quotes. I did not make them up, but they come from surprising sources.

• (2305)

Young people are particularly vulnerable to the health effects of marijuana because adolescence is a critical time for brain development.

I found that quote on Health Canada's website. It is from the government's own public servants, who are neutral and have nothing to do with the Conservative Party.

Here is another quote. In Colorado, the number of patients admitted to hospitals after the legalization of marijuana increased dramatically. It almost tripled, from 803 diagnostics per 100,000 people from 2001 to 2009 before legalization to 2,142 diagnostics per 100,000 people after legalization.

That is from a Colorado Public Safety report.

Here is another good example. Calls regarding overdoses made to poison control centres rose by 108% in Colorado and by 68% in Washington State since 2012.

These numbers are from the Rocky Mountain Poison and Drug Center. Would anyone say that these are not credible sources?

The safety of our roads and drug-impaired driving is another major cause of concern in my view. It is already a terrible problem. There are almost as many accidents caused by drug-impaired driving than by alcohol-impaired driving, and the numbers will increase. The facts are clear.

In Washington State, after legalization, fatal accidents caused by impaired driving doubled. In Colorado, they tripled.

Here are a few more quotes:

CAA-Québec members are worried by marijuana becoming legal in Canada. [We could do the same survey in other provinces and I am convinced the results would be the same.] Some 73% of respondents to a survey done by the organization expressed concerns that this measure proposed by the [Liberal] government would negatively impact road and highway safety.

Here is another one, from a surprising source: "The number of car accidents in Colorado increased because of marijuana usage." Kevin Sabet, a former adviser to Barack Obama on drug policy, is the author of that quote.

"Close to half of Canadians who drive while under the influence of cannabis think that they are not a danger on the road."

That is over 50%. In his budget, the government is setting aside \$1.9 million for awareness campaigns in the entire country, knowing full well that legalization will occur within a year. That is absolutely ridiculous. Half of marijuana users currently consider that they are not dangerous.

Government Orders

Let us now turn to workplace safety. Many Canadian business leaders are concerned that the legalization of marijuana could lead to workplace safety problems. Many business owners and experts spoke to this in recent months.

“It's so dangerous.' With cannabis becoming legal, he feels that the problem could get worse and he doesn't feel prepared.” This is a quote from Alain Raymond, owner of a roofing company.

“We know that cannabis can have an impact on concentration and reflexes. We also know that cannabis can be detected 15 to 30 days after use. How about an employee who uses marijuana on the weekend but doesn't want his or her employer to know? What does that person do?” That is from Hugo Morissette, a human resources consultant.

Judging by the Colorado experience, these concerns are justified. The number of employees affected by marijuana has risen dramatically in Colorado, from 2.7% in 2011 to 7.5% in 2015, after legalization. The numbers have tripled. It is not insignificant.

The CEO of GE Johnson even said that it was so difficult to find employees that could pass a mouth swab test for marijuana, that he had to hire people from outside the state.

• (2310)

In short, considering the obligations of every employer in Quebec and in every other province, legalizing the recreational use of marijuana will expose employers and employees to many legal and other associated risks, such as the risk of more workplace accidents, increased employee absenteeism, and lower employee productivity. Employees would also be at risk of developing a marijuana addiction, which would in turn require that employers provide proper accommodation. Lastly, there would be a risk of increased health care cost-related claims. That is yet another aspect of the marijuana legalization issue that is far from settled, and the bill does nothing to settle it.

I will now return to the issue I spoke of early on in my speech, that of rental properties. Not a single word on this can be found in the bill. Marijuana legalization complicates the management of rental properties. Landlords fear that growing these plants indoors, up to four per housing unit, will cause damage to the units. What is more, dangerous modifications to existing electrical systems will lead to an increased risk of fire and accidents. Those hoping for an earlier harvest will undoubtedly attempt to tinker with their grid.

I will move a bit more quickly through the other parts, as I do not have many people to persuade. Marijuana's effects on health are particularly troubling to me. Medical experts agree that marijuana is a dangerous drug for children and teenagers; I would add that it is dangerous for all vulnerable persons. Whether for or against legalization, everyone can agree on that.

The Liberals are reluctant to admit that cannabis consumption has the same effect on teenagers, unlike alcohol, and that is to cause permanent damage to the brain. The Canadian Medical Association has already warned the government that occasional cannabis use can have severe psychological repercussions on the brain's development, even up to age 25.

The Canadian Medical Association recommends a legal minimum age, and it would even agree to drop that number down to 21, if that would help the government make a wise decision. What was this irresponsible government's response? Eighteen years. The Liberals have the nerve to say they base their decisions on science and on experts, but the truth of the matter is that they base their decisions on their friends who will benefit from the legalization of marijuana. I will return to this a bit later.

Today, Colorado ranks first in cannabis consumption. Before legalization, and for 10 consecutive years, it took 14th place. How can the Liberals assure parents that legal marijuana will stay far, far away from the children? On that, the Liberals are radio silent and offer no assurances.

How can the Liberals claim that legalizing marijuana and allowing the personal cultivation of up to four plants per housing unit will lead to limiting children's access to marijuana? Once again, the Liberals are radio silent. They are keeping mum on the real issues, which raises some serious questions as to the government's true intentions.

I am now getting to the really juicy part of my speech. I got a call from a friend of mine last week. He is always on top of the news cycle. He asked me to explain to him why, despite all the warnings, the Liberal government had decided to go forward with its legislation. I answered that there definitely had to be a reason. The reason is simple: the government has friends who will benefit from this move. It is a lucrative business for marijuana production company CEOs. This week, we learned that a third of these companies have at least one major Liberal Party donor on their board of directors. Those are the facts. These companies are run by people close to the Liberal Party. I will name a few. I will add that I did not even have to dig too deep, because the story is getting quite a bit of media coverage these days.

• (2315)

Here is one of the quotes:

The co-founder of The Hydrothecary, the only licensed producer of medical marijuana in Quebec, Adam Miron, was the national director of the Liberal Party of Canada and the national director of the Young Liberals of Canada.

That is something else, is it not? The only licensed producer in Quebec is part of the Liberal Party of Canada. Here is another quote:

At Aurora Cannabis, which is trying to open a plant on Hymus Boulevard in west Montreal, Chuck Rifici, who was on the board of directors, was the chief financial officer of the Liberal Party of Canada until last summer.

Last summer is not very long ago. I think that people know him, but we do not have the right to say these things about him outside the House because he files lawsuits against us if we name him. At least here I can say these things. Here is another quote:

Mr. Rifici was working for the Liberal Party of Canada when he co-founded Tweed, which became the largest producer of medical marijuana in the country, with a market capitalization of over \$1 billion.

Government Orders

We need not look very far to see why the government is in such a rush to legalize marijuana. All of the research and statistics show that marijuana is dangerous for children and that we do not have enough information. However, no measures have been put in place to ensure that children will be protected against this product. There is also no evidence to show that there will be fewer motor vehicle accidents. Our police officers do not even have the proper equipment.

I sponsored Senator Claude Carignan's bill in the House, and it is already pretty far along in the process, but the government plans to vote against it, even though it could speed up the process if for no other reason than to ensure that our police officers are properly equipped and to give them the training they need so that they are able to actually take action on July 1 if the government goes forward with this.

Since a Conservative senator was the one who introduced the bill, the government decided not to support it. Instead, it decided to come up with another bill to draw things out, even though Senator Carignan's bill had the unanimous support of the Senate, including that of independent Liberal senators, or maybe they are not independent. We no longer know. The reality is that we are not going to be ready.

I will return to the topic at hand. It is also about ethics. President Barack Obama's former adviser on drug policies, Kevin Sabet, says that they were fooled. He believes that the legalization of marijuana in Alaska, Oregon, Colorado and the State of Washington is all about money and benefits private equity firms, and that the decision had nothing to do with public health. He says that there is a huge industry in Colorado, which is like the tobacco industry and has its own lobbyists.

That is the reality. It has nothing to do with good intentions that go over well when the Liberals talk to Canadians. The reality is that what they are saying is false and that there is a lobby that is applying pressure. Every U.S. state where marijuana was legalized or is in the process of being legalized held a referendum. Moreover, in the states where marijuana was legalized, it was by a narrow margin of 50.5%, 51%, or 52% of the vote. Who provided the information? It was always the big marijuana lobby. That is the reality.

What is happening in Canada is surprising. I believe I spoke about this earlier. I named names, and I am not going to return to that. However, I have some interesting information about the person who will certainly ask me a question, and that is the parliamentary secretary responsible for the legalization of marijuana. He is being investigated by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner with respect to a fundraiser attended by Liberal donors who are lobbying for the legalization of marijuana. He will ask me a question, and I will enjoy answering him.

One person at the fundraising cocktail party attended by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, who was the special guest, and also responsible for the legalization of marijuana, pointed out that there were many other people from the cannabis industry that were trying to get his attention. I think we are starting to get the picture.

● (2320)

A recent article in *La Presse* revealed that former Liberal politicians and former senior Liberal Party officials sit on the boards of directors of the largest cannabis producers in the country and make donations to the Liberal Party. It could not be any clearer. Pretending that the government is presenting a bill that will protect our kids and keep our roads safe is disingenuous. It is not true.

If the Prime Minister used his notoriety to promote healthy life choices, it would be much more useful and a lot less young people and other individuals would be smoking marijuana.

[English]

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite correctly has said that he is protected by privilege in this room and, quite frankly, he uses that privilege perhaps quite inappropriately. I will respond to a number of things he said.

First, he maligned Canadian citizens in his remarks as somehow gaining some opportunity or advantage from this government. As I have already mentioned to his colleague, all of the companies and individuals he mentioned who received licences received them from the Conservative government, from him. I am beginning to suspect you are so well versed in malfeasance, perhaps you have better understanding of this than I do. The decisions to give those companies licences was a decision made by your government.

The member also raises an issue about something I have, a number of times—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I can assure the hon. member that I am sure it was not my government. He should be speaking through the Speaker.

Mr. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that as a result of a completely baseless accusation made to the Ethics Commissioner, I was the subject of an investigation. I have been completely cleared. I have also been the subject of a number of other similar baseless accusations that came from somewhere, of which I have been completely cleared. It seems to be a tactic used on the opposite side to bring these matters forward without any evidence or fact.

Let me give him some facts. The fact is that our children—

● (2325)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): There are some questions coming up. I want to clarify that normally we say “questions or comments” or “questions and comments”, but it does not have to be both. I will let the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest finish.

Mr. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief.

The fact is that our children are using cannabis at the highest rate of any country in the world, including Colorado, and overwhelmingly our kids get their marijuana from organized crime. Is the member opposite okay with that?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes, and the worst part about it is that they are going to continue to get it from organized crime. What did it say in the report that the working group tabled, the report that the parliamentary secretary relied on to draft this bill? The government is not going to legislate on THC levels. Instead, it is going to say that the higher the THC level, the more it will cost. What is organized crime going to do? It is going to continue to charge less. Even better, people will save a minimum of 15% in taxes by buying cannabis from organized crime. That is what is going to happen. This is going to continue.

Experience shows that this is the case. In Colorado, organized crime continued to operate. The Liberals need to stop talking nonsense. They need to rely on the sound evidence that is there and that speaks for itself. Their own report says that this will be the case.

I imagine that the Liberals are so defensive because they know that something is not right. I hope that they will start to wake up because that is what Canadians are doing. None of the states in the U.S. legalized marijuana without at least holding a referendum to find out what people thought about it. Right now, the Liberals are trying to shove this down our throats whether we like it or not.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the examples that he gave regarding the United States and for the many arguments he presented regarding the Liberal government's bill.

I would like to ask my colleague whether he can better explain the Conservatives' position on this issue. Are the Conservatives satisfied with the existing system? Marijuana is available everywhere in Canada, but Canadians can face criminal charges for using it.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very relevant question.

During the convention we had in Vancouver last year, I think we demonstrated openness to the possibility of decriminalization. This could perhaps be an intermediate step before we think about legalization. We all agree. My colleague talked about this earlier. No one thinks that a kid who smokes a joint at 15 or 16 years old for various reasons or because he wants to try it should go to prison or have a criminal record. However, that is not what this government has planned.

The worst is that the government is telling us that it wants to protect kids and educate people and raise awareness, but at the same time, it says that instead of giving money to organized crime, it is going to leave that money in government coffers. It talks about the millions of dollars generated by the sale of marijuana in their various organizations. If that is the case, why is it spending only \$1.9 million in each of the next five years on education? \$1.9 million will only pay for one 30-second ad to play during two or three shows. That is irresponsible. If the government were serious about this, we would see it in the budget. We would see measures and money to put the right equipment in police cars, to train police officers across Canada, to launch fundraising campaigns, to support the municipalities, schools, and health care systems, to prepare us for what lies ahead. The fact is that cannabis consumption will go up, because the government wants to make money. This Liberal government is a

money making machine. It has a deficit to pay for, and this is the best way it has come up with to make money.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to commend my colleague from Victoriaville, who prepared a very thorough presentation on the devastating effects of the Liberal bill on both public health and safety. We saw this in particular with the safety of youth.

I know that my colleague is interested in safety, and I would like to ask him a question. He showed us that the Liberals' motivation is money. That is clearly what he told us. I would like to remind him of a statement by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which indicates that drug impaired driving will be one of the main threats to public safety if recreational marijuana is legalized. He spoke about his private member's bill that he wants to sponsor. Could he tell us more? How can we avoid this? The rate of impaired driving is already high. How can we reduce the number of accidents on the road caused by drunk driving?

• (2330)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very valid question. I had that in my notes, but 20 minutes is not a lot of time for such an important bill.

He is absolutely right. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police put out a report in February saying it was extremely concerned about marijuana legalization. It called for police vehicles to be equipped immediately with screening devices to detect impaired driving and said that officers should have the power to conduct tests the same way they use breathalyzers for alcohol. However, given the tight timelines, the government simply will not be able to do it.

If the government sticks to its timeline and legalizes marijuana on July 1 so everyone can party on Canada Day 2018, which seems to be the idea, the government will not be able to do that in time.

Any good manager knows that setting a reasonable timeline means starting from the end date, which is July 1, 2018, and working back in time, accounting for procurement and training. It just does not add up. It is already too late to get it done in time. Vehicles will not be equipped, and officers will not be trained. Our roads will become more dangerous, especially since, as I said before, 50% of drivers who use marijuana do not think they are at risk. That is because of a lack of education and awareness. I completely agree. Just how is this government planning to handle that? With a five-year, \$1.9-million budget for the whole country. I am not sure anyone would call that a responsible move. I do not think it is.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the cannabis act. It closely follows the recommendations from the task force report of last December, and overall it is a public health approach that also treats Canadians like the responsible adults we are.

Government Orders

We talk a lot about protecting young Canadians in the House, and it is especially important during this particular debate. At the outset, allow me to spend some time to thank young Canadians, and young Liberals in particular.

In 2012, Young Liberals of Canada brought forward a resolution to legalize and regulate marijuana. That resolution noted that millions of Canadians regularly consume cannabis, that billions of dollars have been spent on ineffective enforcement that has resulted in expensive congestion in our judicial system, that progressive cannabis policies have been recommended by various commissions and parliamentary committees, and that the existing black market empowers organized crime. Young Liberals and the Liberal Party of Canada called for legalization and regulation, and that is exactly what we have delivered in the cannabis act.

We know that the status quo is unjust. Tens of thousands of Canadians are charged with cannabis possession every year. Whether or not it results in a conviction, it obviously negatively affects the lives of otherwise law-abiding Canadian adults at the border. Do these Canadians deserve criminal records? Do 43% of Canadians who say they have used cannabis in their lifetime deserve criminal records? Are they criminals? Do 15%, millions of Canadians, deserve criminal records for having used cannabis in the past year?

If I consume a substance and harm no one else in doing so, and do not harm myself in doing so, why is it a crime? There is a strong argument that it should not be, and that argument is grounded in the ideal of freedom. I know that Conservatives care about freedom. A lot of Conservatives care about freedom, because 49% of Conservative members voted for the member for Beauce.

The only explanation for the continued criminalization of cannabis is the idea that the social benefits of the criminal law will somehow reduce consumption and thereby help Canadian society and help others. The criminal law has been incredibly ineffective in doing so when 43% of Canadians self-report that they have used cannabis in their lifetime. We also know that the current approach of prohibition causes more harm than any cannabis use. The black market is empowered by prohibition, and we know that prohibition is the absence of regulations.

I am 32 years old going on 33, and no Canadian I know has ever had a difficult time finding cannabis as a youth—

• (2335)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): If the hon. member does not mind, just one moment, please. I am very interested in what the hon. member is saying, but there are discussions going on, and they are making it very difficult for me to hear what the hon. member is saying. If people are talking, it is okay, but if they do not mind just whispering more than having a loud discussion, it would make it so much easier for me to hear the hon. member.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the black market has no age limit and no quality controls. We also know there is a better way. With tobacco use, we have seen a public health approach succeed, not prohibition but a focus on regulation, restrictions on public use, restrictions on commercial advertising, and a focus on education.

Fifty years ago, 50% of Canadians smoked tobacco. That number is now less than 15%. We do not write tickets to responsible adults for smoking a cigarette or drinking Scotch. We regulate and we educate.

Our approach to cannabis is driven by public health. There is a strict possession limit of an ounce; an age limit of 18, which provinces can set higher if they so wish; and a strict but sensible limitation on commercial advertising. In taking this approach, we recognize the potential harms associated with cannabis use, but we do not overstate them.

In January, the National Academy of Sciences released a literature review of the current state of the evidence and recommendations. Yes, we know there is an association between high cannabis use and psychosis. It is dose dependent and may be moderated by genetics. We also know there is an association between high alcohol consumption and mental health, and we are not criminalizing alcohol. Yes, we should seek to limit the harms of gambling, of alcohol, and of cannabis, but prohibition is not the answer. Our policies should not be permissive. Nor should they be fearmongering.

The leader of the Green Party recognized this as well.

We have struck that balance between Canadians as responsible adults and a public health approach. Legislation on this subject that satisfies a civil libertarian like myself and a former police chief, like my neighbour from Scarborough Southwest, is no easy feat. CAMH supports our public health approach, as does the Canadian Nurses Association.

I have a few comments from constituents of mine. One constituent, Mark Bartlett, says, “Education is the key here, education and not fearmongering, but based and grounded in facts, and education focused on responsible use. Abstinence is the absence of education. We should focus on responsible use that’s related to driving offences, related to the risk of addiction because of the frequency of use, and the potential for reduced academic achievement because of the frequency of use.”

I have a few suggestions from constituents related to this legislation.

It is a wonderful thing that we are removing criminal offences for five grams and under for young Canadians. My constituents are certainly skeptical of the value of any criminal records or criminal charges and the use of the criminal law for possession at all.

On the sale to minors, there is obviously an incongruity between the sale of alcohol to minors and the sale of cannabis to minors. A number of constituents have raised this, and it is not to be part of this legislation, but forward-looking record suspensions and amnesty.

I will end where I began. Once we pass the legislation, it is important to undo the past injustices of this incredibly outdated law and to suspend the criminal records of any Canadian affected by a possession charge and a record. This was part of the original Liberal Party of Canada policy resolution, and we should certainly see that policy through.

Government Orders

I have a few comments on the idea that it is driven by dollars, which I have heard from my Conservative colleagues from the other side. We have been very clear that this is not a revenue driven approach, as it largely was to varying degrees in Colorado, but it is a public health approach. We are not looking to maximize revenues; we are looking to undercut the black market. Where we do take in revenue at the federal level, we plan to spend it on treatment and education.

When it comes to the social harms of cannabis, and I cannot emphasize this enough for my Conservative colleagues on the other side, we can take as just one example the potential social harms of cannabis versus a substance like alcohol. We know from the large literature review from the National Academy of Sciences that there are obvious risks for women consuming cannabis during pregnancy. We also know, though, that fetal alcohol syndrome is incredibly costly to our society. Three thousand Canadians a year are affected by this, yet I do not hear anyone in the House proposing a criminal law or ticketing option related to alcohol. We know the answer is regulation and education, and that is exactly what the legislation proposes.

● (2340)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has given a very balanced speech. I took the bill back to the riding with me and spent a lot of time studying it right after it came out for first reading around April 13. I took it back and read it through over the Easter weekend, and I shared with my constituents what I distilled from it.

It has that sense of balance. I was concerned about a number of aspects. I also want to make sure that public health is central. I am a mom and a grandmom, and I may be the only person who grew up in the 60s who never smoked cannabis. I have concerns about putting anything in my lungs. I have always been cautious, and I am cautious with my kids.

That is why I thought the bill did a good job in terms of having public information and having strict controls. If anything, as I mentioned earlier in this place, the one concern I have about the bill as drafted is that the punishments are overly harsh in some of the criminal aspects for someone who is over 18 and is distributing marijuana to someone under 18.

How does my colleague think we will confront what I think are some fear-based tactics? I have looked up the Colorado experience online, researching it since we have been sitting here, as I had not been able to get in on the debate. It seems to me that what we have heard about Colorado—and perhaps the hon. member can throw some light on it—is not the case; rather, the teens in Colorado were already consuming cannabis much more than teens in other states before it took the measures to legalize. Their experience thus far appears to be cautiously optimistic. They are not seeing more fatalities or car accidents. They are not seeing more organized crime.

The governor, who did not want this to pass when it came forward as a referendum, now says that he would not want to go back to prohibition. He describes the war on drugs, in his words, as a train wreck.

Getting this right is going to be important for Canada, because I think we are going to lead the way for a lot of jurisdictions.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I would second the notion that the war on drugs is an abject failure, with cannabis no less than other substances.

When we look at the Colorado model, we see that those who were not convinced in the first place have seen the successes and have been converts. I expect the very same thing to happen here in this House.

I would emphasize as well that our approach is even more focused on public health than the Colorado approach, especially relating to the limitation on commercial advertising. I think we will have even more success here in Canada.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am inclined to support the bill, to get it to committee for further review, but I would like to hear the member's comments around an important implementation element, which is the decriminalization part of the marijuana discussion.

We have seen spending of over \$4 million a year to prosecute marijuana possession, simple possession, of 22,000 people who got a criminal record in 2014 alone, hours of court time, all for something that the government and a great majority of the community I hear from agree should not be a criminal offence at all.

Given that young Canadians in particular are most likely to end up with a criminal record for simple marijuana possession, given that it has taken the government quite some time to get to this point in its mandate to fulfill a major election promise, and given the extreme impacts of a criminal record on young people, I would like to hear the member's comments on how we can move toward removing the penalties for simple possession well ahead of the July 1, 2018, implementation.

● (2345)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am on record on multiple occasions saying that I do not think we should continue arresting Canadians for simple possession. I do not think we should continue charging them.

I can say I was comforted when I hosted a drug policy town hall in my riding, and I had a panellist who was a member of the Toronto drug squad, who said that is simply not something that happens in Toronto. It is obviously still a problem in other jurisdictions. It is obviously still a problem in some cases for certain minority groups who are unfairly treated.

I will say that, while my government is not looking to decriminalize in the interim, and we can see some worries with dispensaries having popped up—I had one right next door to me—without having interim regulations in place, there are some incredible worries. That is why I focused more on this notion of record suspensions and amnesty post-legalization.

Government Orders

There ought to be a consensus in this House. I have heard Conservative colleagues say that they do not want to see people negatively affected by criminal records. I think we can agree on this on this side of the House, and I expect members from the NDP agree as well.

Really, a focus post-legalization on an expedited record suspension process is the most obvious fair way forward.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have four kids and I am concerned about the regulations and the laws as written by the government and how they would deal not just with possession of marijuana but with distribution. The one thing the member has neglected to talk about is that there is no legal recourse for individuals who have five grams or less when they distribute the drug. What it is essentially saying is that they cannot sell to kids, but kids can sell to other kids and that is going to be completely fine as long as it is five grams and under.

Does the member across the way think it is okay for kids to sell marijuana to other kids?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, the goal of a strictly regulated system is to ensure that we are not allowing people off the street to sell marijuana, whether it is kids to kids or whether it is others to kids. The notion of the five-gram limit is to ensure that we avoid giving criminal records for possession to kids who are in possession of five grams and under. I am not sure if the member opposite is aware of how small five grams is in terms of selling. I also would not want to see major criminal records punishing young Canadians for the sale of such a small amount.

Principally, the focus here is on possession. There obviously should be penalties, whether it is a ticketing penalty or whether it is not a harsh criminal penalty but some form of diversion in our criminal justice system, for people who are caught trafficking, regardless of amount and regardless of age. I do not think a harsh criminal penalty is the answer, but obviously no penalty at all is not the appropriate answer for selling outside of a strictly regulated framework.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the comments offered by my colleague from Beaches—East York were very thoughtful and reasoned. He clearly is speaking to members of his community and has given this issue a great deal of thought.

I am glad that he recognized the distinction between this and the approach that was taken in Colorado and Washington, which was overwhelmingly a commercial model for the regulation of cannabis. They passed referendum and ballot initiatives that really focused on legalization and revenue collection. The Canadian approach has been fundamentally different, in that our approach has been a public health approach directed entirely at reducing both the social and health harms.

I have travelled across the country and talked to parents who are concerned about their kids and they are worried about three things basically. They are worried about the health of their kids. They are worried about the effects that cannabis can have on their health and on their developing minds, and they want to restrict their access to it. They are worried about the social harms to their kids: whether they are going to finish high school; who they are going to be associated

with; and, if they do get involved with cannabis, what type of people they will have to do business with. Finally, what I have also heard overwhelmingly from Canadians is that they are worried that their kids are going to end up with a criminal record.

Our government has approached all of those harms in a very comprehensive way to look at how we can do a better job of reducing those social and health harms. Could the member perhaps expand on his experience and his reflections after conversations with families and parents in his community?

• (2350)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, there is no perfect solution to a consensual crime like this. If they want to stamp it out, good luck; it is impossible. Whether it is gambling, whether it is alcohol addiction, whether it is cannabis, frankly whatever it is, there is no way to stamp out drug use completely, including cannabis. In tackling supply and consumption, these methods simply do not work through aggressive law enforcement. We have the status quo. We know it does not work. What are the alternatives? There is an overwhelming consensus from every drug policy expert who has studied the subject that the status quo of prohibition is a failed model and that we ought to look to regulation and education.

In taking that public health approach and particularly looking at restricting commercial advertising and balancing that with treating Canadians like the responsible adults we are and recognizing that Canadians should be free to make decisions for themselves as responsible adults, it is important to strike that balance, and I think we have.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to point out that we have 10 minutes. If the next hon. member is splitting his time, he can give his speech and then the questions will begin when we resume debate.

The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time, but since it will be another day, I will provide the name at that time.

I can say with some confidence that the bill has tremendous interest among my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia. I held a telephone town hall on this issue on March 14, and more than 3,300 constituents stayed on the call for the entire hour. That is how much interest there is. Much of what members will hear in this speech reflects their views, and I thank them for that.

It is estimated that growing cannabis and selling it makes up a significant portion of the economy in parts of my riding, and certainly the product is well used, legal or not, by many people, young and old. Those who grow marijuana in the Kootenays are not part of organized crime. They do not see themselves as criminals. Rather, they believe that they are just small-scale farmers producing a herb that has received a bad rap. While I do not think that is completely accurate either, I believe that it is important for post-prohibition licensing to include small producers and co-ops, and not just the large corporations that are currently offering medical marijuana.

Government Orders

That leads me to one of the biggest problems with the bill, the lack of detail. Canadians were promised a piece of historic legislation that would break new ground. What we got was a frame with much of the picture missing. Manufacturing licences will be provided to producers who meet undetermined standards. They will be set by regulations we have not seen yet. It will be legal to sell marijuana, but it is entirely up to the provinces to determine how. Again, no details are provided in the bill.

The age is set at 18, but provinces can change that too. In other words, we might be able to grow cannabis, but we do not know how we would get a licence. We might be able to buy it, but we do not know where, and we might be able to smoke it, but we do not know when. That is a lot of unanswered questions.

Let us look at the issue of minimum age for a moment. Health officials and researchers have been very clear that using marijuana before the age of 25 can be dangerous to brain development. I would like to read briefly from an article by the American Psychological Association. Jodi Gilman, Ph.D., at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Centre for Addiction Medicine, used an MRI to look for brain changes in 18- to 25-year-olds who smoked marijuana at least once per week but were not dependent on the drug. Compared with non-users, the smokers had changes in the shape, volume, and grey matter density of two brain regions associated with addiction. Participants who smoked more often had even more significant differences.

The Canadian Psychological Association recommended to the government panel that the minimum age be 21. The government has chosen to ignore this scientific and medical advice and has lowered the age even further to 18.

Of course, the impact of marijuana used by a pregnant woman could be even more severe. According to information provided to me by the senior policy adviser to the Minister of Justice, heavy cannabis use during pregnancy can lead to lower birth weights. It has also been associated with longer-term development effects in children and adolescents, such as a decrease in memory function, the ability to pay attention, reasoning, and problem-solving skills, and an increase in hyperactive behaviour.

Will marijuana carry labels warning expectant mothers to avoid use of the product, such as we see on tobacco and alcohol? Bill C-45 is silent on this issue.

Yesterday the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* published a powerful editorial about Bill C-45. The editorial, written by editor-in-chief Dr. Diane Kelsall, calls the minimum age of 18 too young, given the scientific evidence. Dr. Kelsall warns that growing marijuana at home will give young people too easy access. She is also concerned about the lack of national standards for retail sales as well as the limits on the potency of various strains. Dr. Kelso wrote:

The government appears to be hastening to deliver on a campaign promise without being careful enough about the health impacts of policy. It is not good enough to say that provinces and territories can set more stringent rules if they wish. If Parliament truly cares about the public health and safety of Canadians, especially our youth, this bill will not pass.

As I said earlier, last March I held a town hall in my riding to hear from constituents about their thoughts on marijuana legalization. Their opinions were widespread, naturally, and many came with

questions. I heard from many people who thought legalization was a good idea. I heard from others who oppose it. I heard from producers who said they did not want to be shut out of the action, and retailers said the same.

• (2355)

Deb Kozak, mayor of Nelson, B.C., was one of my guest panellists. She said she wanted to see a framework that would help her municipality develop appropriate zoning and bylaws for marijuana retailers. Sadly, so far the bill is lacking on that front too, downloading that responsibility to the provinces.

The money that comes from the legal sale of marijuana is another area not covered in the proposed legislation. Many constituents want that taxation aspect to be dedicated specifically to deterring the use of marijuana and other drugs and to reducing and treating the health impacts of using marijuana. They do not want the revenue from legalizing it going to general revenue.

One question I was asked was about crossing into the United States. Will legalizing marijuana in Canada make border crossings more difficult? I did not know, so I wrote the Minister of Justice and asked. Here is what the minister's office responded:

Travellers should remain aware that while some states have legalized recreational cannabis, cannabis remains a controlled substance at the federal level in the United States. Travellers seeking entry into the U.S. may be inadmissible if they admit to having consumed cannabis in Canada or disclose to U.S. authorities plans to purchase or consume cannabis while in the U.S.

Let us say that again: travellers seeking to enter the U.S. may be inadmissible if they admit to having consumed cannabis in Canada.

Canadians doing something that will be legal in Canada may be barred, as a result, from entering into the United States. That is an issue that the government needs to deal with.

Perhaps we should retaliate. It is illegal to consume alcohol under the age of 21 in the United States, so perhaps we should ban anyone from entering Canada if they admit to having had a beer at age 20.

It is imperative that the government work with U.S. authorities to acknowledge our sovereignty and the ability to make laws that are different from theirs and to work out what is going to happen along the border.

Finally, I would like to repeat what many of my NDP colleagues have said. The biggest missing piece of Bill C-45 is the need to provide full pardons to any Canadians convicted of possession of small amounts of marijuana in the past.

Government Orders

Last December, the Governor of Vermont, Peter Shumlin, pardoned 192 individuals who were convicted of possession. He said, “My hope was to help as many individuals as I could overcome that stigma and the very real struggles that too often go along with [being convicted of marijuana].”

I appreciate the government's interest in ending the failed war on drugs and that the prohibition on cannabis, which has harmed more people than it has helped, is finally coming to an end. I hope that the government will get it right.

There is work to be done. This law is not finished yet. There are a lot of holes in it, so while the NDP will support Bill C-45 on second reading, I encourage the government to listen to members of this House and take the opportunity to correct the many deficiencies of the bill when it goes to committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member will have five minutes for questions when the debate resumes.

It being 12 a.m., this House stands adjourned until later today at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Health

Mrs. Philpott 11625

Committees of the House

Health

Mr. Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) 11625

Public Accounts

Mr. Sorenson 11625

Public Safety and National Security

Mr. Oliphant 11625

Income Tax Act

Mr. Davies 11625

Bill C-356. Introduction and first reading 11625
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 11626

Main Estimates 2016-17—Canadian Heritage

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes) 11626

(Motion agreed to) 11626

Committees of the House

Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Mr. Lamoureux 11626

Motion for Concurrence 11626

(Motion agreed to) 11626

Electoral Reform

Mr. Cullen 11626

Motion for concurrence 11626

Mr. Lamoureux 11628

Mr. Rayes 11628

Mr. Boulerice 11628

Mr. Fillmore 11629

Mr. Rayes 11630

Mr. Fillmore 11630

Mr. Boulerice 11633

Mr. Albrecht 11633

Mr. Ste-Marie 11633

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 11634

Mr. Lamoureux 11634

Mr. Reid 11634

Mr. Fillmore 11637

Ms. Quach 11638

Ms. Gladu 11638

Mr. Ste-Marie 11638

Ms. Boutin-Sweet 11640

Mr. Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation) 11640

Mr. Plamondon 11641

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 11641

Mr. Lamoureux 11641

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 11642

Mr. Robillard 11643

Ms. Malcolmson 11643

Mr. Reid 11644

Ms. Kwan 11644

Division on motion deferred 11645

Petitions

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Mr. Dubé 11645

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Diotte 11645

The Environment

Ms. Malcolmson 11645

HIV/AIDS

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 11645

41st General Election

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 11646

Physician-Assisted Dying

Mr. Warawa 11646

Impaired Driving

Mr. Warawa 11646

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Ms. Kwan 11646

Firearms Registry

Mrs. Wagantall 11646

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux 11646

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Cannabis Act

Ms. Wilson-Raybould 11646

Bill C-45. Second reading 11646

Mr. Nicholson 11649

Mr. MacGregor 11650

Ms. Gladu 11650

Ms. Quach 11650

Mr. Nicholson 11651

Amendment 11653

Mr. Mendicino 11653

Mr. MacGregor 11654

Mr. Blair 11654

Mr. Albrecht 11654

Mr. MacGregor 11655

Mr. Blair 11658

Mr. Tilson 11658

Mr. Lamoureux 11659

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Marijuana

Mr. Fortin 11659

Yarmouth Sports Hall of Fame

Mr. Fraser (West Nova) 11659

2017 RBC Cup Championship

Mr. Shields 11659

Ski Saint-Bruno	
Mr. Picard	11660
Reconciliation Saskatoon	
Ms. Benson	11660
Insurance Brokers Association of Canada	
Mrs. Mendès	11660
HPV Prevention Week	
Mr. Kent	11660
HPV Prevention Week	
Mrs. Nassif	11660
Antonio Sousa	
Mr. Spengemann	11661
Canada 150 Commemorative Medals	
Mr. Nuttall	11661
First Nations	
Mr. Arseneault	11661
Komagata Maru	
Mr. Dhaliwal	11661
Communication and Leadership Award	
Mr. Albrecht	11661
Rankin Cancer Run	
Mr. Bittle	11662
HPV Prevention Week	
Ms. Sansoucy	11662
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada	
Mr. Berthold	11662
Tourism Week	
Ms. Hutchings	11662

ORAL QUESTIONS

Natural Resources	
Mr. Scheer	11663
Mr. Carr	11663
Mr. Scheer	11663
Mr. Carr	11663
Infrastructure	
Mr. Scheer	11663
Mr. Sohi	11663
Mr. Scheer	11663
Mr. Sohi	11663
Government Appointments	
Mr. Scheer	11663
Ms. Joly	11664
Government Accountability	
Mr. Mulcair	11664
Ms. Chagger	11664
Mr. Mulcair	11664
Ms. Chagger	11664
Infrastructure	
Mr. Mulcair	11664
Mr. Sohi	11664

Mr. Mulcair	11664
Mr. Sohi	11664
Ms. Leitch	11665
Mr. Sohi	11665
Mr. Rayes	11665
Mr. Sohi	11665
Natural Resources	
Mr. Obhrai	11665
Mr. Carr	11665
Mr. Obhrai	11665
Mr. Carr	11665
Mr. Strahl	11665
Mr. Carr	11666
Mr. Strahl	11666
Mr. Carr	11666
Democratic Reform	
Mr. Blaikie	11666
Ms. Gould	11666
Mr. Boulerice	11666
Ms. Gould	11666
Government Appointments	
Mrs. Boucher	11666
Ms. Joly	11666
Mrs. Boucher	11667
Ms. Joly	11667
Mr. Brassard	11667
Ms. Joly	11667
Mr. Brassard	11667
Ms. Joly	11667
Privacy	
Mr. Dubé	11667
Mr. Goodale	11668
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Benson	11668
Mr. Hussen	11668
Status of Women	
Mr. Serré	11668
Ms. Monsef	11668
National Defence	
Mr. Bezan	11668
Mr. Sajjan	11668
Mr. Paul-Hus	11668
Mr. Sajjan	11668
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Clarke	11668
Mr. MacKinnon	11669
Mr. McCauley	11669
Mr. MacKinnon	11669
The Environment	
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	11669
Ms. McKenna	11669
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Laverdière	11669
Mr. DeCoursey	11669

Indigenous Affairs	
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo).....	11669
Ms. Bennett	11669
Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo).....	11670
Ms. Bennett	11670
Canadian Heritage	
Ms. Rempel	11670
Ms. Joly	11670
Veterans Affairs	
Mr. Fuhr	11670
Mrs. Romanado	11670
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mrs. Stubbs.....	11671
Mr. Hussen	11671
Housing	
Mr. Aubin	11671
Ms. Goldsmith-Jones	11671
Health	
Ms. Ludwig	11671
Mrs. Philpott	11671
Mr. Lake	11671
Mrs. Philpott	11671
Infrastructure	
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	11672
Mr. Sohi	11672
Mr. Ste-Marie.....	11672
Mr. Sohi.....	11672
Presence in Gallery	
The Deputy Speaker.....	11672

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Autism Spectrum Disorder	
Motion	11673
Motion negatived	11674
Extension of Sitting Hours	
Motion that debate be not further adjourned	
Ms. Chagger.....	11674
Motion	11674
Ms. Bergen	11674
Ms. Chagger	11674
Mr. Rankin	11675
Mr. Genuis	11675
Ms. Gladu	11675
Mr. Doherty	11675
Mr. Nater	11676
Mr. Albas.....	11676
Mr. Deltell.....	11677
Mr. Kmiec.....	11678
Mr. Albrecht.....	11678
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	11679
Motion agreed to.....	11680
Resuming debate	
Motion.....	11680

Mr. Lamoureux.....	11680
Mr. Doherty	11682
Mr. Masse (Windsor West).....	11682
Mr. Lightbound.....	11683
Mr. Albrecht.....	11683
Mr. Berthold.....	11683
Mr. MacKinnon	11685
Mr. Warawa	11685
Ms. Gladu	11685
Mr. Berthold	11687
Mr. Vaughan.....	11687

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Framework on Palliative Care in Canada Act	
Bill C-277. Third reading.....	11688
Mr. Davies.....	11688

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Criminal Code	
Bill C-46—Notice of time allocation motion	
Ms. Chagger.....	11689

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Framework on Palliative Care in Canada Act	
Bill C-277. Third reading.....	11689
Mr. McCauley.....	11689
Ms. Sidhu (Brampton South).....	11691
Mrs. Stubbs.....	11693
Mr. Lamoureux.....	11694
Mr. Warawa	11695
Ms. Gladu	11696
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed) ..	11696

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Extension of Sitting Hours	
Motion	11696
Mr. Vaughan.....	11697
Ms. Rempel	11700
Ms. Malcolmson	11701
Mr. Genuis	11701
Mr. Cuzner	11702
Mr. Kmiec.....	11702
Mr. Lamoureux.....	11704
Mr. Weir	11704
Mr. Carrie	11704
Mr. Doherty	11705
Mr. Vaughan.....	11706
Ms. Malcolmson	11706
Mr. Finnigan	11706
Mr. Nater	11709
Ms. Malcolmson	11709
Mr. Lamoureux.....	11709
Mr. Weir	11710
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	11710
Ms. Young.....	11710
Amendment negatived	11713

Motion agreed to	11714	Mr. Blair	11725
Cannabis Act		Mr. Clarke	11725
Bill C-45. Second reading	11714	Mr. Eyolfson	11726
Mr. Mendicino	11714	Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	11727
Mr. McColeman	11715	Mr. Stetski	11727
Mr. Dubé	11716	Mr. Bossio	11728
Mr. Rayes	11716	Mr. Berthold	11728
Mr. Lametti	11716	Mr. Drouin	11730
Mr. Rayes	11718	Ms. Trudel	11730
Mr. Stetski	11718	Mr. Shields	11731
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	11718	Mr. Blair	11731
Mr. Warawa	11719	Mr. Rayes	11731
Mr. Blair	11720	Mr. Blair	11734
Mr. Erskine-Smith	11720	Mr. Weir	11735
Ms. Malcolmson	11721	Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	11735
Mr. Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	11721	Mr. Erskine-Smith	11735
Mr. Graham	11722	Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	11737
Mr. Bossio	11723	Ms. Malcolmson	11737
Ms. Trudel	11723	Mr. Zimmer	11738
Mr. Lightbound	11723	Mr. Blair	11738
Mr. Carrie	11725	Mr. Stetski	11738

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