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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, June 7, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 7, 2017

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of *O Canada* led by our wonderful pages.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

LÉO MAJOR

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has its own war heroes who deserve special recognition on the occasion of that other 150th anniversary.

One of them, Léo Major, is our only soldier to have been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the DCM, in two separate wars. He landed at Normandy and single-handedly captured almost 100 Nazi soldiers at the Battle of the Scheldt.

He refused to return home despite having lost an eye and broken his back. He had a war to finish.

In one night, he single-handedly liberated the Dutch city of Zwolle, which was occupied by 1,000 enemy troops.

During the Korean War, he and 18 soldiers recaptured a hill that an American division of 10,000 had lost. Léo Major and his men held their position for three days, repelling seven attacks by two Chinese divisions 14,000 soldiers strong.

Quebec has war heroes who fought and are still fighting for freedom, and Léo Major was one of them. Some soldiers by their actions become legend.

Léo Major, *je me souviens*. I remember. We will all remember.

• (1405)

[*English*]

CLAYTON CASSIDY

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate the life of a courageous resident of Cache Creek.

Clayton Cassidy served his community with integrity over the last 30 years as a member of the fire department, serving as fire captain and, most recently, fire chief. While investigating water levels following the floods in Cache Creek, Chief Cassidy tragically lost his life.

In the words of his brother Patrick, Clayton was a compassionate community leader. He was a man uncomfortable with praise who devoted his life to helping others.

Clayton Cassidy is survived by his wife Rose, his three sons, seven grandchildren and seven siblings.

On behalf of the constituents of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, I offer my sincere condolences to the Cassidy family. Chief Cassidy's service will forever be honoured and his courage will never be forgotten.

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FINANCE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, summer is coming, and Canadians across Canada are looking forward to another fishing season, with its promise of adventure and tall tales of that monster fish that got away.

The Liberals seem to love fishing just as much as the next guy, since all their lessons on governing come from fishing.

Lesson number one is that there is no such thing as too much equipment.

Lesson number two is that when in doubt, exaggerate.

Lesson number three is that even the best lines get weak after they have been used a few times.

Lesson number four is that sometimes we really have to squirm to get off the hook.

Statements by Members

I know the Liberals have a fishing story they do not like to brag about, but let us be honest, we are not talking about a small fry here. The Liberals said the deficit would only be this big, but we know it is really that big. That monster \$28 billion deficit continues to dive deeper and run the line.

The Liberals need to stop baiting us with wild fishing stories and reel in this deficit.

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CUMBERLAND-COLCHESTER CONSTITUENCY YOUTH COUNCIL

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last fall, 14 bright young people representing every corner of our riding formed the Cumberland-Colchester Constituency Youth Council. They kicked off a study on youth retention and out-migration in rural Nova Scotia. They approached it like a parliamentary committee, heard from many witnesses and held lively discussions.

Their final report calls on governments to invest in the kinds of infrastructure that rural Nova Scotia needs for economies and communities to thrive, things like broadband internet, cellphone service, small schools, support for entrepreneurs, recreational infrastructure, and tourism. Their report is now in the hands of every municipal councillor, MLA and MP in the area.

These young people showed a great thirst for knowledge about civics and politics, and I want to thank them for their report. I also want to thank my executive assistant, Joel Henderson, for organizing and monitoring the entire process. I want to thank you as well, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to talk about it.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the weather has long been one of our favourite topics of casual conversation. Since the flooding that spring brought to the Mauricie, however, it has become practically all we talk about.

I say “practically” because what we should have focused on was the incredible outpouring of support that saw perfect strangers helping each other without expecting anything in return.

By offering my thanks I hope to promote humankind's capacity for goodwill.

I offer my thanks to those who, even today, are still helping their neighbours. I offer my thanks to the many military personnel, police officers and firefighters for their help. I offer my thanks to the artists who held benefit concerts for the victims. I offer my thanks to the politicians who put aside their differences to respond to the emergency and alleviate the distress people were in.

Finally, I offer my thanks to everyone whose acts of kindness, while I might not be aware of them, make me proud to be their humble representative.

[English]

CANADA 150 POETRY CONTEST

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am thrilled to present Guelph High School student Michaela McBryde's winning submission in Guelph's Canada 150 Poetry Contest, titled “150 Years of Greatness”:

A Queen's signature
 Leads to the birth of a nation
 A nation called Canada
 Free to make our own choices
 In hopes they lead to greatness
 Choices that created
 Many ways to make life better
 Many mistakes to learn from
 Many decisions to change the world
 Many opportunities for greatness
 A strength on our own
 Partnering up with others
 To help the world
 In war, in politics, in humanity
 Peacekeepers for greatness
 A country of 36 and a half million people
 Citizens contributing thoughts, discoveries, advancements, technology, art, music,
 history, exports and services
 Canadians strive for greatness
 Canada is strong and unified
 We stand together
 To celebrate our history
 A celebration of 150 years of greatness.

I congratulate Michaela.

* * *

● (1410)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we remember a terrible event that took place 33 years ago and marked a horrific escalation in tensions between Sikhs and the India government.

Apparently seeking to target militants, the Indian army launched Operation Blue Star in June of 1984, attacking the Harmandir Sahib complex or Golden Temple in Amritsar. This event precipitated the assassination of Indira Gandhi and subsequent coordinated massacres against the Sikh community.

The Golden Temple is the most sacred site to the Sikh faith. Innocent lives were lost, and the temple itself was damaged.

We cannot change the past, but it is important we learn its lessons and promote justice and reconciliation as we go forward.

Any attacks on holy sites obviously have a profound negative impact on community relations and have a searing effect on the psyche of the faithful. They of course leave thousands of innocents vulnerable. This particular attack clearly did all of those things.

People should be able to pray without fear of violence.

Throughout the world, Canada must make human rights, religious freedom, justice, and reconciliation central foreign policy priorities.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, one of my constituents, Ms. Houle, wrote to the local newspaper to say how deplorable she found the behaviour of parliamentarians during a recent oral question period she attended. She is not alone. Each one of us sitting in the House is extremely fortunate to be here representing our constituents. There is no greater privilege I can have than to serve the residents of Hull—Aylmer as their member of Parliament. I love my work.

[English]

I would not be truthful if I said that I entirely enjoy question period, especially of late. The catcalling, heckling, yelling, and mindless applauding leaves me cold. In private conversations with members on all sides of the House, I know my feelings are shared by many.

[Translation]

I am therefore issuing a challenge to my colleagues. During oral question period from now until the summer recess, let us stop applauding our immediate colleagues and heckling those sitting across the aisle.

[English]

Let us show Madam Houle and all Canadians that we can do better.

* * *

PORTUGAL DAY

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in honour of June 10, Portugal Day, I would like to pay tribute to nine Portuguese leaders who have been recognized in the community over the last couple of months.

They are not only Portuguese leaders but they are Canadian leaders. They have made their community proud as they have made significant contributions that have made Canada a better country.

They are Jack Oliveira of LiUNA Local 183, business manager and community leader; Frank Alvarez, award winning broadcaster of Portuguese news and culture; FPCBP Gala winners, Nellie Pedro for business excellence, José Maria Eustáquio for community leadership, Dr. Carlos Teixeira for academic work, and Constable Peter de Quintal, as next generation leader.

Finally, the 2017 Portuguese Walk of Fame recipients are Charles Sousa, Ontario minister of finance; Pedro Gil Vieira, award winning physicist; and popular Portuguese musician Antonio Amaro.

It is said, “True leaders do not create followers they create more leaders.” All these leaders have achieved this through their respective work.

*[Member spoke in Portuguese as follows:]**Parabens a todos. E obrigada pela vossa liderança e inspiração.***BAPS SHRI SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR**

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 10th anniversary of the magnificent BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Toronto. It is Canada's first traditional hand-carved Hindu place of worship.

On the 22nd of July, 2007, the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir was inaugurated and dedicated to the people of Canada by His Holiness the late Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the creator and inspirational force behind the temple.

This summer, the 10th anniversary will be celebrated in the presence of His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current spiritual leader of the BAPS Swaminarayan organization. On the behalf of the members, I welcome His Holiness to Canada.

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan organization is a worldwide organization dedicated to promoting spiritual, social and cultural needs of millions of Hindus around the world.

I invite all members of Parliament to join me on July 22nd in Toronto to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Mandir.

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● (1415)

BAY OF QUINTE EDUCATORS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I offer sincere congratulations to two Bay of Quinte teachers, Sheryl Parker and Susan Sewell-Charles, who are two of the 37 recipients of the 2016-2017 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

The Bay of Quinte has tremendously engaged educators operating from public and private institutions at all grade levels. Our educators consistently point their students ahead by creating dynamic climates of learning that allow them to test their own ideas, understand the world around them, and determine the best course of action for their own future.

Sheryl and Susan as a team work very hard to encourage the talent, ideas, and engagement of our local students at Queen Victoria Public School in Belleville. Together they have provided a dynamic and inclusive environment for students to acquire the innovative knowledge and skills required for their long-term success in life. These two remarkable teachers, like so many others, are helping us all to take another step toward a brighter future by investing so much into our children.

* * *

BUSINESS IN MARKHAM—THORNHILL

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently I participated in round tables with the Markham Board of Trade and industry leaders from high tech, digital, automotive, clean tech, and higher education.

[Translation]

We discussed how to ensure that Markham continues to be a leader in our national economy.

Statements by Members

[English]

I learned about GM's new autonomous and connected cars centre, about IBM's innovation space and Markham convergence centre that are helping businesses take their technology to global markets, Icon Digital's state-of-the-art production facility, and Pond Technologies' commercialization of its research to fight climate change. These multinational Canadian headquarters and SMEs located right in Markham are proud employers to tens of thousands of jobs and are leading the way in innovation.

I am proud budget 2017 is investing in an innovative future economy that will create middle-class jobs for today and tomorrow. I look forward to continuing the work with all businesses in Markham—Thornhill.

* * *

73RD ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 73 years ago this week, an Allied force of over 150,000 soldiers, 4,000 ships, and 11,000 airplanes began the D-Day attack to defeat Nazism and liberate the people of western Europe. The Canadians went north to the Netherlands, a distance of some 300 miles. It took them four months to get there, advancing only three miles a day. Every mile of ground was soaked in Canadian blood.

[Translation]

Eleven months after D-Day, in May 1945, Canadian soldiers finally liberated the Netherlands, including my mother's family in Friesland.

[English]

More than 7,600 Canadians died in the canals, fields, and villages of the Netherlands so that my mother and her family could live, and the Dutch have never forgotten. I am here today because of the sacrifices of those Canadian so long ago.

We will never forget. *Je me souviens.*

* * *

HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA, PUNJABI EDITION

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no matter where we are from or what we believe in, Canadians are all united by our love for the sport of hockey. We have all enjoyed the sport, whether it is street hockey, ball hockey, ice hockey, field hockey, or table hockey.

That is why *Hockey Night in Canada, Punjabi Edition* has been a great success. Punjabi is Canada's third most spoken language after English and French, and the show has garnered thousands of fans. Perhaps the most memorable moment was when host Harnarayan Singh had the call of the year—"Bonino, Bonino, Bonino"—which went viral.

However, it is unfortunate that during this year's Stanley Cup playoffs, the show has been the target of racism and insensitive comments online. This is not who we are as Canadians.

I am proud to proclaim that we stand in solidarity with the show, for it is the epitome of our diversity and an example of what makes our country so great. I ask my hon. colleagues to help by watching

and spreading the word of *Hockey Night in Canada, Punjabi Edition*.

* * *

• (1420)

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because almost half of Canadian companies have no women on their boards, zero, Canadian women expected our self-proclaimed feminist Prime Minister to turn words into action. However, Liberals are using the failed, discredited comply and explain model of the Conservative Party in Bill C-25. The government should adopt my legislation, Bill C-220, to get gender balance.

Quebec legislated quotas, and in five years reached parity on crown boards. The same success came with legislation in France, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden.

Without quotas, Canadian women will wait 72 years for equity. As Caroline Codsí from La Gouvernance au Féminin said, "When we legislate, we find women. When we do not legislate, we find excuses."

Let us no more excuses. It is time for the government to act on women's equality.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, two little girls started up a lemonade stand to raise money for summer camp, but they were shut down by the government because they did not have a permit. This year, the current government has produced a permit application form for these young entrepreneurs, with 10 conditions and eight additional conditions. It requires they also report all of their revenue to the federal government, supposedly so that Revenue Canada can keep a careful eye on whether they are paying their taxes.

Of course, the government needed to prevent chaos from breaking out. We do not need kids on the street playing road hockey or roasting marshmallows over an open flame with all those greenhouse gases being emitted. Finally some order is being restored, but along with it is a \$37 billion problem, which is red tape. It prevents immigrants from working in their professions, prevents builders from constructing affordable housing, and prevents businesses from working for their customers instead of the bureaucrats.

Will the government finally stand out of the way of these young entrepreneurs?

* * *

TERRORIST ATTACK IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Afghanistan another craven act of cowardice struck.

Walking to prayers during the holy month of Ramadan, peaceful worshippers were targeted in Herat. As they went in to pray, they were assaulted. Seven lives were stolen and many people were left injured. They came to reflect on the core message of Ramadan—peace, compassion, and empathy—but were assailed by its opposite.

The smoke and destruction that desecrated the great Jama Masjid is a testament to the depravity of this action. It is evidence of a spineless evil that targets the innocent and most vulnerable with heartless indifference.

The victims and their families, the people of Afghanistan, and Afghans across Canada should know that this House and all of Canada stand with them. Know that we will not rest until such cowards are brought to justice and until such evil is extinguished.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by trying to appoint a Liberal donor and activist, Madeleine Meilleur, the Prime Minister made a mockery of a process he claimed would be open and transparent, but luckily Madame Meilleur has better judgment than he does and has withdrawn herself from a process that has become tainted.

As a provincial minister, Madame Meilleur introduced a law that required multi-party support for positions like this. Will the Prime Minister learn a lesson here and ensure that the next officer of Parliament, the Ethics Commissioner, will not be another partisan Liberal and will enjoy all-party support in the House?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians need a strong, independent appointment process, and that is why we reformed to an open way the appointments process in this country. After 10 years of excessive partisanship by the former Conservative government, we know that picking the best people for the jobs regardless of their backgrounds, people who reflect the full diversity of this country, is what Canadians expect. That is exactly what we are delivering.

* * *

• (1425)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after misleading Canadians for weeks, the Liberals finally admitted yesterday that their infrastructure bank will put taxpayers on the hook for failed projects, while the investors get all the profits. The finance minister claimed that there will be minimal risk to taxpayers. How reassuring. The Prime Minister also claimed that his deficits would be minimal too, but we all know how that turned out.

Just how much taxpayer money is the Prime Minister willing to put on the line so that his billionaire friends get to keep all the profits?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were very clear over the past years. They need investments in their communities, in public transit, in green

infrastructure, in better housing, in the kinds of things that make our communities stronger and give growth and opportunities to people both right now and into the future. That is why we put together \$180 billion of investments in infrastructure, including a brand new world-class infrastructure bank that will leverage private capital to deliver even more of the infrastructure that our communities and Canadians need.

We have an ambitious plan to build this country and we know Canadians are with us.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leverage comes from using taxpayers' money to guarantee profits for investors, and that is not right.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister needs to stop evading the issue. Everyone knows that his infrastructure bank is only going to make his rich Liberal friends richer without having to worry about taking any losses.

Will he tell Canadians once and for all how much taxpayer money he is willing to waste to line the pockets of his millionaire friends?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years now, Canadians across the country have been telling us that their communities have desperate infrastructure needs that must be met.

That is why we created an investment plan worth \$180 billion that will be rolled out over the next few years. It will create opportunities for Canadians and good jobs now, as well as economic growth for the middle class for the next few years.

The infrastructure bank is just one of our innovative ways to generate even more capital and build the infrastructure, such as bridges and public transit, that Canadians need.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian parents have every right to know if a convicted sex offender is living in their neighbourhood.

Our previous Conservative government had a plan in place to help make that information available, but it seems that the Liberals might not let parents have access to it. That would be a bad idea.

Will the Prime Minister assure Canadian parents that they will have access to the data base?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's priority is always to ensure the safety of families, communities, and individuals across Canada. We are going to do everything we can and need to do to protect our communities.

Oral Questions

When a high-risk offender is about to be released, the local police is notified and in turn can notify the local community. We have faith in our system and we will ensure that Canadians are safe in their homes and in their communities.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, government officials have advised the Prime Minister to cancel the creation of a publicly available high-risk child sex offender database. If the Liberals have a problem with the public being informed about dangerous criminals living in their neighbourhood, then Canadian parents have a right to know.

If the Prime Minister is as outraged as he claims to be, he has an opportunity right here and now to reject the advice he has received from these officials. Will he do it, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, public safety and the safety of our children is always a priority for this government, and will continue to be because it is a priority for any government in this country. When a potential dangerous offender is about to be liberated, the local police are alerted and they can then alert the public.

Canada already has a national sex offender registry, which helps ensure that offenders are properly registered and that high-risk offenders are identified.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Setsuko Thurlow is in Parliament today. She has been a Canadian citizen for 60 years, but when she was a 13-year-old girl, on August 6, 1945, in Hiroshima, an atomic bomb wiped most of her city and most of her family. She has made it her life's work to fight against nuclear arms.

Canada is a signatory to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, article VI of which mandates that we must fight to avoid nuclear proliferation in the world. Last August, to our great shame, the Liberals voted against nuclear disarmament, and last March we were absent from these talks in New York.

It is not too late. The talks are starting again. Will we be there?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians strongly support concrete efforts towards nuclear disarmament.

We are taking meaningful steps to achieve nuclear disarmament. That means doing the hard work of actually achieving results. In 2016, for the first time ever, Canada rallied 159 different states to support and pass a resolution calling for the fissile material cut-off treaty. With the support of nuclear and non-nuclear countries, Canada is chairing this high-level group to help phase out nuclear weapons. Canada continues to lead in the fight for nuclear disarmament.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is so Orwellian.

Canada voted last August against nuclear disarmament. We refused to take part in March. Those talks are starting again at the United Nations in a couple of weeks. Will we be there or are we going to get talking points that contradict the bare reality that the Liberal government is doing nothing on nuclear disarmament?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, as of last year we are chairing a high-level group that is actually moving forward with the fissile material cut-off treaty.

What the member opposite is talking about is an initiative that actually does not include the nuclear states. There can be all sorts of people talking about nuclear disarmament, but if they do not actually have nuclear arms, it is sort of useless to have them around, talking. It is well-meaning, as the NDP often are, but we are actually taking real, tangible, concrete steps that are going to make a difference in moving towards a nuclear-free world.

* * *

[Translation]

MARIJUANA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the subject of all talk no action, the Prime Minister promised to immediately legalize marijuana, but at the same time, he is blocking our attempts to ensure that people no longer get criminal records for simple possession. That just seems like common sense to us, but the Liberals are celebrating the recreational use of marijuana on one hand and handing out criminal records on the other. Some 15,000 people have already been arrested, since the Prime Minister took office. How many other criminal records is he going to hand out before marijuana is finally legalized?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been against decriminalizing marijuana because decriminalization does nothing to protect our young people from the effects of the drug and it does nothing to take the profits out of the hands of criminals. That is why we are going to put a system in place that controls and regulates the sale and production of marijuana so that we can protect our young people and keep the profits out of the hands of criminals. I understand that some people are impatient for this to happen, but until the law is changed, the law remains the law.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the law is the law, unless someone is the son of a prime minister, of course. The Prime Minister admitted to smoking marijuana after he became a member of Parliament, and now he is telling all other Canadians that they have put their pot down.

Fifteen thousand Canadians have been arrested for possession under the Prime Minister. Will he at least grant pardons for those criminal records, or is there one rule for him and his family and another rule for everybody else in Canada?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, until the law is changed, the law remains the law. We are controlling and legislating around marijuana to make it more difficult for young people to access marijuana and to keep the profits out of the hands of criminals. This is an approach we are taking because the current approach is failing Canadians. It is creating an unfair approach for Canadians and is not protecting our young people.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just heard the good news. Ms. Meilleur is withdrawing her candidacy. She finally saw the light. Now it is up to the government to restart the process and make it truly transparent, open, and non-partisan.

Can the Prime Minister promise the House that he will consult the opposition parties so that we can have a non-partisan official languages commissioner that we can all agree on?

• (1435)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our appointments are based on merit. Many people have diverse backgrounds and have been active at the municipal, provincial, or federal levels. They have also defended both official languages. Every member of the House knows that Madeleine Meilleur has always stood up for minority language groups.

We will continue to look for a highly qualified candidate. We will keep consulting the opposition parties, as we did in this case.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, none of that is true. The Liberals never consulted the opposition parties. Our party leaders received letters two days in advance.

I want to ask the Prime Minister a simple question. Will the next process be non-partisan? Will the candidate be someone who does not donate to the Liberal Party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we came to power, it was clear to us that the previous government's appointment process was completely irresponsible and partisan.

We therefore set up a merit-based appointment process that reflects Canada's diversity. We are proud that 60% of the 130 appointees are women, 13% to 15% are visible minorities, and 10% are indigenous people.

We know that we still have a lot of work to do before making appointments that fully represent Canada, but we will stay the course.

[English]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did the Prime Minister really just imply that the appointment of Graham Fraser was a partisan appointment as official languages commissioner?

Now that we have seen the withdrawal of the partisan and botched appointment of Madeleine Meilleur, we are left with an interim language commissioner and an Ethics Commissioner whose term is close to an end. Of course, we have not forgotten that the Ethics Commissioner is currently investigating the Prime Minister. Given the Liberal Party track record on appointments, which McGuinty-Wynne Liberal can we expect Gerry Butts to appoint as Ethics Commissioner?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it humorous that the party opposite is criticizing us on appointments because the fact is that the Conservatives completely botched the Supreme Court appointment, which is so important. No prime minister had ever botched it as much as the previous prime minister did. We were pleased that we were able to do something that a lot of people said was not possible, which was to find an extraordinary Supreme Court justice from Newfoundland who was bilingual. These are the kinds of things that we look for, and we take seriously the responsibility of nominating the best-possible people for the posts right across this country.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thought my question was on the Ethics Commissioner, not the Supreme Court, but with this Prime Minister it is all socks, no action.

What we are left with is an Ethics Commissioner whose term is close to an end. She is currently investigating the Prime Minister himself. We have no faith the current government will nominate someone who is truly impartial and non-partisan, who is supposed to be an officer of this Parliament. Will the Prime Minister take the advice of his own botched official languages commissioner and ensure that any appointment has the support and the consent of all recognized parties in the House?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of the independent nominations process that we have put in place. It is open and available for all Canadians to apply. Whether it is through the extraordinary appointments we have made to the Senate or the outstanding appointment we made to the Supreme Court, we are going to continue to live up to the high expectations that Canadians have. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the members opposite like to play partisan games but we will stay focused on merit-based appointments that look like Canada. That is what Canadians expect.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is painful to watch. Madam Meilleur just withdrew her name, confirming exactly what we have been saying all along, that she is too partisan for this appointment. The Prime Minister has a choice. He can learn, he can show a bit of humility, he can say that maybe he made a mistake and apologize, and he can confirm that the next appointment of the Ethics Commissioner, for example, will not be a partisan appointment.

Could he do that, and just once show a moment of humility?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has been pleased to reach across the aisle to appoint special advisers and special counsellors to counsel on various things. We are pleased that we have been able to highlight the breadth of merit that is available for nominations to great positions across this government. We have refused to politicize the appointments the way the previous government used to do, and quite frankly, where the partisan yelling of the members opposite has taken us today.

We recognize the extraordinary service that Madeleine Meilleur has always offered minority language communities, and we look to find someone just as qualified as she was.

• (1440)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in one of those appointments, namely, Kim Campbell, he forget she was the prime minister. That was a big mistake.

On this appointment, the Prime Minister has embarrassed the heritage minister, he has embarrassed himself, and Madam Meilleur has had to withdraw her name from this process. We are asking the Prime Minister for a very simple commitment because, frankly, he cannot be trusted on this.

Will he commit to Canadians that appointments for officers of Parliament will not be political, especially the Ethics Commissioner, who is investigating him at this moment?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of Stephen Harper's government, Canadians

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. It must be Wednesday.

The hon. Prime Minister has some more time.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that they deserve an open nominations process based on merit that is willing to recognize the full diversity of our country. That is exactly what we are focused on. That is exactly what we are delivering for Canadians.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister for immigration said the government was providing funding for groups like the Inland Refugee Society of B.C. That is simply not true. NGOs like the Inland Refugee Society do not get a penny from the federal government. With a 300% increase in its caseload, it is running out of basic resources. Without urgent intervention, it will have to close its doors.

Will the Prime Minister support the Inland Refugee Society of B.C., yes or no? We need to do more than just tweet about it.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize, with tremendous pride, how open and generous Canadians have been over the past year. Our commitment to bringing in over 40,000 Syrian refugees would not have been able to be done without family groups, church groups, community

groups, and different organizations coming together and creating opportunities to welcome new Canadians into their homes.

We salute the hard work that all community groups do. We look forward to working with them as we continue to demonstrate to the world that immigration is a source of strength, not a source of weakness or fear.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because of a labour dispute, shrimp workers in the Gaspé have been deprived of at least six weeks of work.

They could find themselves without any income for several weeks next spring if the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development keeps talking about consultation rather than taking action. He has been consulting for 18 months. Urgent action is needed to resolve the problem of the spring gap, the black hole.

When will the Liberals keep their promise and restore the extra five weeks pilot project for seasonal workers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has shown that it is open to working with the communities affected that are struggling with difficult situations, in order to ensure that the employment insurance program provides workers, families, and the regions with the security they need.

As we demonstrated last year with the assistance we granted to Alberta and the provinces affected by the drop in oil prices, we will always be there to help struggling communities make it through those difficult times. That is who we are as Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Prime Minister before about the appointments of the next Ethics Commissioner and Commissioner of Lobbying. The Prime Minister is running out of time to consult with the opposition parties. He is legally required to consult with the opposition, but we all know what he thinks about following the law.

Since the Prime Minister will not recuse himself from selecting the next lobbying and ethics commissioners, will he tell the House when he will consult with the opposition parties on these appointments?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, I have recused myself from the appointment of the next Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Oral Questions

●(1445)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he has recused himself by appointing his House leader, who reports to him, on who should be appointed as the Ethics Commissioner. It sounds a little mischievous to me.

We know the Prime Minister is currently being investigated by the Ethics Commissioner for breaking the law. He is failing to uphold any level of ethical standards and refuses to even acknowledge if he has met with the Ethics Commissioner.

The commissioner's term is set to end this July, and the Prime Minister has not even consulted the opposition about a viable replacement. Is it the Prime Minister's plan to send the Ethics Commissioner packing without appointing a replacement so he can just walk off scot-free?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all members in this House understand how important it is to have a strong Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I myself have worked many times with and have answered many questions from, over the course of my career as an MP, the Ethics Commissioner. I know that all of us in this House will always work with her, because that is part of the trust Canadians need to have in their members of Parliament and in their government.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner position will soon be vacant, and we do not know if the Prime Minister really intends to launch a clear and transparent process to fill the position or if he is just going to pick a name from the list of Liberal donors. Transferring appointment responsibilities to the government House leader's office is anything but reassuring.

Do we need to bat our eyelashes at the Prime Minister for him to consider consulting the opposition parties, or will he have the decency to consult us in the interest of transparency, even at the risk of offending generous Liberal donors?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's appointments reflect the outstanding merit and diversity of candidates from across the country. Over 60% of our appointees are women, 15% are visible minorities, and 10% are of indigenous descent.

We have proven that this is a merit-based appointment process. We will always comply with the rules of the process, including the rule about consulting opposition members. We believe that appointing the right people is crucial to maintaining Canadians' faith in our parliamentary institutions.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he forgot 100% Liberal.

We see an epidemic of partisan Liberal appointments happening. Jennifer Stebbing, a failed Liberal candidate, got a cushy Hamilton Port Authority job. Johnna Kubik was appointed as a judge after donating over 26 times to the Liberal Party. The new president of ACOA got his appointment for over \$30,000 in Liberal donations. Now, after a nice \$1,500 donation to the Liberal Party, the

infrastructure minister appointed Jeanhy Shim to the Waterfront Toronto board of directors.

When will the Prime Minister stop this blatant partisan patronage and start serving all Canadians rather than just the Liberal insiders?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we believe, on this side of the House, that previous partisan affiliation is not a barrier to being appointed to important posts. Whether they were former Liberals, or even the fact that the President of the Treasury Board was a former Progressive Conservative, we recognize that Canadians have dedication to their country and service that we thoroughly recognize and respect. We will continue to make nominations based on merit, based on reflecting the full diversity of our extraordinary country.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have also been promising a non-partisan appointment process for CBC's board of directors for a year and a half now.

A year ago, in May 2016, the Minister of Canadian Heritage said that she was going to announce her much-talked-about process in the coming weeks. That is what she said.

However, yesterday, we learned that half of the seats on CBC/Radio-Canada's board of directors could soon be vacant. When asked about that, the minister's office said that the process would be announced soon, but it did not give a specific date.

It has been a year. We are starting to believe that this will never happen. CBC needs a competent board of directors that is not made up of Stephen Harper's friends, or the Liberals' either, for that matter.

When will the CBC's board of directors be depoliticized? Will it be in a few weeks, a few months, or never?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is very proud of keeping its promise and of making major investments in the CBC for now and the future.

We know that Conservative supporters have been politicizing the CBC for a very long time and that we need to make the right choices to ensure the public broadcaster is managed independently. It is essential for our democracy to have free and independent media. We are going to ensure that the right people are in the right places.

* * *

●(1450)

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of keeping promises, last week I questioned the Minister of Environment on the stern warnings issued by UNESCO that Canada could lose world heritage site designation for Wood Buffalo unless all the directives are met, including engaging indigenous peoples. She responded that she had initiated those consultations. How then does the government explain that the Mikisew Cree First Nation, which initiated the review, is still waiting? Whatever happened to the Prime Minister's commitment to a nation-to-nation relationship?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no relationship is more important to this government than the one with indigenous peoples across this country. That is why we take so seriously the responsibility of consulting and working hand in hand on a broad range of issues. On the issue of UNESCO and Wood Buffalo National Park, we take that very seriously. We look forward to working with local communities, with stakeholders, and with partners to ensure that we continue to preserve this extraordinary place for decades and generations to come.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was proud to vote with my colleagues from all parties to reaffirm our support for the Paris agreement. I particularly wish to thank the vast majority of the Conservative opposition, who agreed that climate change is a global problem that requires a global solution.

Despite the withdrawal of the United States, Canada must continue to work on implementing the Paris agreement, since it is in the best interest of Canadians.

Can the Prime Minister update the House on Canada's commitment to the Paris agreement?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Pontiac for his question and his involvement in the environment.

I was very pleased, last night, to see most of the Conservative Party members accept the reality of climate change. I look forward to seeing whether they have a concrete plan to meet the targets. Since they do not want carbon pricing, I look forward to seeing their plan for meeting the Paris targets, since they do not like ours.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing reports that the government is considering stopping public access to the national sex offender registry. We are all familiar with the Liberal record with regard to vulnerable Canadians. They voted against the recent motion to support people living with autism, and they voted against Wynn's law, whose only purpose was to protect innocent Canadians. That is why we want to know if the government is now prepared to keep secret from the public that dangerous and high-risk sex offenders are living in their neighbourhoods.

My question for the Prime Minister is straightforward. Does he believe Canadians have the right to know, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the security and safety of Canadians in their communities, in their families, and in their homes is a priority for this government as it is a priority for every single person who serves in the House. We recognize that it is important that we keep people informed. That is why local police are always informed when people are released, and they can then alert the local population. We recognize how important

this is as an issue, and we will always do everything we can to keep our communities safe.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why this concept is so difficult. The registry was created by the Conservative government, and it was there to give the public information they need to remain safe. I can appreciate that the subject of victims, innocent Canadians, is not a priority for the government, but nonetheless, I am hoping that the Prime Minister will look at this and say, regardless of the Liberal record in this area, that we must and should protect our children. Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, yes or no? Canadians deserve to know.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know Canadians are always disappointed to see political parties play the worst kinds of crass political games with an issue that is so serious for Canadians. The Conservatives tabled legislation but did not put any money toward it. They did not bother actually delivering on it, as with so much with the previous government. It was all smoke and mirrors. It was all talking a big game, not actually delivering. We are focused on concretely keeping our communities safe and giving police the tools necessary to keep our communities safe. That is what we are going to do, and we are not playing crass political games with that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am having trouble hearing the answers to the questions. We could have a shorter question period, if that is what members want.

The member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

• (1455)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past few days, the Liberals have refused to clear the air about whether they plan to cancel a publicly accessible registry for high-risk sex offenders, cancelling a tool for parents to keep their kids safe.

Let me provided the Prime Minister with another opportunity to clear the air. Are the Liberals planning to cancel this registry for high-risk sex offenders, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives tabled legislation for this initiative but did not actually put any money forward on this.

Canada already has a national sex offender registry, which helps ensure that offenders are properly registered and high-risk offenders are identified. No one in this House believes that we should do anything but keep our communities and our children totally safe.

This Conservative Party continues to play the worst kind of political games with it, which is part of why people are so cynical about their approach to politics.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was the Conservative public safety minister, I stood my ground when there was pushback from officials on implementing a public registry of high-risk sex offenders.

Oral Questions

Today, that registry is law. Today, those same officials want to gut it. Our Conservative government was able to stand up to them for the good of all Canadians.

My question is quite simple. Will the Prime Minister and his minister get serious and stand up for the victims, the families, and their children instead of kowtowing to officials?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government will always be there to defend the interests and safety of Canadians. We will do everything we can to keep Canadians safe. We will do everything we can to give our police forces the tools they need.

Suggesting that a party of the House is not concerned about the safety of our children is simply irresponsible and crass politicking.

* * *

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first the Liberals took aim at the parliamentary budget officer, and now they have the Commissioner of Competition's powers in their sights. In 2011, the commissioner blocked a deal between Air Canada and United Airlines because it would have eliminated competition and raised the cost of flying. Under Bill C-49, the minister will have sole authority to approve such deals, and it just so happens that Air Canada and United Airlines are planning to resubmit the exact same proposal.

If the commissioner rejects the deal again, will the Prime Minister tell his minister to listen to the commissioner, or will he once again bend to Air Canada's will?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were elected because we pledged to protect Canadians' interests and generate growth for the middle class and all those working hard to join it. We will always do what is in Canadians' interests and protect consumers' interests. That is what people expect, and that is what we will always do.

* * *

[English]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of Canadians have been receiving shakedown demands from Internet trolling companies using the notice and notice regime to make unsubstantiated allegations of Internet piracy. Canadians scared by the notice pay the demands without ever being found guilty.

The minister has already acknowledged that these scare tactics have no force of law, but he needs to take real action. When will the government fix this by changing the regulations and stopping the shakedowns? If the Prime Minister does not know the answer or does not understand it, will he please defer to someone who does, because I want action for Canadians. They need it now.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, keeping Canadians safe, both in reality and online, is something that is a priority for this government. We look forward to working with partners to ensure that we are defending the rights and the financial security of vulnerable Canadians.

We will continue to work hard on this file to make sure that Canadians are safe, both online and in their communities.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liberal action, or I really should say Liberal inaction, speaks louder than Liberal words. The Prime Minister has yet again punted key spending for our brave men and women in uniform down the road until after the next election. Essentially, the Liberals are giving the Canadian Armed Forces an IOU, and of course, nobody trusts these Liberals.

When will the Prime Minister take real action on national defence and not punt spending down the road until after the next election, when the leader of the official opposition becomes our Prime Minister?

● (1500)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are incredibly proud of the extraordinary work that our Minister of National Defence did on the defence policy review, recognizing, first of all, that for 10 years, under the previous government the men and women of the Canadian Forces were used as political props but under-invested in. The previous government announced a lot of things but did not put the kind of money forward in stable, long-term, predictable ways, and that is exactly what we have done.

We have recognized that the men and women of the Canadian Forces deserve a government that truly supports them, in deeds as well as in words, and that is what today's historic announcement was all about.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, the Minister of National Defence claimed to have the best interest of our military members at heart, but this is simply smoke and mirrors.

Most of the funding is promised for the coming decade. The crumbs promised by the Liberals for the next few years are smaller than the brutal cuts in the last two budgets. The Liberals are using creative accounting to make it look as though spending based on GDP is increasing.

Our men and women in uniform need more resources now.

Why is this Prime Minister unable to understand that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years our men and women in uniform have needed investment instead of the empty rhetoric of the previous government.

That is why we are now looking at exactly what the men and women in the armed forces need so that we can then provide for them, whether it is money for ships or for the fleet of 88 aircraft. We are now making the necessary investments that the previous government simply did not want to make.

Oral Questions

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Division 18 of the government's budget bill empowers the Minister of Finance to approve loan guarantees to infrastructure megaprojects through the new \$35 billion infrastructure bank. I asked him eight times at committee who would pay for the losses in the event that such a project or its builder went under. He could not answer and did not know.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House who will pay for the losses in the event that a loan guarantee-backed project goes under?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can understand the difficulty that the members opposite have with the concept of an infrastructure bank. For 10 years, the Conservatives did not look at investments in infrastructure. They did not look at innovative ways to actually deliver for Canadians the public transit, the social infrastructure, the green infrastructure that Canadians needed. Our historic investments are going to be—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

[Translation]

I know that the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean wants to hear the answers and that everyone in the House of Commons wants to hear the questions and answers.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, our historic infrastructure investments will create good jobs now for the middle class and long-term growth.

We know that we need to invest in our communities and in our future. This is exactly what Canadians asked us to do and this is what we are doing.

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her speech yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs outlined Canada's recommitment to the international forums that had provided peace and stability for the past 70 years. Canada is a proud member of many international institutions, and next year we will have the G7 presidency.

Could the Prime Minister please tell the House how the objectives outlined yesterday, including Canada's commitment to multilateral forums, will strengthen our position in the world and provide an opportunity to promote the Canadian values of diversity, inclusion, and openness?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians, we believe in diversity, openness, and inclusion. We will work toward a better world, because that is what Canadians do.

Multilateralism and collaboration are key to the challenges we face. With our allies, we will seek to bring peace, stability, and prosperity to all corners of the globe.

We believe in a progressive trade agenda. We believe in fighting climate change. We believe in putting gender equality at the forefront of all our efforts, particularly in development. We will always promote and defend Canadian values on the world stage.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his rambling justification of his vote against the Canadian autism partnership, the Liberal House leader's parliamentary secretary said:

I disagree with members who say that it is 10¢ a day for this, or it is only \$19 million. I can assure you that every one of the constituents I represent would argue that a million dollars is a lot of money.

He will get no argument from this side on that last point. However, as the Liberal Prime Minister racks up a deficit over 25,000 times that \$1 million, how is it possible that Canadians living with autism were left behind?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize the member's strength and passion on this issue. I recognize that autism spectrum disorder has a significant and lifelong impact on individuals and their families.

Federal investments in research, data improvements, surveillance, and training skills are supporting those with autism and their families. There is an extraordinary network of stakeholders across the country raising awareness and providing services to families. Our government will continue to support those efforts through our programs.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, volunteers in my riding are in the middle of a massive community-led cleanup of Clayoquot Sound. Without any government support, Clayoquot CleanUp has raised \$75,000 to tackle 600 tonnes of marine debris along the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Yesterday, at the United Nations conference on oceans, we were warned that the amount of plastic in our oceans could soon outweigh fish.

On the eve of World Oceans Day, where is the government's plan to clean up marine debris along our coasts, and will the Prime Minister provide immediate support for the cleanup on Vancouver Island?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year we put forward historic investments in our oceans with our oceans protection plan. It is recognition that Canada must have world-leading response and protection for our coasts.

We have the longest coastline in the world. It is high time a Canadian government took seriously the responsibility of protecting and supporting it. That is what this government is doing, after too many years of inaction, particularly by the previous government. We are moving forward to protect our coasts and the people who make a living along them.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today our government unveiled our new defence policy.

It is our duty to support the men and women at the heart of the Canadian Armed Forces so that, in return, they can continue to bravely serve Canada.

Can the Prime Minister tell the House about the details of this new defence policy, particularly measures to support families?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, military families are the backbone of the Canadian Armed Forces and are crucial to the success of our military.

That is why our government made a commitment to improving the support we provide to military families and ensuring that they have access to adequate resources.

We will allocate an additional \$6 million a year to modernize military family support programs, including military family resource centres, to offer better solutions to families when soldiers are away on missions or otherwise absent.

It is important to remember that behind every uniform, there is a family—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin.

* * *

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister even know that in addition to the vast majority of Canada's autism community, the Canadian autism partnership has received overwhelming support from every part of our country: the Canadian Association for Community Living, UNICEF Canada, Plan Canada, Save the Children Canada, World Vision Canada, Global Citizen, Hayley Wickenheiser, Elliotte Friedman, and many more.

Conservative, NDP, and Green members were unanimous in our support for Canadians living with autism, yet every single Liberal, but one, voted against the partnership. Could the Prime Minister please explain this decision?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Government of Canada has invested more than \$39 million in autism research over the past five years. This investment contributes to providing the research evidence needed for the development of new tools and treatments for those suffering from autism.

Oral Questions

We recognize the challenges families are going through and we stand ready to support them.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first off, I would like to point out that the Prime Minister has never risen in the House to answer a single question from the Bloc Québécois.

This shows the Prime Minister's blatant lack of respect for the one million Quebecers that we represent. That same attitude shows in his refusal to talk with Premier Couillard about Quebec's place in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister apologize for his government's ongoing contempt for Quebec's legitimate concerns?

• (1510)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have spent a great deal of time meeting with Quebecers and all Canadians and having conversations with them about their priorities.

They talk to me about growth for the middle class. They talk to me about their concerns for the future and jobs for their children. They talk to us about the environment and Canada's role in the world. They do not talk to me about constitutional issues.

This government was elected because of our clear commitment to act in accordance with Canadians' priorities, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the consent of the House to move a motion.

I will quickly give my colleagues and you, Mr. Speaker, a bit of context. As you know, you warmly welcomed the media and MPs at an event yesterday evening. The NDP was very disappointed that we could not attend because we were here in the House to vote.

[English]

That context is important for the motion. It is important particularly for some of the new Liberals to understand that. The government House leader can decide to schedule these time allocation votes whenever she wishes.

I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion: That, in the opinion of the House, as often as is reasonably possible, the government should arrange the House schedule to ensure that recorded divisions on time allocation and closure motions take place during the usual sitting hours of the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(On the Order: Committee Reports:)

June 1, 2017—That the Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (extension of time, pursuant to Standing Order 97.1, to consider Bill C-323, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (rehabilitation of historic property)), presented on Thursday, June 1, 2017, be concurred in.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you will find agreement for the following. I move:

That the order made Tuesday, May 30, 2017, respecting the deferral of the recorded division on the motion to concur in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, scheduled to take place later today, be discharged and the motion deemed adopted.

[Translation]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Order discharged and motion agreed to)

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, copies of Canada's new defence policy entitled "Strong, Secure, Engaged".

* * *

•(1515)

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, a report of the Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group respecting its participation at the 20th bilateral meeting in Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan, from January 23 to 29.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34 I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the spring session held in Tirana, Albania, from May 26 to 30, 2016.

I also have the honour, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the standing committee meeting in Berlin, Germany, March 31 to April 1.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on the consideration of Kathleen Roussel for appointment as director of public prosecutions. I am very pleased to say that the committee unanimously considered the question and we all agreed to approve the appointment of Ms. Roussel to this position.

* * *

[Translation]

PETITIONS

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the petition I am tabling today comes from one of my constituents. Mr. Franco lives in L'Assomption, and he stepped on Quebec soil 35 years ago when he was barely 15 years old.

As a result, he is familiar with the challenges of leaving his country, Uruguay, of leaving his roots, and of coming here with his parents and sister. He knows how difficult it is to adopt a new culture and a new language. That is why he started this petition for the Ishtais, a Syrian family currently living in Lebanon. He wants to help them integrate and he knows how to do it. He is a mathematics teacher, is sensitive to the immigrant experience, and is grateful to Quebec. Basically, Mr. Franco wants to give to someone else what he received himself.

He therefore has the support of his wife, his son, and his community. Today we are posting 519 signatures on the House site, as well as over 1,218 paper signatures, for a total of 1,737 signatures.

This shows that the community is behind Mr. Franco. He is willing to welcome this Syrian family, and \$30,000 has been raised in less than a year to do so.

This family, currently in Lebanon, is living in difficult conditions. The father, the mother, a boy and twins are crammed into a small room. They are so eager to come to Quebec that they have written some words in French on the walls of their room.

The petition calls for them to be helped by providing them with better living conditions and by expediting Mr. Franco's application to sponsor the Ishtai family.

[English]

The Speaker: Order. Before we go on with petitions, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader wishes to propose a motion.

Is it agreeable to the House to return to motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

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

Mr. Speaker, there has been discussion among the parties, and I believe you will find consent for the following motions.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, PIPEDA, seven members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

FINANCE

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

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2018 budget, seven members of the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to travel to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Montreal, Quebec; and Windsor and Toronto, Ontario in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of the pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2018 budget, seven members of the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia; Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; Calgary, Alberta; and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of the pre-budget consultations in advance of the 2018 budget, seven members of the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C. and New York, New York, United States of America, in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motions agreed to)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

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

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the Oceans Act's marine protected areas, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel

Routine Proceedings

to Sydney, Chéticamp, and Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; Gaspé, Quebec; and Bathurst and Shippagan, New Brunswick in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canada's engagement in Asia, seven members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Beijing, Jingzhuang, and Hong Kong, China; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Hanoi, Vietnam in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the United States and Canadian foreign policy, seven members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Mexico City, Mexico; Washington, D.C.; and New York, New York, United States of America in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

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

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of specific claims and comprehensive claims, seven members of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs be authorized to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia; Yellowknife, Northwest Territories; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Shannonville, Ontario; and Quebec, Quebec, in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

Routine Proceedings

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

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

That, in relation to its study of priorities of Canadian stakeholders having an interest in bilateral and trilateral trade in North America between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, seven members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Mexico City, Mexico; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Columbus, Ohio; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States of America, in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

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

That, in relation to its study of Canada's involvement in NATO, seven members of the Standing Committee on National Defence be authorized to travel to Kiev, Ukraine; Brussels, Belgium; and Riga, Latvia in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

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

That, in relation to its study of the review of the status of official languages in minority settings across Canada, seven members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages be authorized to travel to Brome-Missisquoi, Quebec, and Cape Breton and Grand Pré de la Vallée, Nova Scotia in the Summer or Fall of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

• (1520)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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

That, in relation to the annual conference of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committee, CCPAC, and the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors, CCOLA, annual conference, seven members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to travel to Fredericton, New Brunswick, in the Summer of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Speaker: Is the hon. parliamentary secretary sure that is all?

Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1525)

PETITIONS

PALLIATIVE CARE

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of the people in my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk that highlights the positive effects that hospice palliative care has on the quality of life for patients and for their families when they are facing problems associated with life-threatening illnesses.

Palliative care is not currently accessible and available to all Canadians. The petition calls on the Liberal government to specifically identify hospice palliative care as a defined medical service covered under the Canada Health Act so that funds will be given to the provinces and to the territories to administer this care.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand once again in the House to call for a legislated solution to the long-standing economic and environmental problem of abandoned vessels. I am urging the federal government, along with petitioners in my riding, to end the runaround and make the Coast Guard responsible for the first action on abandoned vessels, fixing vessel registration to get the costs off taxpayers, acting before vessels sink and spill oil by piloting an abandoned vessel turn-in program, and creating good green jobs by supporting local marine salvage and recycling.

I am grateful to local government leaders for supporting my legislation, Bill C-352, and I stand with them in recognizing that the \$1 million per year announced last week by the government is not enough to deal with the thousands of abandoned vessels that litter Canada's three coasts.

[Translation]

WATER QUALITY

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Lake Champlain and Missisquoi Bay are part of my riding, Brome—Missisquoi.

Missisquoi Bay is a Canadian body of water that is extremely polluted right now. As I told Senator Bernie Sanders' and Senator Patrick Leahy's teams during a recent visit to Burlington, Vermont, we need to join forces to make the waters of Lake Champlain as clear as they once were.

The petitioners are asking the Minister of Foreign Affairs to issue a mandate letter to the International Joint Commission, which was created under the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 to manage our boundary waters, calling on it to address the issue of the water quality of Lake Champlain.

[English]

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at the Sherwood Park Campground in Cloyne, Ontario, along pristine Story Lake in the riding of Hastings—Lennox and Addington. The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time, year-round employees are treated and taxed as small businesses.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present two petitions today. The first one is on genetically modified alfalfa. The biggest concern the petitioners have is that they recognize that unwanted contamination from genetically modified alfalfa is inevitable because it is a perennial, pollinated by bees, and that such contamination will threaten organic farming systems.

Organic farming prohibits the use of genetically modified organisms, so they call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow proper reviews on the impact on farmers in Canada.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition recognizes the inherent rights of farmers, derived from thousands of years of custom and tradition to save, reuse, select, exchange, and sell seeds. Petitioners call upon Parliament to enshrine in legislation the inalienable rights of farmers and other Canadians to do just that.

ALGOMA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again to table petitions for the attention of the Minister of Transport.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are from Sault Ste. Marie, Wawa, Goulais River, Blind River, Desbarats, and Hilton Beach. The petitioners are concerned because the Algoma passenger train has not been operating for more than a year, and this has resulted in substantial hardship to the residents, businesses, and other passengers. They are extremely concerned because of the economic impact this is having.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Transport to put the Algoma passenger train back on track in order to ensure the mission of Transport Canada, which is to serve the public interest through the promotion of a safe, secure, efficient and environmentally responsible transportation system in Canada.

It is extremely important to them. As members know, I have been tabling these petitions for a number of weeks now, almost a year.

● (1530)

POVERTY REDUCTION

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions on behalf of my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

The first petition, E-291, initiated by Randy Hatfield, calls upon the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to designate Saint John, New Brunswick, as a demonstration site for the Canadian poverty reduction strategy for testing and evaluating new, and promising poverty reduction initiatives, which would include investments in affordable housing, skills training, literacy, neighbourhood revitalization, early childhood education, and youth mental health.

The petition was signed by 1,562 people from my riding. Our objective and our goal, and we are determined to do this, is to not have Saint John, New Brunswick, known as the city that leads the country in child poverty, but as the city that has shown the way out of child poverty for the rest of the country.

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, E-590, initiated by local historian and legend Harold Wright from Saint John, calls upon the Minister of Canadian Heritage to support the designation of the port of Saint John as Canada's first national historic seaport, and also the designation of Partridge Island's navigational aids station and its military fortifications, the guardian at the entrance of the port of Saint John, as national historic sites. Such designations will recognize the significant roles the port of Saint John and Partridge Island have played in the historical development of Canada over the past four centuries. Such recognition will provide the residents of Saint John—Rothesay, citizens of New Brunswick, and visitors to our city and province, with an understanding of the pivotal role played by the port of Saint John and Partridge Island in our nation's history.

This petition was signed by 2,143 people.

Speaker's Ruling

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present three different petitions.

Two petitions are signed by more than 1,000 Canadians from across the country. The petitioners are calling on the federal government to include alcohol, beer, wine, and spirits as part of the Canada free trade agreement in time for Canada Day 2018.

These petitions are signed by craft brewers, distillers, winemakers, as well as Canadians across the country who are frustrated by the inability to have great Canadian products anywhere across the country, but also from the producers who are frustrated by their inability to grow their businesses because they are literally blockaded by provincial boundaries from being able to market and sell their products from one province to another.

The petitioners would like to see that change as part of the Canada free trade agreement.

POLIO

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the other petition is signed by more than 100 constituents from the High River area. Many of these constituents are members of local Rotary Clubs. They were very enthusiastic about the commitment that our previous Conservative government had with the Rotary Clubs across Canada, in terms of our work to eradicate polio.

The petitioners are calling on the new Liberal government to pledge an additional \$150 million toward the global polio eradication initiative in order for Canada to play a key role, in partnership with Rotary International, in the goal to eradicate polio around the world.

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONFEDERATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions from two Canadian historical societies, stating that they want to see history respected and celebrated during the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

Members of Société historique Nouvelle-Beauce have signed this petition. This historic society maintains a museum about Quebec's aviators from the early days of flight in Canada, up to modern times. This community is significant as it was once represented by Hector-Louis Langevin, a father of Confederation.

Members of the North Erie Shore Historical Society have also signed the petition. They are helping to organize the 150th celebrations in Haldimand County, and have identified Canadian history as a major element of their celebrations.

The petitioners are calling on the government to reverse the decision not to have Confederation included as a theme of the 150th anniversary of Confederation, but indeed, to celebrate Confederation this 150th, on July 1st.

● (1535)

FALUN GONG

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present two petitions to the House today, both dealing with the same issue. They are signed by hundreds of constituents from my

constituency as well as neighbouring constituencies, and a few from across Canada.

The petitioners request that Parliament pass a resolution to establish measures to stop the Chinese Communist regime crime of systematically murdering Falun Gong practitioners for their organs. They want to amend Canadian legislation to combat forced organ harvesting, and publicly call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

They urge Chinese authorities, on the other petition, to bring former leader Jiang Zemin and his cohorts to justice.

* * *

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 ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on May 19, 2017, by the hon. member for Carleton, related to the government response to written question No. 954, originally tabled in the House on May 18, 2017, and for which a revised response was tabled on May 29, 2017.

[English]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Carleton for having raised this matter as well as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader for his comments.

When raising this point of order, the hon. member for Carleton indicated that the response provided to written Question No. 954 contained inaccurate information falsely suggesting that the Hon. John Baird made a sponsored trip while he was minister of foreign affairs.

[Translation]

On May 29, 2017, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tabled a revised answer to question No. 954 and explained that the original response contained inaccurate information due to an administrative error in producing the response.

[English]

On September 27, 2016, I told members of the House, at page 5176 of *Debates*:

Access to information, accurate information, is one of the cornerstones of our parliamentary system. Members must be able to rely on it at all times. The integrity of many of our procedures, especially those relating to written questions, rests on the rightful expectation that ministers, and the public servants who support them understand the value and utility of providing, not simply technically accurate but also complete and transparent, answers in the written responses that they provide to members of the House.

[Translation]

Furthermore, I want also to reiterate, as successive Speakers have before me, that the Standing Orders do not empower the Speaker to rule on the quality of responses to written questions.

[English]

Given that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader has tabled a revised answer to Question No. 954, which addresses the error as raised by the member for Carleton, I am satisfied that the current case reaffirms that all members clearly understand the importance of an accurate exchange of information meant to enable members to properly fulfill their responsibilities as legislators and representatives.

I thank hon. members for their attention, and I consider this matter closed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANNABIS ACT

The House resumed from June 6, 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.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has seven and a half minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night, I noted the government had said its marijuana legislation was designed to keep marijuana out of the hands of children, and the profits out of the hands of organized crime. It is positively Orwellian. This legislation would very clearly do the exact opposite.

Last night, I spoke about the impact on children. To briefly review, the legislation would remove any criminal penalties for children aged 12 to 17 who possess up to five grams of marijuana. That is the equivalent of about 15 joints. It would also allow for people to grow

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marijuana in their own homes where, very likely, children would have access to it. Yes, we could put it in a locked room which has sunlight, but marijuana is a plant, so we cannot exactly store it in the same way we would store prescription drugs or alcohol.

Making marijuana legal would obviously make it easier for children to access it. In general, though, it would make it more prevalent, more readily available, and removing penalties for accessing it, naturally, would remove the risk associated with it. We have seen this across countries. In every case, where there is legalization, there is increase in use; most notably in the Netherlands. After marijuana use was legalized, consumption nearly tripled among 18 to 20-year-olds, and many municipalities in the Netherlands subsequently moved to ban so-called coffee houses completely.

This is clearly the result of legalization, and it is beyond fanciful that a government would claim that if we legalize something, if we make it easier to access and use something, if we make it legal for people to grow something in their own homes, we are to see less use. Yes, marijuana use is too high, and we can talk about the reasons for that right now, but it is fanciful to the extreme to suggest that making it easier to grow and get something will make people less likely to access it.

Let me speak, now, to this issue of organized crime. The government seems to believe that if we make something legal but still have rules around it, people will necessarily follow rules, and that it will necessarily starve out organized crime. The argument goes that if we eliminate a particular business in which organized crime is involved, organized crime will just close up shop. This is intuitively appealing, perhaps, but demonstrably false.

In addition to selling all kinds of drugs, organized crime is, or has been, actively involved in selling contraband versions of otherwise legalized substances, things like tobacco, and there is a major problem with contraband tobacco. Organized crime is associated with illegal practices in many perfectly legal industries. It has a history of being involved in areas like construction, garbage collection, gambling, and politics.

In fact, if we look at the history of organized crime, we see the roots of it are often cultural or sociological, as opposed to purely economic. The Mafia system, for example, originated in a Sicilian response to external occupation. Sicilians, over a long history, developed a system of self-government which, essentially, could exist in spite of, or in defiance of, occupying armies or ordinary rulers. It was a way for ordinary people to mediate their economic, social, and criminal justice relations in a way that did not involve going to occupying authorities. That, very clearly, was the history.

Organized crime will participate in illegal businesses where there is a profit to be made, that is certain. However, its existence does not depend on illegal business. It will apply its modes of collusion, corruption, and intimidation to legal, as well as illegal, businesses, and make a lot of money in the process.

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Developing that Mafia example a bit further, of course, we can look at the history of the Mafia in North America. The Mafia benefited from alcohol prohibition. However, its history stretched for hundreds of years before that. It was a response to emergent cultural phenomena that led to that. Its ultimate decline was not the result of legalization of anything; rather, it was a change in the criminal law, with the introduction of laws that allowed law enforcement to target organized crime directly.

It is very clear with the set-up of this law that it would be very easy for organized crime to continue to be actively involved in the marijuana business, selling it to minors, facilitating the kinds of transactions that are illegal, but it would be legal and, therefore, much easier for people to carry around large amounts of marijuana, up to 30 grams for adults, up to five grams for minors.

It just does not make any sense to say this is going to be the end of organized crime, or even this is going to be a hit for organized crime. We are going to see, very likely, the evidence suggests, increased use, and new opportunities for organized crime to get around many of the fairly anemic, though they be, rules the government has put in place.

• (1540)

The point here is that the government is trying to use justifications for the law that it knows do not accord with the reality. It talks about children. It talks about organized crime. In reality, we are going to see increased use of this by children. Also, this will create new opportunities for organized crime to circumvent the laws that involve selling to children because adults and children will have a much easier time carrying marijuana around without detection.

We have a clear alternative. We do not have to accept the status quo as an acceptable reality either. Our party supports a ticketing option that allows a reasonable and effective criminal justice response, not one that applies disproportionate penalties to this but one that I think can emphasize treatment and public health while also still allowing a legal intervention to address that risk. I think the approach we have emphasized is a sensible alternative. It allows that kind of necessary intervention. This is the position that was endorsed by the association of police chiefs, not decriminalization but a ticketing option.

There is a lot of development that could be done around that proposal. Perhaps we might require people who are facing the possibility of conviction to seek an alternative that would involve education and becoming aware of the impacts of marijuana use. We could use the criminal justice system as a way of directing people toward treatment without being overly punitive. Our friends in the NDP caucus have pointed out the possibility of lifelong criminal convictions. We can address those issues through reforms to the pardon system.

However, the real problem we have right now is that marijuana is in this grey zone. It is illegal but there is not a ticketing option, and it clearly is not an enforcement priority. That is why so many people use it. On the one hand, there is no ticketing option, there is no alternative outside the laying of a charge, and on the other hand, clearly people should not be going to jail for mere possession offences. I think we can all agree on that. I think we can propose

sensible reforms and alternatives that actually communicate the real dangers and risks.

We have a government that is trying to justify an election promise based on the fact that the Prime Minister has said that he has smoked marijuana while being a member of Parliament, and then talks about a public health approach. That clearly sets such a terrible example when parents, teachers, and others are trying to communicate with young people that there are real, dramatic, substantial dangers associated with marijuana.

A more sensible public health approach would be to calibrate our approach so that we can look at pardon reforms and things like emphasizing treatment and education, but we can also have the means of a ticketing option and a criminal charge so that the police can intervene. However, what the government's law says is that children between 12 and 17 years old can possess up to five grams of marijuana, and they can distribute it among themselves. They cannot sell it, but they can distribute it. It makes it a severe penalty for someone who is 18 to give marijuana to someone who is 17, yet someone who is 17 can give marijuana to someone who is 12 with absolutely no penalties. Therefore, there is a real demonstrable incoherence to the government's approach.

There is also not a coherent message among government members when it comes to the actual risks associated with marijuana use. We have multiple members who speak publicly and openly about the fact that they have used or use marijuana, and talk about it as if it is not a problem, when we know that marijuana use is associated with higher levels of mental health problems later in life, especially when it is used by young people, even at relatively moderate levels. Therefore, there is a problem here in terms of the government talking, on the one hand, about a public health approach, and on the other hand, not facing up, in a realistic way, to the public health problems that are associated with marijuana.

I have cited the studies. The information is clearly there. We are going to see an increase in use if marijuana is legalized. If the government proceeds with the legislation, I hope that, at the very least, it will be prepared to re-evaluate it, because it seems to not understand this point. Hopefully a year or so after the legislation is passed, it will be willing to re-evaluate the problems that it has put in place.

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•(1545)

To summarize, there is a dramatic dissidence between what the government is claiming about this and the realities that are in place. The Liberals talk about keeping it out of the hands of children, but they will make it easier for children to access it. They will remove criminal penalties for very young children who carry marijuana with them. There will be no means for that kind of legal intervention. They will allow adults to carry very large amounts and distribute it among themselves, and children to give it to each other. They will allow parents with children in the house to grow marijuana in a place and in a context where very likely that marijuana may be accessible to children. The government is prepared to allow all of these things, yet it makes the outlandish claim in that context that somehow this will reduce the access children have to marijuana. It just does not make any sense.

Then the Liberals talk about the issue of organized crime, but the reality is that organized crime is a system that exists regardless of what is and is not illegal. Organized crime capitalizes on opportunities to work outside of the law, but it is not required that a thing be illegal for organized crime to be involved in that business. That is just a reality the government needs to understand.

Frankly, members of the government who have dealt with organized crime in the context of police work should know this, and I am sure they do, contrary to whatever the talking points say. Organized crime often grows out of distrust of authority, out of issues of social exclusion, and out of long-standing systems of authority that exist in place. It is not the result of just something being illegal. We know this from history.

With regard to the public health issue, the evidence is very clear with respect to marijuana that it is a dangerous substance. Not everybody who smokes a joint will experience those negative effects, but it is clearly associated with higher levels of mental health challenges. Another member has spoken at length about the carcinogenic effects associated with smoking marijuana, and a lot of this is new and emerging research with respect to the risks of marijuana.

We need to send a clear message as a legislature. I would just say to members as well that we need to set a clear example when it comes to the risk, because the Liberals say on the one hand that they will take a public health approach, that they will try to educate about the risks of this, but on the other hand, they are saying that there is not even clarity or agreement in terms of what those risks actually are.

It is very confusing in terms of the messages the Liberals are sending, which do not seem to acknowledge those risks and with different members saying different kinds of things. I would hope that through this debate at the very least, members would be willing to clearly say from all parties, whatever their position on the ultimate criminal question, that marijuana is dangerous and that the best medical science indicates clearly that the risks are in place. I hope members will join me in opposing the bill.

•(1550)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has said quite clearly that he is concerned that if we

were to legalize marijuana, we would put young people at risk and it would lead to other health and social harms for our youth. Quite frankly, I am quite prepared to agree with him. I think legalization alone would do all of those things. Legalization alone would leave the production and distribution in the hands of criminals, and it would make it more accessible to our kids. I would just point out to the member that this is not at all what we are proposing to do.

What we are proposing to do is to lift the criminal sanction, which is the first step of legalization, and to replace the existing system of cannabis control, for which the evidence is overwhelming it is currently failing our kids, failing our communities, and failing the health of all Canadians, with a system of strict regulation for production, which leaves in place a strict criminal sentence for those who produce outside of the regulated regime. It would put strict regulation in place for its distribution and leave in place a strict criminal sentence for those who would distribute and traffic cannabis outside of the regulated regime. It would also put in place, and allow to be put in place, at the provincial, municipal, and the federal levels, regulations that will control its consumption so it can be done in a healthier, safer, and more socially responsible way.

Given that, I wonder if the member might consider that a strict regulatory framework of production, distribution, and consumption might lead to better health and social outcomes for our kids—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I need to give others time to ask questions.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, with the greatest of respect for the parliamentary secretary, he should read the legislation insofar as the sections, because the strict regulatory regime that the Liberals talk about is actually just for people to grow their own at home. People can grow up to four plants that can be a metre high, yes, but who is going to police that when there are no notification or registration requirements whatsoever for those who grow it? Municipalities are not going to be informed. The law says that people can grow their own marijuana at home. That is not a strict regulatory framework at all, and it is quite disingenuous to suggest that it is.

•(1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been listening to the relatively tense exchanges between the two members and I have a question for my hon. colleague.

Before getting into politics, he was a secondary school teacher for 25 years. When students are tempted to experiment with marijuana, it does not take a lot of resourcefulness to find a source. I do not quite understand how the new regulations are going to change things.

What worries me even more about this bill, and that is what I would like to hear about from my colleague, is that its chief obstacle is the normalization of the drug, as though it has absolutely no consequences. However, recently, health authorities—we are told that the health aspects are being considered—have told us that there should be a minimum age limit of at least 21 years.

Are we not normalizing the use of this substance in this debate?

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, in terms of its being easy to access, marijuana is a plant. It is, I have been told, not that difficult to grow. This is the challenge we have in limiting access to it, but if we now make it legal for people to grow it in their homes and distribute it to others, even for minors to possess and distribute it to other minors, of course it is going to be easier to access. There is more we can do in the context of continuing criminalization to address the ease of access. We do not have to accept the status quo as being sufficient, but that certainly does not mean that we should move in the wrong direction toward legalization.

The member is quite right to point out that the government is not at all sending consistent messages about the risks. Again, I would hope that, at very least, through this debate we could send a clear message about the genuine risks associated with marijuana use. Members of the government are supposed to be leading and setting a positive example, and in the case of the Prime Minister, he used marijuana while being a member of Parliament. That is a real problem in terms of the message it sends.

The reality of the political process by which this has come about is the government trying to appeal to people who think there is no problem with marijuana. All of the best and real science shows that there are significant risks associated with marijuana.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am speaking today in support of Bill C-45, not just as the member of Parliament for Scarborough Centre but as a mother who wants to keep her children and all children safe from drugs and alcohol and as a citizen who wants to reduce the power and influence of organized crime.

The fact is, if we want to keep cannabis away from our children, we need to support this bill. Those who oppose this common-sense, evidence-based legislation are supporting a so-called war on drugs that has been one of the most spectacular and expensive failures in the history of public policy and has done nothing but line the pockets of those in organized crime.

The fact is, today it is easier for under-age youth to get their hands on cannabis than it is to get their hands on alcohol or tobacco. If members doubt that, they should talk to our nation's youth and visit schools, as I have. I hear from my own children that cannabis is more accessible to children than beer or cigarettes. It is in our schools and is leading to conflict, illegal activity, and expulsions. Cannabis is negatively impacting the education and lives of our younger generation.

The numbers back this up. Canada has one of the highest rates of youth cannabis use in the world. In 2015, use among youth aged 15 to 19 was 21%, rising to 30% among youth aged 20 to 24. This is simply today's reality.

While the sale and distribution of alcohol and tobacco is regulated by federal and provincial governments, there are strict rules against selling to minors. Retailers face severe fines and penalties if they violate these rules, including losing their licence to sell tobacco, for example, so they have a business interest in ensuring that they follow the regulations against selling to minors.

Of course, there are ways around any system. Yes, an older friend could buy beer for a younger friend. It is illegal, but it does happen. They could steal alcohol from their parents' liquor cabinet. Youth, desperate enough, will find a way around any system. However, the fact is, the regulation of alcohol and tobacco has clearly been more effective in restricting use by minors than prohibition. We need to bring the same system of regulation to cannabis, because it has been proven to be more effective in restricting use by minors.

Besides being more effective, there is another very good reason to support this legislation and the strict regulation of cannabis. With a single stroke, we would be dealing a massive financial blow to organized crime in Canada. Cannabis is a cash crop for criminal gangs, bringing in revenue they use to purchase harder drugs for distribution as well as guns, which fuel violence and crime in our communities. Legalized and regulated cannabis would put criminal gangs out of the cannabis business.

As I have said, a store owner operates under strict rules on who he or she can sell to. Criminal gangs and drug dealers do not care about such rules. They do not care how old customers are, as long as they have the money. Criminal dealers also do not just sell cannabis. They can expose their young customers to other far more dangerous illegal substances.

For the first time, Bill C-45 would create a specific criminal offence for selling cannabis to minors and would create heavy penalties for anyone who engaged youth in cannabis-related activities. The bill would also prohibit products, promotions, packaging, and labelling designed to appeal to our youth. This is why, if we want to make it harder for young people to access cannabis and strike a blow at organized crime, we need to support Bill C-45. If people say that they are tough on crime but oppose this bill, they are fooling themselves.

The proposals in Bill C-45 are common-sense, evidence-based policy that is the result of more than a year of extensive consultation with law enforcement and health and safety experts, led by my colleague, the hon. member for Scarborough Southwest, and the Task Force on Cannabis Legalization and Regulation, led by the Hon. Anne McLellan. This is legislation whose time has come.

• (1600)

I must say that I am saddened to have read the misinformation that some opposed to this bill have sought to spread, particularly within different ethnic communities. Rather than arguing against the merits of strict regulations, they have sought to use fearmongering and misleading statements to deliberately inflame tensions. As a member of one of those ethnic communities, I am insulted that they think so little of us and believe we lack the intelligence to see through their alternate facts. Members of my community want to make it harder for their children to access cannabis, and that is exactly what would be accomplished with Bill C-45. This is help parents need.

Government Orders

Another misleading attack on this bill I have heard is that it would make it legal for minors to possess cannabis. That is an obtuse and deliberately misleading statement. It is true that under Bill C-45 the possession of a small amount of cannabis would not be a criminal offence. It is not for the possession of a small amount of alcohol or tobacco either. This does not mean it would be allowed, though. Our government would work with the provincial governments to ensure that strict fines were in place for those caught in possession of small amounts.

Why a fine and not a criminal charge? On this side of the House, we do not think it is right to ruin the lives of minors by saddling them with criminal records for the rest of their lives because they made a mistake. While strong criminal penalties would be in place for trafficking and distribution, fines are the right approach for simple possession by youth.

It has been raised that there are a number of unanswered questions about the system of regulation that would be created by Bill C-45. Where and how would cannabis be sold, for example? I have also heard from my constituents concerns about how the use of cannabis by neighbours in apartment buildings could impact their enjoyment of their own homes. These are questions that would be addressed by provinces and municipalities, as they fall under their jurisdiction. Canada is a federation, and it would not be appropriate for the federal government to dictate these answers. What is right for one municipality may not be right for another. I am confident that the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health would work with their provincial counterparts to arrive at the right answers.

We recognize that the use of cannabis and cannabis products, as with alcohol and tobacco, is not without risk. We recognize that the risk is particularly heightened for our youth. That is why it is so crucial that we abandon the status quo, which has utterly failed to keep it out of the hands of our youth.

With this legislation, we would replace a failed approach to drug policy that makes it too easy for youth to access cannabis and provides easy revenue to organized crime with an evidence-based approach of strict regulation and enforcement that would make it much more difficult for youth to access. It would provide severe penalties for those who engage youth, and it would take a large cash crop out of the hands of organized crime.

I would urge those who want to keep cannabis out of the hands of our children to support Bill C-45. As a mother, the bill offers help we very much need.

• (1605)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, the literature is very clear on this. *Lancet* has stated that of young individuals who utilize marijuana, 60% have a lower chance of graduating from high school or graduating from university. The *Journal of Neuroscience* is also very clear. If people between the ages of 18 and 25 use cannabis regularly, they will experience structural changes to the brain.

The young people who were in our galleries today know the difference between drugs and what are not drugs. They know the difference between smoking and not smoking. They talk to me about that in my clinic all the time, because they know.

I also want to correct the record. The member stated that in the legislation, children would not be allowed to possess. Section 8 of the government's own legislation states clearly that 12- to 18-year-olds could possess.

My question for the member is simple. If individuals are allowed to grow plants, and they have children, and those children take cannabis from those plants, are their parents going to be arrested, or did you plan on regulating that?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member that she is to address her questions through the Chair. It is not my legislation.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, the status quo is not working. I am the mother of two teenagers, a 19-year-old and a 17-year-old, and I hear how easy it is for youth right now to access cannabis. It is easier for youth to access cannabis than tobacco or alcohol. With legalization, it would be controlled, and it would be difficult for youth to have access to cannabis.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind members that when someone has the floor, that person has the right to be heard. I hope that if individuals have comments and questions, they will wait to be recognized.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Scarborough Centre mentioned at the beginning of her speech that the goal of the government is to eliminate the black market. When we look at the preamble of the law, it does not mention that as a goal. It is not a stated purpose of this legislation. Speaking as a father of three very young children, the youngest born at the beginning of the 2015 election, I cannot think of an easier way for them to have access to marijuana than to allow every single household to grow four plants, with absolutely no real supervision.

How can the member say that this legislation would better protect children, having talked about high schools and how easy it is to get it today? This legislation would make it easier. How can we say that this would make it more difficult for children to obtain marijuana, when it would make it easier by bringing it directly into their homes?

• (1610)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, the status quo is not working. Through Bill C-45, our government would restrict access by youth and put in place strict safeguards to protect youth from being encouraged to use cannabis. It would create new offences for adults who either sell to or urge youth to commit cannabis-related offences.

As a parent, a mother of two kids, it is my duty to educate them about what is right and what is wrong. I do not drink or use tobacco, and I tell my kids what is right and what is wrong. They are not allowed to use alcohol because of their religion, but I cannot stop the shops from selling it because they should not have it.

Government Orders

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the proposed legislation in Bill C-45, related to the legalization of cannabis, more commonly known as marijuana.

Bill C-45 has been put forward on a rushed timeline. Many practical implications of Bill C-45 are to be decided by provincial governments. When implementing the bill, the Liberals are asking Canadians to trust them now and hope for the best later, a policy that will not work, like all of the other broken election promises.

Before I even begin my speech to outline my concerns with the policy put forward by the government, I would like to say that I do not believe the legislation would create sound policy for Canadians. Instead, we are being asked to sign a blank cheque on many regulation details to be decided later. The legalization of an illicit drug has a significant impact on all Canadians, and it is our duty to ensure that all Canadians are safe.

I will start with a bit of history of cannabis in Canada. Cannabis was first banned in Canada in 1923, under the Narcotic Drugs Act Amendment Bill. Other drugs on the list at the time included opium, morphine, and cocaine. I am glad those three are still on our current banned list. I do not know for how long though.

Cannabis use continued to steadily grow through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, bringing us to today. Cannabis use is at an all-time high. According to a University of Waterloo report on tobacco and cannabis use in Canada, around one in five students between grades 7 and 12 has used cannabis. The majority of them used cannabis over the past year. I do not think any member would stand up in this chamber and say that this is a good thing. Indeed, these numbers should be going down. Passing the legislation would most certainly mean student usage of cannabis will go up.

Cannabis has been illegal since 1923 for many reasons, but one of the most prominent is that cannabis is a drug that has real and damaging health effects on those who use it, especially in the age range where brains are developing. We heard from my colleague, a physician, who just quoted some of the hard facts about medical research and the kind of harm our children and youth will face once they start using marijuana.

The softening of attitudes towards cannabis has not resulted in lower usage, or more importantly, lower usage among young people. Many more Canadians who do not currently smoke marijuana, or cannabis, are likely to start once it is legalized. The legalization of cannabis will not curb interest. Indeed, it will help to promote it, as evidenced by the states in the U.S.A., such as Colorado, that have legalized it.

I have many concerns with the bill, but I will start with the legal access to cannabis proposed in Bill C-45. The government has stated over and over again that the bill is aimed to protect children and young people from cannabis. The irony in this statement, however, is that by legalizing cannabis and actually providing legal backup for the production, possession, distribution, and use of cannabis, the bill would actually encourage cannabis to be used more.

Under Bill C-45, adults will be able to possess up to 30 grams of dried cannabis while in public. To put this in perspective, 30 grams would fit into a small bag of potato chips, so it is not a small amount.

•(1615)

In private, there is no prescribed limit. We can stockpile kilograms as long as we do not intend to distribute.

The bill goes even further to allow adults to grow and produce their own cannabis with up to four plants in their homes. The problem is that these plants are already in the home. The government wants to protect children, but it is allowing cannabis to be grown in the very space that is supposed to be safe for children.

I understand that the legislation includes a few parameters to ensure that it is not possible for any and every adult to produce cannabis. I also wish to clarify that I am not speaking in reference to the use and the need for cannabis for medical purposes. That is a different issue.

That being said, I am not confident that there are enough safeguards to ensure that the four-plant limit is not rampantly broken or disregarded. Allowing individuals to produce on their own will make regulation and oversight much more difficult for the government and our law enforcement.

This leads directly into some of the other regulatory concerns I have. How the government plans to effectively regulate cannabis production and consumption is not made clear in the present form of the legislation. In particular, the clauses concerning search warrants include provisions that would allow a warrant to be issued through a phone call, or would allow inspectors to open packages and enter buildings based on their belief that activities contravening the law are taking place. These provisions lack substance and practical process to assist law enforcement officers to determine when a search warrant is appropriate and how they are accurately able to predict violations.

Finally, in my home riding of Richmond Centre, I strongly campaigned against the legalization of marijuana and was re-elected because this is a view that many of my constituents share. They tell me their concerns. There are concerns about the awful lingering smell of smoked cannabis, but there are also concerns about obtaining housing insurance if a tenant decides to grow cannabis plants in the unit without the landlord knowing about it. Parents are concerned about the safety of their kids. There are so many unanswered questions about the real-world consequences of legalizing cannabis.

The bill represents a huge shift in policy and for our society, as a whole. I find it infuriating that a government that is so preoccupied with consultations on even the smallest of changes deems it appropriate to rush through this legislation.

One journalist commented that, "Trudeau Liberals are legalizing marijuana as if they're being forced to".

The safety of Canadians, and particularly, our young people are—

Government Orders

•(1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I just want to remind the member that she cannot name individuals who are in the House.

Hon. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, I was quoting what the paper said.

I strongly encourage the government to slow down the legislation and get the regulatory framework in place. Hopefully, we can then bring together a more effective and secure piece of legislation.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation and one that I think many of us in the House, and Canadians, have struggled with. We are clearly not winning the fight when it comes to the issue of drug abuse in Canada, which is something that I was a part of for many years. I almost feel like we are giving up. However, the reality is that we have the highest cannabis use here in Canada among our young people. Bill C-45 is, hopefully, going to help us get a handle on that.

As much as we are uncomfortable with the direction in which we are going, what alternatives are there to supporting Bill C-45?

Hon. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, the most important thing we have not done successfully for a number of years is education. Whenever we talk about prevention of drug use, there are always many things that we should have done. The whole reason we have an increased number of young people is, number one, the softening of the attitudes. Number two is that they do not see the actual damage done to their brains.

I would like to quote a real example of a neighbour whose house was what is called a grow-op. In the basement we could see mould and a lot of things, and then finally the police discovered it was a grow-op. Then when the school board looked at the kids living upstairs, above that very basement, all those students showed signs of being stoned, as if they were smoking grass.

My question, as a former educator, is this. We need to educate young people so that they will not even go there. If we encourage them to use it and give them even more access at home, how can parents guarantee that their own kids will not have access to those four plants?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments, which help us all in thinking about this matter.

It seems to me that, from the very start, something fundamental is missing from this bill. I have a hard time understanding that after 18 months of study, nobody has come up with a standard THC level. That is the first important thing.

When the Liberals manage to get organized crime out of the schoolyard, as they say they want to do, what will organized crime offer other than a superior experience to what could be sold on the market? Nobody has even come up with the THC level of the product that will be legalized.

Could my colleague comment on that?

[*English*]

Hon. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, I think the most important thing is not even “have our kids tried that?” That is the safest thing. Looking at the drug to see if the quality of the drug is good or giving the best cocaine to the people at the injection site, this is following the same argument. That is not the right way to deter our students, our young people, from taking this very harmful drug.

My policy would be to not even go there. The current legislation actually would encourage and make it so much easier for our young kids to have access to drugs, not even talking about marijuana cookies, not even talking about how these kids can trade among themselves. These are very real issues, but the legislation would not be able to stop that.

•(1625)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to support Bill C-45, the cannabis act. This bill represents not only a fulfillment of a large campaign promise to Canadians but a meaningful step forward in protecting our youth and ensuring a safer Canada.

In 2012, 20% of youth aged 15 to 17 reported using cannabis in the previous year. This is an unacceptable statistic as it is harmful to our youth. In my riding of Don Valley East, I represent a large youth population. As government we have a duty to ensure that cannabis stays out of the hands of these constituents.

Bill C-45 would establish criminal prohibitions on the sale or distribution of cannabis specifically to young persons. This is the first time in Canada that a specific criminal offence for selling cannabis to a young person has been created. The bill would create two new criminal offences, with maximum penalties of 14 years in jail for giving or selling cannabis to youth, or using a young person to commit a cannabis-related offence.

There is also strict legislation designed to prevent youth from using cannabis. Under the act, any kind of labelling, packaging, promoting, advertising, sponsorship, or endorsement that could entice young people to use cannabis, or make cannabis appealing to youth carries a heavy penalty. This includes a fine of up to \$5 million and/or three years in jail.

A large problem with the current status quo is that it does not protect youth. As we have heard, there is a large number of young people who have had their lives irreparably damaged by minor cannabis possession charges. Cannabis possession is the fourth most frequent crime committed by youth in Canada.

Bill C-45 would seek to avoid subjecting youth to the lifelong consequences of a criminal record. Individuals under the age of 18 years would not face criminal prosecution for possession or sharing very small amounts of cannabis, and any violation of that act by youth would be subject to the youth criminal justice system. On top of these measures, our government has committed \$9.6 million over five years to a comprehensive public education and awareness campaign designed to inform Canadians, including youth, about the risks and harms of cannabis use.

Government Orders

In 2012, 33% of people aged 18 to 24 reported using cannabis in the previous year. Currently, cannabis procurement is a very dangerous activity. It involves contacting criminal dealers or visiting illegal pot shops, arranging secret cannabis buys, and worrying about the content of the drugs. There is a serious issue with the cannabis that is currently in circulation that has been combined with other potent drugs or has an abnormally high THC content. While overdosing from cannabis is not likely, an impure form of cannabis can lead to an extremely unpleasant reaction to the drug.

Bill C-45 would allow those who are regular consumers, and those who are looking to experiment to consume safe and regulated drugs. It would also allow for the government to regulate the sale and production of these drugs, taking the profits out of the hands of criminals. In 2013, 67% of police-reported drug offences involved cannabis, and of those, 80% were possession offences.

● (1630)

The current criminal justice system is overrun with people who committed non-violent possession crimes. The bill aims to eliminate this burden, thereby allowing our justice system to be more effective in protecting Canadians.

The regulations introduced in the bill include the legal possession of up to 30 grams of cannabis when in public, the purchase of cannabis from regulated retailers, and the growing of up to four cannabis plants per residence. This would ensure that the cannabis market is safe and secure. New regulations on minor possession would also allow our police forces to focus on the important work of keeping cannabis out of the hands of our youth, and the proceeds out of the hands of criminals.

The bill represents political co-operation to the utmost extent. All three levels of government, municipal, provincial, and federal, worked together, along with private Canadian citizens, to ensure the best possible legislation that will protect Canadians.

I would like to congratulate the task force on cannabis legalization and regulation for its hard work. Through its tireless work, engaging in cross-country consultations with all levels of government, as well as experts, patients, advocates, indigenous governments and representative organizations, youth, employers, and industry, it provided meaningful advice on this new legislative and regulatory framework.

The proposed cannabis act would create a strict framework for controlling the production, distribution, sale, import, export, and possession of cannabis in Canada.

I am proud to tell the members of my constituency, many of them youth, that the government they elected is truly working for them. I am proud to tell them about the immense amount of work that our government did and is doing, above and beyond, to fulfill the campaign promises that many Canadians feel so strongly about. I am confident that the cannabis act will lead to a safer and better Canada.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member's speech gives me a couple of things to think about that are important, such as the continuation of the criminalization of youth and other people, which has serious consequences. For example, in my riding, we have a truck driver who has worked for Ford for 20 plus years. He does just just-in-time delivery, but he has

a criminal record from 20 years back, when he was 18, related to possession of cannabis. He has no other record than that, but it creates problems with employment and so forth that he has to deal with on a regular basis.

The government will not be doing anything about convicted people until the bill is passed. Therefore, I would like to ask the hon. member some questions. Why is it that the Prime Minister, who has admitted to actually smoking cannabis while an elected member of the House, does not have a criminal record? Where did he obtain the marijuana from? How does she feel about the fact that her constituents could be receiving criminal records over the summer while the Prime Minister does not?

● (1635)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Madam Speaker, that is a valid question. We are talking about legalization versus decriminalization. Under decriminalization, the current law makes it a criminal offence. If we keep the current law, then we have no basis for conversation.

With legalization, we would make strict regulations for the sale and possession. We would ensure the safety of Canadians. We would remove the criminal activity, because it is the criminal organizations that are benefiting from it. By decriminalization, we could decriminalize it, but it still does not reduce the fact that the activity is still in the hands of criminal organizations. There is a balance to be had.

The bill cannot automatically remove the status quo at the moment until we have had discussions at the committee level, where I hope the committee will get more intelligent reporting and input.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I often hear Liberal members talk about how they are going to take marijuana and cannabis away from criminal activity. The first thing they want to do is to put a tax on it to get a tax revenue from that. How can the member possibly think they will take marijuana and cannabis growth, and trafficking out of the criminal element when the first thing they want to do is make it more expensive than the illegal sector can produce and sell it for because of the tax system? How do they think that is possible?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Madam Speaker, at any school, children are smoking cannabis more than they are smoking cigarettes, so it is important that the product is a safe product. We cannot be ostriches and hide our heads in the sand, and say the problem does not exist. What we have done with this bill is include municipal and provinces governments, and the police forces. At the moment, criminals benefit from it, and it goes into their pockets.

Does the hon. member want criminal organizations to benefit from it? If he does, then he does not support the bill.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Provencher, Public Safety; the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill, Public Safety; and the hon. member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, Health.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-45.

Marijuana has been criminalized in Canada since 1923. Much has changed in the past century, including the conversation about marijuana. The Liberals promised to legalize, regulate, and restrict access to marijuana in their 2015 platform. However, since the Liberal government was elected 20 months ago, more than 15,000 Canadians have been charged for simple possession. This is an incredible waste of resources.

What is even more alarming is that we likely will not see the government actually implement a plan until next summer. The government should be embarrassed about how long this is taking.

Not only have the Liberals broken their promise to Canadians, they are clogging up our justice system with arbitrary offences. While we wait for legalization, the Liberal government is ignoring the tens of thousands of charges and criminal records handed out for simple possession, which disproportionately affects young and racialized Canadians. People should not have barriers for the rest of their lives for finding good employment, housing, and international travel due to having had a charge or a conviction for a small amount of cannabis.

The Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. vs. Jordan* last year imposed time limits on court cases. This decision exposed a chronic shortage of resources in the Canadian justice system, caused by a myriad of factors, such as judicial vacancies, underfunding in legal aid, and mandatory minimum sentences. Many serious criminal charges have been either stayed or withdrawn.

In my riding alone, many different municipalities are approaching this issue differently. Some local governments are directing the RCMP to take a hard stance against marijuana. Several people volunteering at medical marijuana dispensaries have been arrested for simple possession. However, in neighbouring communities, local governments have asked the RCMP to do the exact opposite. We are in a jurisdictional and legal grey zone, and the lack of clear direction is creating confusion for everyone.

With this crisis in the justice system, it is irresponsible to continue using police and justice resources to continue to criminalize young people for simple possession of cannabis. We cannot afford to continue to use police and court resources, and charges and convictions for simple possession.

The NDP has had a 45-year history of championing marijuana decriminalization. We have been asking the Liberals to immediately decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana as an interim

measure and invoke prosecutorial and police discretion to cease enforcing a blatantly unjust law such as this one.

We support the overall goal of legalization and we will be preparing constructive proposals for the government, especially with respect to bringing in pardons for those previously convicted of cannabis possession. It would seem fair that those who have received previous convictions for marijuana possession should have some form of amnesty offered, given the looming legalization. However, there is no indication that the Liberals are interested in making pardons easier to obtain or if they will address the high \$631 fee just for an application to do so. The inability to access a pardon remains a serious obstacle for many people trying to escape their criminal past and to move on with their lives.

While Bill C-45 is a step in the right direction, albeit late and long overdue, it contains several ludicrous points.

First, it would allow for a punishment of up to 14 years for anyone selling marijuana to a young person. This is absurd. It is akin to the punishments for producing child pornography and attempting to leave Canada to commit terrorism. I know it would give judicial discretion, but it is excessive and might not even comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Second, the legislation leaves many key issues to the provinces. The federal government has clear jurisdiction in the federal criminal law power, but when it comes to sales and distribution, it is very clearly a provincial power under our constitution. This means the provinces will need time to set up their own regulatory systems. This is another reason that we wish this process had begun earlier.

It is unclear what the government's plan is in terms of tax and revenue structure for marijuana and how it will be shared between federal and provincial governments. Unfortunately, the provinces will have to wait to hear from the Minister of Finance on that matter. These gaping holes need to be addressed before we can move forward with meaningful legislation that makes sense for all Canadians.

● (1640)

The New Democrats and I want to ensure that the funds will be generated for a reliable stream of long-term revenue for research and prevention, specifically in addiction treatment and prevention. The government needs to clearly outline provincial and federal responsibilities that balance health protection with the goal of reducing the illicit market and protecting youth.

It is important to note that the New Democrats are aware of some of the negative consequences of criminalization. It has been widely acknowledged that there is a lack of scientific research into the health impacts of cannabis use, especially chronic long-term use. We must be particularly concerned about the health impacts of chronic and heavy cannabis use among young people. Therefore, we will be pressing the government to begin establishing research plans and funding into these important areas.

Government Orders

It is time to take a new approach to marijuana. We currently have archaic legislation in place, and Canadians want change. 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 ease of access.

People who are going to smoke or ingest marijuana need to ensure they are backed up with education and support services around them. About 30% of Canadian youth have tried cannabis at least once by the age of 15, which is the highest among 43 countries and regions in Europe and North America.

Clearly, our strategy currently has been failing. We need to work with society and not against it.

Decriminalization will 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 will also reduce the cost in our judicial system.

We support the legalization of marijuana as long as it is done effectively so it is not marketed to children, that a reliable, long-term revenue stream is created for public health, prevention, and research, and that there is a comprehensive strategy around safety.

• (1645)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member and I have had some very thoughtful conversations on this issue. I very much look forward to working with him as we move forward with this initiative.

I would like to share with the member a report and some statements made by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health with respect to the issue of decriminalization. It suggests that decriminalization is a half measure in which cannabis remains unregulated, meaning that users will know nothing or next to nothing about its potency or quality; that as long as it remains prohibited, it is difficult for health care or education professionals to effectively address and help prevent problematic use; and finally, decriminalization encourages commercialization of cannabis, enriching organized crime. This very respected body instead recommends that legalization presents governments with an opportunity to regulate cannabis to mitigate risks, something that cannot effectively be done under prohibition or decriminalization.

With that advice and knowledge, could the member comment on whether we have made the right choice?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments. We have had some excellent conversations. He has helped me better understand the government's position on the bill.

We are supporting the bill. It gives us an opportunity to look at ways to curb youth from using marijuana through providing prevention, addiction treatment, and education around it, as well as eliminate organized crime, and I appreciate that.

In the interim, in the 15 months before we see the bill come to fruition and become law, the current crisis of delay is causing a huge lack of resources in our justice system and creating tons of

confusion. The member knows better than many here that we cannot afford to continue to use police and court resources in charges and convictions for simple possession of a substance that will soon be legal.

Therefore, we call on the government to decriminalize so we can create an interim measure of decriminalization and invoke prosecutorial and police discretion to cease enforcing an unjust law in the short term.

We are supporting the bill. I support the member's direction on that. However, in the interim, we call on the government to decriminalize so we can free up the courts and law enforcement so they can do their job.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, even though the government is limiting debate on yet another subject, using closure at an astonishing rate, the debate has been interesting.

Yesterday, the member for Vancouver Quadra said that she had been advocating and having meetings for several years within the Liberal caucus on the legalization of marijuana. The Prime Minister's position and his experience in the area is well known. In recent weeks, we have seen how Liberal Party fundraisers and insiders seem to be occupying positions on boards of directors, leadership positions, as well as ownership stakes in cannabis companies.

I am curious about the NDP's position on this. There has been enough smoke raised here that causes some concern as to whether Liberal insiders are benefiting from this legalization regime, much like the same group of Liberal insiders benefited at Queen's Park in Ontario with the Green Energy Act. From the remarks by the member for Vancouver Quadra, it seems there have been discussions for several years.

I am asking my NDP friend if the New Democrats share our concern about these Liberal insiders benefiting unfairly.

• (1650)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward a valid concern.

We have had concerns about appointments. We have concerns about government members and appointments and how they have had an affiliation to the Liberal Party in the past. Certainly we do have concerns around how this has unfolded.

We want to ensure that it is done right. We have a lot of questions. We are disappointed that this debate has been limited. We have questions about the revenue and where it will go. Will it go to addiction treatment and education? We have concerns around a lot of different issues.

We share the member's concerns around limiting debate on this very important subject for Canadians and about the burden that is going to be put on the provinces and local governments. At the same time, we think it is time for Canada to move forward. It is long overdue.

Government Orders

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-45, a bill for which I have had some responsibility and involvement from the outset. I will not be using my limited time today to review all aspects of this bill, which I think have been discussed significantly in the House. I have had the opportunity to sit through every hour of debate that has taken place so far, and I have tried very hard to listen carefully to the questions and concerns raised by members of the House. I would hope to use my time today to do my very best to answer some of those concerns and to perhaps give members some insight into how these matters might most appropriately be dealt with.

To back up a minute, there was reference a little earlier to there perhaps being some malfeasance or something inappropriate with respect to individuals who have received approval for the licensed production of cannabis. In previous discussions in the House, a number of companies, specifically Canopy, Aurora, Tweed, and Hydrothecary, were mentioned as places where individuals who had some political affiliation had received some benefit. I want to point out to the House, as a point of clarification, that the four companies I just mentioned all received their licence approvals under the previous government. Therefore, quite frankly, the accusation is without merit.

I want to explain how I come to this position of speaking on behalf of the government for the legalization and strict regulation of cannabis and the restriction, in particular, with respect to access by kids. I want it to be clear. I took a position in my previous occupation as a police officer and a police chief of expressing sincere concerns about the limitations of decriminalization. My position has not varied from that. I will say that in my experience as the person responsible for the protection of the children of Toronto and the safety of communities, I tried always to look at the harms being perpetuated on our kids and our communities and at doing everything possible to reduce those harms and to protect those kids and communities.

In October 2014, there was a report prepared, which I quoted from earlier, by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. It recommended the implementation of a new system, a public health approach and framework, for the strict regulation of cannabis. It identified a number of harms that could be addressed in this way.

I will acknowledge right up front that I believe that every member of the House cares very sincerely about all our kids, all the youth of Canada, and I believe that every member of the House is quite sincerely concerned that Canada has the highest rates of cannabis use among young people of any country in the world. I believe that every member of the House, on both sides, understands that the high use by our kids represents a significant risk to our kids. There are very real social harms. There is harm to the development of the adolescent brain. There are other health risks our kids face as a result of the early use of cannabis, the frequency of its use, and the high potency of its use. I believe that everyone agrees that we have to do a better job. The current system is appalling and unacceptable, and it demands action from us. Now we can debate and discuss an appropriate course of action.

I believe that every member of the House believes that it is unacceptable that organized crime profits, in the billions of dollars, from this criminal enterprise. Street gangs, outlaw motorcycle gangs, and other criminal enterprises are wholly responsible currently for the production, distribution, and trafficking of this drug in our communities and to our kids. I believe that every member of the House believes that we must take the steps necessary to make our communities safe, to take those profits away from organized crime, and to protect our kids, our communities, and the health of our citizens.

I will try to address some of the concerns that have been raised. A number of members have asked why the government's legislation has recommended that persons under the age of 18 be prohibited from access, but persons over the age of 18, the age at which a person is normally deemed to be an adult, depending on the jurisdiction in which a person resides, could have access to cannabis produced under strict regulation and sold only through a strict regulatory regime, as established by the province and the local jurisdiction.

•(1655)

I am well aware that the science indicates that there is a real health risk to people up to the age of 25. This was a matter considered at great length by our task force. It was the subject of substantial debate within the task force, within the government, and within this House.

Our government believes that adult Canadians between the ages of 18 and 25 have the right and the maturity to make decisions about their own health. We allow young people over the age of adulthood, as determined by provincial jurisdiction, to get married, to have children, to buy a house, to get a mortgage, to use alcohol and tobacco, and to make decisions about their own lives and their own health. As long as we enable them to make safer, healthier, and socially responsible choices, as long as we provide them with the information they need to make a well-informed choice, I think we are fulfilling our responsibility and respecting their ability as adult Canadians to make that choice.

As well, there has been some question of how the legislation would deal with the possession of cannabis by a young person under the age of 18, or as the provinces may determine. One of the harms that was identified in our discussions from coast to coast and with experts across the country was the criminalization of our youth, as was earlier mentioned. It is very much our government's intention to protect our children from the harm of having their actions result in a criminal record. We want to make sure that we can enforce a prohibition against the possession, purchase, and consumption of cannabis but without subjecting them to the risk of a criminal record. The right way to do that is through provincial legislation.

In every province and territory in this country, there is a liquor licence act. It is an offence, under provincial regulation, for a young person to possess, purchase, and consume alcohol. If they are caught, law enforcement can seize that alcohol and can give them a ticket for that offence. There are actual consequences for breaking that regulation, but that young person does not face the consequence of a criminal record. In my humble opinion, that is a significant reduction of risk for our young people.

Government Orders

I travelled across the country and talked to parents and families about what concerns them about cannabis and their kids. They are certainly worried about their health. We have a responsibility to do a better job of protecting those kids. They are worried about the social harms to their kids. They are worried about whether they will finish school. They are worried about who they are hanging out with. They are worried that if they are using cannabis, they are dealing with a criminal to get it, and that criminal may sell them other drugs or expose them to other risks.

Finally, parents have shared with me that they are also concerned that their kid may be in a car one evening and be innocently pulled over by the police, found to be in possession of cannabis, and end up with a lifelong criminal record, with all of its consequences. I believe that every member of this House is motivated by a sincere desire to do a better job of protecting our kids from all those harms.

I have also heard concerns about resources. I have met with mayors, city councillors, police chiefs, fire chiefs, bylaw enforcement people, and public health officials, and all have expressed concern. They are willing to take on their responsibility to keep their communities safe, but they have concerns about resources. I am proud that our government has committed that the revenues that could be generated from the taxation of this substance federally could be reinvested in research, public education, treatment, and rehabilitation.

There is an important discussion taking place with the provinces, territories, and municipalities across the country to make sure that law enforcement, municipal officials, and public health officials have the tools, the infrastructure, the administration, the oversight, the testing, and the enforcement capability that will keep our communities safe.

• (1700)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Scarborough Southwest for staying past midnight last night to address some of the concerns I raised on the public safety front. He has carried a file that he probably did not pray for before his time in politics, but he has tried to do so nobly, and that is appreciated.

My colleague suggested that because licenses were granted in the past under the previous government for the medicinal marijuana program, that somehow makes that conduct, whether lobbying or attending Liberal fundraisers or the fact that Liberal insiders may have been involved in developing the Prime Minister's plan to legalize it, all right.

As that member knows, my position is the position he used to have as chief of police, which is that a person could be given a ticket. They could allow it still to be criminalized but could give law enforcement tools.

My concern is that the member for Vancouver Quadra said that the legalization plan had been talked about within the Liberal caucus for several years. We see the former CFO of the Liberal Party and other insiders in key positions in cannabis companies. We all know that when it was medicinal marijuana, they were staking their claims, like a gold rush, hoping that full legalization was coming.

Could that member tell us that within the Liberal caucus there has been no direct access or early access by Liberal insiders to gain financially from legalization?

Mr. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise and reassure the member that in all my experience with this file, I have not seen a single incident of anyone having insider advantage or knowledge, and I have had primary carriage of this file on behalf of my government from the outset.

It was once suggested in the House that we had given some advantage and foreknowledge that somehow benefited people who had invested in this. That suggestion was completely false. There was another incident about a month later when I made a statement about the importance of taking the time to do this right, which had an enormous and unintended impact on the stock market. We did not hear any suggestion that I had somehow done that against them.

I also want to assure members that although I would not ever name an individual, particularly an individual for which there was absolutely no evidence or suggestion that he or she had done anything wrong, there are many individuals in this business and in the queue to obtain licenses who represent all political stripes. It is not the political stripe. It is the ability and willingness to meet the very stringent requirements of those licenses upon which those—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but I have to allow for at least one more question.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

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

The discussions we are currently having are quite educational. I heard solid arguments on a number of aspects, such as the legal age. For instance, it was proposed that use be permitted based on scientific studies or based on the age of majority, since at 18 people are responsible for making all kinds of decisions. I admit that I appreciated that argument.

However, I think that what is worrying the public is the lack of coordination. The federal government says that the legal age is 18, while at the same it is telling the provinces that they may review this standard if they want to raise it.

Would it not be better for the government to first sit down with the provinces so that everyone can come up with a measure they all agree on?

Government Orders

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Bill Blair: Madam Speaker, the advice we received, particularly from our task force, which included people with great expertise in public health, neuroscience, and problematic substance use, was that it should be strictly restricted for those under the age of adulthood. For adult users, what we should be encouraging is lower risk, safer, and more socially responsible use. Those 18 to 25 are the highest users of cannabis in this country. To criminalize their acquisition of this drug would simply leave them to the black market and to organized crime.

The recommendation was adulthood. We recognize and we greatly respect that each of the provinces has the authority under our Constitution to establish an age of majority. In seven provinces it is the age of 19. In three it is 18. We have given latitude to the provinces to make their own decisions as to the age they believe is appropriate.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour today to rise and speak to Bill C-45, the government's draft legislation respecting cannabis and amendments to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code, and other acts. This draft legislation is more than 100 pages long. As the title suggests, it is a complex bill affecting the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code, and other acts.

Beyond affecting these acts, this complex bill would also affect individuals. It will affect families and it will affect people's lives. It will affect the provinces and territories and the communities within them. The bill would affect our country in ways we cannot be sure of at this point.

As I begin to speak to the bill and its complexities, I would first like to recognize that the medical community has been studying the effects of cannabis as a drug to treat many illnesses, from chronic pain to anxiety and seizures to illnesses such as intestinal illness and cancer. There are a multitude of illnesses that may or may not be remedied by fully tested, properly prescribed and administered marijuana.

While scientific studies may be on their way to discovering the full potential of cannabis, they are only partway along that path. Much more testing is needed to establish what the full effects and benefits of cannabis are. Science has yet to reach complete conclusions and understanding of the possible detrimental effects of cannabis on the human body.

That said, science has established that cannabis has negative effects on the developing brain of young people. Science has also established the health risks of inhaling smoke, whether it be tobacco smoke, wood smoke, or marijuana smoke. The risk of smoke to human health is well documented.

At this point, cannabis is considered by the laws of Canada as a drug, still not fully tested, with many known effects and many unknown. As legislators, it is our responsibility to consider what the full potential benefits, detriments, and dangers are of any legislation that comes before us, as well as the impact of our decisions and the votes that we take on that legislation. As such, I take this responsibility very seriously, and while I have had some time to

look over the bill, there are so many angles, so many components, so many potential impacts, and so many unknowns that I feel much more time is needed before we go down the path of legalization.

Sound and thorough review of this legislation is necessary to ensure that the House does its due diligence to ensure that we perform our duty to the people we represent and not pass haphazard legislation that we come to regret. While I do not disagree that the current status quo is not working, there are other policy options available. One is decriminalization without full legalization, which deserves consideration.

As I mentioned, there is much to be considered. We must consider not only what is on the pages of the bill in the House but also what will be on the pages of the bills in the provincial legislatures, in the territories, and the communities. How will impairment be measured? How will it be proven and penalized? Many of these issues can and likely will be dealt with by provincial legislation, but we have heard that the provinces need much more time and resources to complete the legislation and implementation required.

I have heard from municipalities that they are concerned about how they will draft new bylaws to regulate marijuana production in residential areas and in residential rental homes, which, by the way, will be permitted under this legislation. I have been informed that the provinces and municipalities are looking for funding from the proposed tax and licensing revenue stream that the Liberal government is developing. This funding is required to offset the costs municipalities and the provinces will encounter in dealing with the responsibilities being downloaded onto them by the federal Liberals' election promise, a half-baked idea with no decisive plan for implementation.

• (1710)

Another issue that concerns me as a former small business operator is the impact on small business. What about cannabis use in the workplace?

Large businesses and government agencies may be able to implement random screening processes on a large scale to manage cannabis use in the workplace, but what about the employer managing the corner store? What about the auto repair shop where people take their family car for repairs? What about the other small businesses that will not have the capacity to test or reprimand employees who choose to use the drug before they show up for work or, even worse, use it on their coffee breaks? How will small business owners deal with the challenges without having issues escalate to a point that they either lose the ability to serve their customers or face labour law complaints, be they founded or unfounded?

This kind of scenario is a real possibility, and the consequences could be dire for small businesses, small business managers, and other employees. These are the types of situations and shortcomings that are not addressed in this already complex legislation.

As I said, this bill would end up affecting Canadians in ways we do not think the Liberals have even considered. If the Liberals have considered these possible effects, they have chosen either to ignore them or to pass them on to other levels of government to deal with.

Government Orders

I would also like to address some of the ways in which individuals would be affected. We have heard from the medical community that the use of cannabis affects the function of the brain; that is very clear. We have also heard from the medical community that cannabis has detrimental and irreversible effects on the developing brains of young people. In fact, evidence shows that cannabis should not be used by young people because it has been shown to cause both functional and structural changes in the brains of young people who use it regularly. The Canadian Paediatric Society has cautioned that marijuana use is strongly linked to:

cannabis dependence or other substance-abuse disorders; the initiation and maintenance of tobacco smoking; an increased presence of mental illness, including depression, anxiety and psychosis; impaired neurological development and cognitive decline; and diminished school performance and lifetime achievement.

I am certain that I will be facing questions from the Liberals once I am finished speaking, so before they start asking those questions, I would also pose a question for them in my closing comments.

Part of the platform the Liberals have put forward supporting this legislation is that they are introducing it to protect the health of our children and keep them from harm. When we have health authorities saying that inhaling smoke is detrimental to our health; when we have statements like the one I quoted from the Canadian Paediatric Society, illustrating the risks of cannabis use in young people; when the government is promoting half-baked legislation that would do nothing to eliminate illegal marijuana growth and trafficking; when the Liberals' goal is to create tax revenue that would make the so-called regulated product more expensive than the black market or homegrown product; when the Liberals have no plan to share the potential gains with the provinces and municipalities that will be burdened with their own legal nightmares created by this legislation; when the Liberals have no plan that will actually keep cannabis out of the hands of children at home, let alone on the playground, how can any member on that side of the House believe this is good legislation?

We can likely assume that the Liberals will push this legislation through with their majority and a whipped vote. I believe their motion for early closure of debate on this bill shows that they are afraid to continue debate for fear the multiple flaws in this legislation might be exposed.

As a final comment, I hope at least some of the government members, or eventually the Senate, will take a non-hazy view of this legislation and send it back for a complete remake.

• (1715)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for the points he brought forward.

I have a son in the United States. He works down there and has business down there. In Oregon, which I think has legalized marijuana, there is concern. People do not want to hire people who are from Oregon because of the effects it has had on the young people there.

We have former peace officers here, and one has taken charge of this file. There are a number of road deaths of innocent people because of the legalization of a drug that has a mind-altering effect

and affects the reaction time of people when they are driving. Apparently there is not yet a roadside test, but it may be close. We have one for alcohol. We may have one for drugs, but I am not sure how testing for a combination of the two is going to happen.

Do you have a concern in your area regarding road safety and the impact it will have in terms of victims who are killed because of the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the hon. member that he is to address questions to the Chair and not to the individual member.

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, I have certainly heard concerns about the legal definitions of impairment under this drug and the legalities of the equipment that may or may not be available.

I do not believe any of it has been tested in court. Impairment levels could be different from individual to individual. There is so much data that has yet to be looked at, data gained from other jurisdictions that are trying legalization and are still really in the experimental stage. I believe there is a huge risk in it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed by the member's comments, in the sense that we now have an option after so many years.

I think it is important that we recognize that in Canada, we have some of the highest usage of cannabis in the developed world amongst our young people. To defend the status quo does not do our young people any justice, nor does it deal with the issue of the crime element, whereby literally hundreds of millions of dollars are generated through cannabis-related criminal activities.

If the Conservatives are having such a difficult time with this particular piece of legislation, in hindsight, even though they had 10 years under Stephen Harper to deal with it, would they not recognize that we need to do something on this issue?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, I believe that if the member had been listening, he would have heard me say that I certainly agree that the status quo is not working but that I do not agree that full legalization is the way to go.

Many times we have heard from members on the other side that they are going to keep it out of the hands of criminals and will remove the criminal element from it. I have yet to understand how they are going to do that. Not one of the members has explained how they can tell a leaf or a bud from a plant that was grown legally from one that was grown illegally. How can we possibly tell the difference? How can we tell if what is on the street is legal or illegal?

The only way buyers are going to be able to tell is by the tax that the government is going to put on it. That is the only way the government is going to be able to keep it out of people's hands.

Government Orders

• (1720)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on the cannabis act, also known as another poorly thought out, poorly written, rushed-through piece of legislation by the government, which needs time allocation to get it through, only to go to the Senate, where it is going to be butchered and sent back for further amendments, leaving the government wondering why in the world it bothered trying to have independent senators in the first place. However, I understand that is just the working title.

If anyone is watching CPAC at home right now and breathlessly waiting another nine and a half minutes for me to tell them whether I support the bill or not, I will give them a spoiler alert. They should go and have a cup of coffee or something so they do not hear the answer now. Clearly, I do not support the bill as presented. That is shocking, I know.

I want to discuss a couple of highlights, or lowlights, of the bill before I get into the bulk of my speech. We have heard repeatedly from experts and the medical association that setting the minimum age at 18 is way too low. Eighteen is the legal age in Ontario right now, where I am from. Just last week, I had the pleasure of speaking at two different high schools for their graduations, where the huge majority of these children were 18. The government wants to allow children 18 years old to legally smoke marijuana and to go into the stores any time to pick it up. It is disgraceful. Youth aged 12 to 17 would be allowed to have up to seven joints at the same time.

The legislation would put Canada in contravention of international laws and treaty obligations, including the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs. There is no plan from the government right now to address these issues.

There are problems with drug-impaired driving. There is no universally accepted limit for what constitutes impaired driving. There is no common line across the world that has a legalized system to say this is what impairment is. Current drug testing involves oral fluid samples, but it can only provide the presence of the drug, not the concentration. Chemical traces of marijuana stay in an individual's body for a long time after impairment is no longer an issue. Saliva tests are very expensive at \$20 to \$40 for every single test. Currently, checking for alcohol at roadside stops costs pennies. Now we are going to force this huge cost upon municipalities to bear.

One of the arguments we hear is that legalizing it will push out organized crime. Who in the world thinks the Hells Angels, or anyone else in organized crime currently taking in billions, is going to stop and say, "It's all over. Let's pick up our toys and go home. It's now legal. Maybe we can use our motorcycles to become Uber drivers, because we're obviously out of the business"? It is simple-mindedness to think that the Hells Angels, and all these criminal organizations that have been doing this for years and years, with amazing market penetration, are going to just pack up their stuff and go away. I am not advocating for organized crime or the Hells Angels, but this is reality.

One of the arguments we hear is that it will fill the tax coffers. We can legalize it, tax the heck out of it, and raise a lot of money. Unfortunately, the parliamentary budget office, the same PBO the government is trying to muzzle with its omnibus budget bill, says the opposite. It says the money raised by the government will be measured in the millions and millions, not the billions. To quote the PBO, "The illicit market, their profit margins are very high, so they have room to compete with the legal market, which makes it even more difficult for the government to set the price and the tax rate."

The PBO says the government is not going to push out illegal drugs unless it keeps prices down. Now we are going to have the government helping to set the price of marijuana low to keep out organized crime, thus making it easier to access for Canadians.

The PBO estimates the pot market is worth about \$4 billion to \$6 billion. Of that, the feds are going to take \$100 million or more, the provinces will take a bit more, and that is only if they keep taxes and prices down. When have we ever seen the government keeping prices or taxes down? Does anyone in Ontario or B.C., with their public liquor store systems, the B.C. Liquor Stores and the LCBO, actually think government is going to keep prices down and undercut organized crime? I do not think so.

President Reagan has many famous quotes, and one of my favourites was when he described governments' view on business as thus: "If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it." I can very well see a future where the government, with its interference in this market, with regulations and added taxes, makes it difficult for legalized marijuana to compete with organized crime, and therefore, lowers taxes or changes the system, or perhaps even subsidizes it, to better compete with organized crime.

• (1725)

One government member argued that pot arrests are tying up the courts. I have to ask, why not just decriminalize it? The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police says so. My colleagues in the NDP do not disagree with it. What is so magical that on June 30 marijuana is going to be illegal but on the very next day, July 1, it is going to be magically okay? I do not often agree with my friends and my colleagues in the NDP, but they do have a point.

I am stunned that the Liberal member is using this argument about tying up courts when the government has failed to fill open positions in the courts for over a year. My colleague, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, has been calling for the government to fill the judge positions that the government has neglected to fill.

Murderers are being let go because we do not have judges. Of the 101 applications for release by accused persons because of court delays, 51 were granted, including, from Edmonton, Adam Picard, who was accused of murdering a gentleman named Fouad Nayel, and another one, Lance Regan, also accused of murder.

Private Members' Business

Here we have the government not filling judge positions but we have another member of the government stating that we cannot tie up the courts with pot. She does not seem to care that we are not filling the judge positions and are allowing accused murderers to go free, but she is concerned about the courts being tied up otherwise.

Why such a big rush to legalize by July 1, 2018? Why the arbitrary cut-off? Is it perhaps because the government is under pressure from so many broken promises, such as balancing the budget by the end of its mandate in 2019, which will now be 2055; the \$30-billion deficit, which will now be hundreds of billions of dollars; or the whole open and fair competition to replace the fighter jets, which it is not doing because it is going to CF-18s, so maybe we will throw them under the bus because we have to appease Bombardier.

Of course, the biggest promise the government may have broken is on electoral reform. We know the government rallied youth to its cause with the electoral reform promise, which it has now cancelled. Is it rushing through the bill, putting families and children at risk, just so it can draw this cohort back to Liberal support?

I have to wonder, again, why July 1? Is it so the Prime Minister can light the symbolic first joint on Canada Day, or maybe arrange to photo bomb a bunch of people toking up and get his PR experts to create a hashtag and call it a photo bong?

We have spoken to the RCMP in Edmonton. I have spoken to the police in our riding. They say they are not going to be ready by July 1. The training is not going to be done. The ability to detect levels of intoxication will not be ready. Municipalities have told us they are not ready, and they do not want to get stuck carrying the bill for this poorly thought out legislation.

Provinces are scrambling to get ready. The Province of Alberta, just a week ago, started consultations on how it is going to regulate and distribute marijuana in Alberta. That is four million people, and we just started the process. Our schools are not ready. However, the government says not to worry; they have a plan for education and prevention of \$9 million over five years. That is 5¢ for every Canadian, over five years.

Let us put that in perspective. The government, in its budget, has put down \$120 million for the same time frame as free charging stations for Tesla owners. If people own an \$85,000 Tesla, the government is there for them. However, if a family is trying to keep their kids away from marijuana, here's a nickel a year. It is ridiculous.

In conclusion, I wish the government would take a step back and realize it is too soon. I understand it has a majority, it has a mandate, and it is going to push this through. However, I beg the government to slow it down and let us have proper consultations with the provinces, municipalities, and families before it steamrolls this ahead.

• (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Edmonton West will have five minutes for questions and comments when this matter comes up later today.

[Translation]

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

[English]

NATIONAL MATERNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM STRATEGY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-243, An Act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.) moved that Bill C-243, An Act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen moved that Bill C-243, An Act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy, be read the third time and passed.

[English]

He said: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak once again to my private member's bill, Bill C-243. I would like to begin with a couple of quick thanks, and then I will address the substance of the bill.

First of all, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for the careful study of the bill. I appreciate the efforts of all members of the committee, and I look forward to speaking to their proposed amendments shortly.

I would like to thank the nine witnesses who took the time to present constructive feedback to the committee for consideration. The witnesses represented a diversity of backgrounds, including women's advocacy groups, skilled trades organizations, and of course, Melodie herself, the welder in my community who inspired the bill. I hope that all of them will continue to be part of the important discussions going forward and if my bill is passed, their voices will be a critical part of the development of an effective national maternity assistance program that reflects all areas of the labour market, including women working in hazardous jobs.

Private Members' Business

As today will be the last opportunity to speak to Bill C-243 in the House, I would like to thank all members who have supported the bill from the beginning. Bringing forward legislation is one of the most important things that we do as MPs, and I truly appreciate all members and all parties who took the time to get involved in one way or another.

As one final thanks, I would like to take the opportunity to thank a staff member in my office. I know that all MPs greatly value the work that our staff do. There is one individual, Mr. Steven Patterson, who works in my office who started working on this file when I was told that I had a private member's bill coming up very early on. He was still a fourth year student at Queen's University studying politics. He started writing this bill from his dorm room in residence. He worked with me when we were challenged on royal recommendation, and in my opinion, put forward one of the smartest and best cases against royal recommendation that the House has seen, and further continued to work as this went through committee. Unfortunately, Mr. Patterson will be leaving me to go to law school, which was pretty much inevitable in the fall, and I want to greatly thank him for his participation in this. A warning to anyone out there who crosses paths with lawyer Patterson in the future, they want to make sure they are on his side because otherwise they will most likely be on the losing side.

I want to provide some background on this issue, and then get to the committee's amendments. My goal with the bill was to address one of the barriers for women who want to enter a so-called non-traditional job. I believe that we need to level the playing field, so that women have an equal opportunity to participate in all sectors of the labour force.

I am pleased to see that budget 2017 includes strong measures to do exactly that. Specifically, budget 2017 proposes to allow women to claim EI maternity benefits up to 12 weeks before their due date, which is expanded from the current standard of eight weeks if they so choose. While there are some small differences between this and my original bill, this change introduces exactly the kind of flexibility that I and so many others have been advocating for with the bill.

Budget 2017, which was introduced one day before the committee began its study of my bill, obviously has implications for the future of Bill C-243. Therefore, I support the committee's decision to remove the employment insurance provisions of Bill C-243 found in sections 6 and 7, as with the passing of budget 2017, they will have essentially been addressed.

It is important to note that these changes leave the first part of the bill, the national strategy, essentially unchanged. The bill in its current form specifically calls on the Minister of Employment to develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure that pregnancy is not a barrier to a woman's full and equal participation in all aspects of the labour force. To be honest, this has always been the most important part of the bill as the changes to EI were only ever intended to be a first step and not a final solution.

● (1735)

The strategy would give the government a proposed mandate to engage in broad consultations, and to consider more comprehensive and long-term solutions. The other amendments, such as adding greater emphasis on gender equality, are also consistent with the goal

and purpose of Bill C-243. I support the decision of the committee, and I would urge all members of this House to vote yes on Bill C-243 at third reading.

I want to reiterate why I feel having this debate and developing a strategy is so important. Many of the discussions we have in this place and throughout the country about equality in the workforce, as it relates to gender equality, specifically for some reason seem to focus on including more women as doctors, lawyers, business leaders, and politicians.

While well-intentioned, these conversations often neglect the fact that many women want a career in other fields, including physically demanding jobs like skilled trades and construction. These are good paying jobs and according to Statistics Canada, employees in the trades earn an average hourly wage that is about 6% higher than other occupations.

While the wages are good, in many cases there is a shortage of labour to meet the demand. Over the next 5 to 10 years, 40% of current tradespeople will need to be replaced, and the Conference Board of Canada has predicted that one million skilled workers will be needed by 2020. This skills gap would hurt Canada's competitiveness, but more important, it is an opportunity. In my opinion it is an opportunity for a win-win. We have the opportunity to get more women involved in skilled trades, and in lines of work that have a higher demand, and at the same time we have the opportunity to fill these vacant positions that will be created very soon.

Finally, the national strategy proposed in Bill C-243 is an opportunity to promote gender equality while addressing this very real economic challenge.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for introducing this bill.

We have never doubted his conviction on this. At the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons With Disabilities, it was a pleasure to hear from Melodie Ballard, who is the person behind this bill.

My colleague talked about a national strategy for all women. We know very well that, here in the House, we can only legislate for women whose jobs are under federal jurisdiction, so it is clear that this bill will apply only to certain specific job categories.

My colleague himself told the committee that he sees this as merely a first step. Is his underlying goal to provide real leadership as a way to help the provinces introduce their own preventive withdrawal programs?

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, my colleague actually answered the question with her comments. This is a first step, and this is about engaging with the provinces.

Private Members' Business

My objective here has always been to have a dialogue, to get the discussion going. It will never be the responsibility, or no government would be compelled to have to implement the recommendations. This has always been about a strategy. It has been about reaching out to the provinces, looking at the amazing model that Quebec currently has, and trying to have a broader discussion throughout the country as to how we can change the way that women are taken care of during pregnancy, so that we can better affect the labour market.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is absolutely the right direction that we should be going in for women if we want and expect women to get into non-traditional fields, so I commend the member on introducing this bill. He has done an excellent job on his research, and I am fully behind it.

This bill would allow women 15 weeks of maternity benefits before their due dates in many jobs, not just welders or working in a toxic paint factory but a variety of jobs. When I was on maternity leave with my last child, I took a month off prior to the birth, because I was on my feet all the time and was having a lot of pain. Having that flexibility is really important.

Currently, as the member stated, eight weeks are available prior to the birth, but 15 weeks is better because different jobs affect people differently, whether it is toxic chemicals, paints and solvents, or pesticides in the agricultural field. All of those things have to be taken into consideration. It does not necessarily apply only to fields involving toxic substances or fields of non-traditional work. Many people may work long hours while standing. It could be a person working at Walmart who works at a cash register for eight hours a day. Doctors have said that standing all day can also harm babies and cause slower growth. I commend the member for introducing this legislation.

I sat on the human resources, skills and social development committee for parts of this bill, and I am concerned that the committee gutted sections concerning employment insurance. I know in budget 2017 the government included an additional 12 weeks rather than eight, but not the 15 weeks, as the member put forward. I had people explain to me that it is because a pregnancy may go longer. It is great to say that a pregnancy could go longer, but I know as a woman, as do others, that not a lot of pregnancies go longer than 50 weeks. They are usually 40 or 42 weeks, and that is when the doctor gets involved and performs a cesarean section or induces delivery. A woman will not be pregnant for as long as was said to me, so I do not know why the government felt it was necessary to reduce it from 15 to 12 weeks. I do not know why the government did that.

That being said, there is a provision that can be taken into consideration, which is more of a red tape issue that will have to be dealt with. Any person can take 15 weeks off in sick benefits. If a woman needed to take off those weeks, she could take up to 15 weeks of sick benefits. From reducing it from 15 to 12 weeks, the government has added an additional layer of red tape, because women would be required to go to Service Canada, present a doctor's note, and change it from sick benefits to maternity benefits. I am really questioning why the government needed to reduce that.

All it has done is put the onus back on mothers. When women are expecting their babies, the last thing they should have to worry about are financial concerns. They need to worry about preparing for the baby, making sure they have cribs and a bunch of other things, especially if they have other children. I wish the government had kept the 15 weeks, as the Conservatives and NDP supported in committee. However, it is 12 weeks in the budget. I support the 15 weeks, but, unfortunately, it was changed.

I sit on the status of women committee, where members talk about how they can make sure there is fairness and equity for women. A lot of it has to do with education and putting women in occupations that have higher earnings, but at the same time, we know some of those occupations are welding or construction jobs, things that may put pregnancies at risk. It is very important that women have that flexibility, and this is a great measure. We know that preterm births can occur if women try to work right up to their due dates, as well as high blood pressure. At any time, what is most important is to always consider the baby and the mother as paramount in the decision as we move forward.

• (1745)

When we talk about women, we need to recognize that equality does work when we have legislation like the one put forward by the member for Kingston and the Islands. This is an excellent first step to job equality and equity for women.

We have seen many women try to get into positions in the STEM fields, science, technology, engineering, and math. If we want women to prevail, if we want women to have financial independence, having good-paying jobs is one way to do that. The government can assist with this by ensuring we have a balance between pay equity and equality for women, as well as rights for families. This is a great opportunity.

We also have to take into consideration that many mothers may have other children at home. Having those 15 weeks, potentially, would be very good. We need to understand that a woman may not only be lifting heavy loads at work, but she also may be having to lift a 40-pound two-year-old at home. We have to do anything we can do to prevent a preterm birth, anything we can do to prevent harm to any child. This bill has done a great job on that.

At the end of the day, we are very supportive of this. We want to see pay equity. We want to see good benefits from the federal government. There was a big discussion about whether the bill needed a royal recommendation. I come to the House, having dealt with employment insurance for 11 years. I feel I bring something that many of the members of Parliament are learning about and maybe becoming more aware of in their constituency work. It's really important that when we look at this, we ask ourselves what we can do. I have seen many women who needed to take time off work.

The need for royal recommendation seems to be silly to me. If a woman takes 15 weeks off before the birth, she will not be granted those additional weeks after. All we are doing is moving the range.

Private Members' Business

In the 2017 budget, there is the thought that women do go back to work early and may not take the entire parental leave portion of the maternity leave. Therefore, they may be using more benefits, if they are taking benefits prior to that. That may be a concern of the government, but we need to look at what is best for children, mothers, and families first.

I commend the member. This is an excellent bill. It is a great start for women's equity and equality in our country. I thank him for all the work he has done on this. I just wish it was the 15 weeks, as it was in the original bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the critic for families, children, and social development and for employment and workforce development, I recommend that my NDP colleagues vote in favour of this bill. However, there are still several aspects of this bill that concern us, as New Democrats.

Clearly, we appreciate the spirit of the bill. However, what ultimately happens with this bill will depend on the consultations conducted by the government.

Even if the government passes this bill, it will be too early to determine whether the government will implement an adequate and serious strategy, especially considering that at second reading, it voted against this bill. Furthermore, it was essentially gutted when clauses 6 and 7 were removed in committee. All that is left is consultation.

We are also concerned by another amendment brought forward by the Liberals in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, HUMA. The report calls for the consultation findings to be provided to the House not in two years, as was originally stated, but in three years, after the bill takes effect, that is, after the next election. If the Liberals seem to be in no rush to hear the findings of these consultations, there is cause for concern about what comes next.

If the Liberals want a real maternity assistance strategy and want to make it a priority, why are they extending the consultations?

Canada has no global strategy that allows women to continue to support themselves during pregnancy. Federally regulated employees are of particular concern to us. We need to think about how we can create a real social safety net for them.

Quebec's safe maternity experience program was introduced in 1981 following a Supreme Court ruling that unequivocally found that the work environment was at issue in the case of a preventive withdrawal, and not the pregnancy itself. That is why Quebec's program is funded entirely by employers. They cover the cost, because they are the ones who control the working conditions.

I will give a concrete example. I was the executive director of a community organization for troubled youth for quite some time. We had a lot of young female staff members, and there were a lot of pregnancies. It was considered a high-risk occupation because of the contact staff had with troubled youth, so pregnant workers usually took preventive withdrawal at around week 14 or 16 of their pregnancy.

We have to understand what that actually means in Quebec. For the first five business days after she stopped working the employer paid the worker her regular salary. For the next 14 days, the employer paid 90% of her salary, which was ultimately reimbursed by the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail. Accordingly, there was continuity in the employee's pay. Then the commission paid the employee 90% of her net income until the risk subsided.

In some workplaces the workers return to work when the risk period is over. As soon as the worker gives birth, she receives maternity benefits that are not affected by the preventive withdrawal.

At the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Roch Lafrance from Union des travailleuses et travailleurs accidentés ou malades delivered very informative testimony.

In my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, there are two organizations that help workers on preventive withdrawal, namely Mouvement action chômage de Saint-Hyacinthe and Regroupement des accidentés de la Montérégie, which is part of the organization that testified before the HUMA committee. That organization has a solid 36 years of experience, since the safe maternity experience program has been available in Quebec since 1981.

● (1750)

They have seen different situations over 36 years. This program is quite popular in Quebec, both with employers and with employees who have benefited from preventive withdrawal.

Based on this experience, they presented us with three recommendations, which I would like to share with the House.

First, they stressed that the pregnant worker's right to preventive withdrawal is not a right to maternity leave. When preventive withdrawal is included in employment insurance, it displaces maternity leave. This is an issue because preventive withdrawal is not maternity leave. The reason for preventive withdrawal is the working conditions that pose a danger to the pregnancy or the unborn child, rather than the pregnancy itself. This is an important point. This is why the matter pertains to working conditions. As I was saying earlier, the costs of such a system in Quebec are fully covered by employers, because they are the ones who set working conditions and decide whether the worker can or cannot keep working.

The employment insurance program is not the right vehicle for such a program that truly helps pregnant workers. The employment insurance program is a communal fund that employers and employees pay into. The government has not contributed a penny to it since the 1990s. It is an insurance program that protects against job loss. The more the scope of the employment insurance program is expanded, the more the program's very foundations are distorted.

Private Members' Business

Furthermore, the bill is completely silent about the process for administering such a program. In Quebec, when an employer makes a preventive withdrawal request because the pregnant worker is deemed to be at risk, the CLSC physicians are the ones who study the request. It is truly a medical issue, and the risks have to be assessed from a medical perspective. What will happen when a medical certificate is challenged, for example? Will employment insurance officials analyze the challenge to the medical certificate?

Regarding preventive withdrawal, it is really important to have a specific process that falls within the medical field. This requires special expertise that the employment insurance program administrators do not really have.

What is more, there is really not much point in granting preventive withdrawal just 12 or 15 weeks before the woman gives birth. From Quebec's 36 years of experience in this regard, 94% of preventive withdrawals are granted before the 23rd week of pregnancy. In many occupations, preventive withdrawal is granted at the beginning of the pregnancy because the pregnant woman is vulnerable to certain viruses at that point.

I talked earlier about the advantages of Quebec's preventive withdrawal program, where workers receive 90% of their salary. Obviously, if preventive withdrawal benefits are allocated under the EI program, pregnant workers will be financially penalized because they will receive only 55% of their salary. What is more, since they are starting their EI maternity benefits earlier, they will have to return to work sooner.

In closing, it is important not to give women the impression that they will be off work longer under such a program. If we want to help women, we really need to support the provinces in implementing a real preventive withdrawal program. These consultations need to be done as quickly as possible.

Since Quebec has a program that has been working for 36 years, there will be no need for extensive consultation. The government just needs to look at it to see that it is working. Why should these women have to wait three years?

The NDP is concerned about that fact that the government is addressing a health and safety issue under the EI program.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-243, as put forward by my colleague from Kingston and the Islands, and to commend him for the work on this legislation and for raising awareness of this extraordinarily important issue about equity and equity for women in the workplace.

It is a sign of the times and the generational change starting to happen in the House as we see men step up in ways that are extraordinarily progressive. They find imaginative ways to address not women's issues, but societal issues that have a gender component to them and the gender analysis that is required to start to create a more equal society and also bring women into places where they perhaps would not have had the opportunity to work as a result of

some of the challenges, especially younger women in their child-bearing years.

The bill focuses on the health and safety of pregnant workers in the workplace. In particular, the bill would mandate the Government of Canada to invite provinces and territories and relevant stakeholders to consult on the prospect of a national maternity assistance program.

I have a couple of quick notes in response to the previous speaker.

As the bill moved through the process of introduction, committee, through the budget process, and now onto the floor for third reading, a doctor's note is no longer a mandatory requirement as part of this provision, as the issues that were raised and the concerns that were highlighted have been dealt with through the collaboration of cabinet talking to the private member's bill. The committee heard some excellent evidence to make the bill better as well.

Additionally, some of the flexibility that took away the pressure on the need for royal consent has given the bill more flexibility and, in doing so, has also accommodated the situation where an unexpected pregnancy, which also produces a child more quickly than expected, can now be accommodated in a way that protects the woman's right to ensure income continues to come into the household so the family is sustained and supported properly.

On top of that, we have also taken a number of other steps around EI reform and revision to make EI more flexible but, more important, more easily accessible with respect to the time from application to receiving benefits. This too was an important component that was added to the process as we were seized by this issue, in large part because of the presentation by the member for Kingston and the Islands.

We are looking to support pregnant women in the workplace. We are also ensuring we minimize and deal with the risks to their health and to the health of their unborn children. We are also ensuring that when the employer is unable to accommodate them through reassignment, there are mechanisms in place to support the family, the mother, and the child.

I would like to again state that the government supports Bill C-243, as amended by the standing committee. I will also take a few minutes to talk about some of the other measures contained in budget 2017 that also deal with this issue and work to protect the health and safety of pregnant workers and nursing employees, with which is also an important issue our caucus is seized.

Starting in 2017-18, \$886.4 million will be spent over five years, and \$204.8 million per year to make employment insurance caregiving, parental, and maternity benefits more flexible to meet all of their diverse needs of families. There is more to this issue than simply the situation facing pregnant workers.

With budget 2017, we are helping working parents face the challenges that come with a growing family and we are offering more flexible arrangements to pregnant workers. We are proposing to make employment insurance parental benefits more flexible.

Budget 2017 introduced choice and flexibility for parents. Parents will be able to choose the option that best suits their needs based on their work, their family situation, and their child care circumstances.

Private Members' Business

Under the proposed changes, parents will have two options: receiving EI parental benefits over a period of up to 12 months at the existing benefit rate of 55% of their average weekly earnings, or over an extended period of up to 18 months at a benefit rate of 33% of their average weekly earnings. In either case, eligible parents will receive roughly the same level of support.

Investing in EI parental benefits to make them more flexible is expected to amount to \$152 million over five years starting in 2017-18, at the rate of about \$27.5 million per year. Parents will continue to be able to share these benefits, and that is an important component as well.

● (1800)

Through budget 2017, we also proposed additional supports for caregivers. We proposed to create a new employment insurance benefit that would last up to 15 weeks. This new benefit will allow Canadians to care for an adult family member who is critically ill or injured, a benefit we pay to people caring for an adult family member who is critically ill but is not at the end of his or her life. This is a first for employment insurance.

Any of us who have dealt with family situations involving complex illnesses know that the severity of those illnesses do not necessarily give one a prescriptive timetable in which to take time away from work. This flexibility and acknowledgement of some of the challenges facing Canadian families is part how we are making EI more accessible, flexible, and fair. This new benefit supplements the existing compassionate care benefit, which continues to provide up to 26 weeks of benefits for those who leave work to care for family members in end-of-life situations.

Parents of critically ill children will continue to have access of up to 35 weeks. They will now be able to share these benefits with more family members as part of the flexibilities. To implement these measures, budget 2017 proposes to amend the Employment Insurance Act.

Additionally, our government is also proposing to amend the Canada Labour Code to ensure that workers in federally regulated sectors have the job protection they need while they are receiving caregiving, parental or maternity benefits. Of particular interest in the present debate is the proposal in budget 2017 that will also allow pregnant women to claim EI maternity benefits up to 12 weeks before their due date, up from the current eight weeks, if they so choose. This is how we have worked with the member to ensure his goals are realized. This investment in additional flexibility is expected to be about \$43.1 million over five years, starting in 2017-18, and about \$9.2 million a year thereafter.

The collaboration between the member for Kingston and the Islands, our government, and members from both sides of the House was valuable to advancing this private member's bill's policy agenda. For those of us who have watched private members' bills move through the House, sometimes with friction, sometimes with quite easy support, the work that the member did on this bill to ensure it not only got represented in the budget when it ran into some difficulties around the financing issue but by also working at committee with his colleagues to ensure he had an impact with his private member's bill, speaks well to not only the focus, but the integrity and the hard work of the member in question, and we thank

him. In fact, families across the country owe this member a debt of gratitude.

We are making these changes to the employment insurance system because we care about the well-being of Canadian workers. We made those improvements because Canadians asked us to make these changes.

Last year, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the member for Kingston and the Islands launched online consultations with Canadians on employment insurance around maternity, parental, and caregiving benefits. They asked how people felt about the idea of developing more flexible maternity and parental employment insurance benefits. However, we also requested their views on the idea of offering more inclusive benefits and leave provisions under the Canada Labour Code for Canadians caring for family members. This was all part of the process to develop this bill and ensure we got as much input as possible. Consultation does matter. It is not just a buzzword; it actually is something we do to improve legislation with Canadians for Canadians.

When asked about their challenges while being on maternity or parental leave, people mentioned that finances were their main concern, especially those who were in single-income families, and those with twins and multiple births. Difficulties finding suitable and affordable child care and problems qualifying for EI benefits, while being self-employed or working on contract, were also brought up. More than half of the participants said that they would prefer taking longer combined maternity and parental leaves for up to 18 months at a lower EI benefit if we could make that happen. In terms of caregiving benefits and leave, participants mostly talked about the financial, personal health, and emotional burdens of having to deal with these things without proper government supports.

Our government also hosted a stakeholder round table last November. Participants included representatives from the medical community, health charities, family advocacy groups, unions, and business associations. With respect to maternity benefits and leave, one of the things we heard was that early maternity leave was a health and safety issue and a human right. We also heard from stakeholders that changes to caregiving benefits and leave were needed to make those less restrictive as well.

Private Members' Business

We made sure to consult on potential changes to employment insurance with our partners, including the public, and numerous stakeholders. The implementation of Bill C-243 will have us engage provinces, territories, and the relevant stakeholders regarding the prospect of a national maternity assistance program.

Canada's employment insurance special benefits can be of support to eligible Canadians through important life events. Each year, these benefits help thousands of eligible Canadians to prepare and care for a new baby. We are happy to help. We are happy to partner with the member to support the bill. We want these benefits to remain appropriate for Canadian workers to help them balance their responsibilities.

Our government is on its way to make a fundamental change to the landscape for working women and men in our country all for the better, and in particular for our country's children.

● (1805)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege for me to be here on behalf of my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. As members know, I love my riding. It is an industrial riding and a union riding.

I am here today to speak to Bill C-243, put forward by my colleague from Kingston and the Islands. The bill raises important issues, such as health and job security.

Just as important for our government is our commitment to help the middle class and those working hard to join it. To respect this commitment, we have to give all workers in the country an equal opportunity. The government recognizes that pregnancy should not be a barrier to full employment. We recognize that we must ensure workplace health and safety for pregnant workers.

The Canada Labour Code has provisions that guarantee safe working conditions to all workers in federally regulated sectors, including pregnant and nursing employees.

We also believe that pregnant workers should be able to benefit from more flexibility when the time comes to take their maternity leave. This is particularly true in cases where pregnant women have to stop working earlier than expected because of the risks their job could pose to their health or that of their babies.

I will take the few minutes I have to talk to the House about what our government is doing to help these workers, as well as their families, across the country. In particular, I would like to elaborate on the measures proposed in budget 2017 to increase the flexibility of EI special benefits. The special benefits under the EI program help parents balance work and family life.

Each year, this program helps thousands of eligible Canadians prepare and care for a new baby or take care of a family member who is critically ill. It is our responsibility to ensure that these measures remain appropriate and accessible for Canadian workers seeking to balance their professional careers and personal lives.

Let us start with parental benefits.

Starting a family presents certain challenges, especially for working parents. Measures set out in budget 2017 offer these parents

flexibility. Parents will be able to choose the option that best suits their needs based on their work and family situation.

Under the proposed changes, parents will have two options. For the first option, which corresponds to the standard 35-week period for parental benefits, claimants can receive EI parental benefits at the current rate of 55% of their average weekly earnings for a period of up to 12 months. For the second option, the extended 61-week parental benefits period, claimants can receive EI parental benefits at a rate of 33% of their average weekly earnings over a period of 18 months.

These changes represent an investment of \$152 million over five years, starting in 2017-18, and \$27.5 million per year. In addition, parents can continue to share the benefits.

Moreover, we are proposing to allow pregnant women to apply for EI maternity benefits up to 12 weeks before their expected delivery date, if they wish to do so. This means more flexibility compared to the current standard of eight weeks. This additional flexibility is expected to amount to \$43.1 million over five years, starting in 2017-18, and \$9.2 million per year.

In budget 2017, we are also offering more support for caregivers. We are proposing the creation of a new EI benefit for a period of up to 15 weeks. This new caregiver benefit will allow Canadians to care for an adult family member who is critically ill or injured.

● (1810)

These benefits would be provided to people caring for an adult family member who is critically ill but not at the end of life.

This is a first for employment insurance. We are very proud of this measure. I must add that this new benefit would supplement the existing compassionate care benefit for people caring for family members who are critically ill and in end-of-life situations.

Parents of critically ill children would continue to have access to up to 35 weeks of benefits. They would now be able to share these benefits with more family members.

For some time now, we have wanted to increase the flexibility of the different types of parental benefits to better respond to families' needs. We made sure to do this right. That is why we worked together with all of our partners. I am talking about Canadians and numerous stakeholders. Together we studied the possible changes to employment insurance. Most of all, we listened to people from coast to coast to coast, and the changes we are making are the ones people asked us to make.

Private Members' Business

Last fall, we held on-line consultations with Canadians. We asked them how they felt about the idea of offering more flexible EI maternity and parental benefits and leaves under the Canada Labour Code. We also asked them for their views on the idea of offering more inclusive caregiver benefits and leaves for Canadians caring for a family member. We also hosted a stakeholder round table last November. Among the participants were representatives of the medical community, health charities, family advocacy groups, unions, and business associations. We made a commitment to take measures to improve EI benefits, and that is what we are doing. These changes would ensure greater financial security for Canadian workers and their families when they need it the most.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that our government is making a real difference for workers, especially female workers, across Canada. We are taking this action because their well-being, health, and safety are of the utmost benefit and importance to us. Giving everyone an equal opportunity means the middle class and those working hard to join it will be better off.

I can certainly say first-hand from the riding of Saint John—Rothesay that the response to this bill has been outstanding. Workers who are thrilled with these proposed changes come into my office every week, and I am honoured again to speak to these changes on behalf of my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

• (1815)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to rise again to address a very important piece of legislation that my colleague has brought forward. I first must applaud my colleague for advancing an issue that is important to his constituents and individuals for whom he is trying in a very effective way to advocate. He, along with the others who helped him bring this bill forward to where we have it today, has done an incredible job in making sure that we have advanced this debate. My understanding is that it is because of those efforts that we will continue to see this discussion take place in the weeks and months ahead, as the minister responsible will have the mandate to do the consultation that is so extremely important, because as we move forward, we want to make sure we are moving in the right direction on this very important issue.

For many years we often talked about EI, EI benefits, and the way we have evolved from a time when somebody who was laid off or released would have virtually no benefits whatsoever. Then we had a government that ultimately brought in a national program. As some provinces attempted to deal with it, we had a national government that recognized that there was a need to work with Ottawa in an attempt to bring forward a program that is really there for the worker.

When I think of the many different programs that government administers, for which government is ultimately responsible, I like to think that this is one of those programs that is probably at the very heart of protecting the interests of workers.

Over the years we have seen changes that have been made to tune it up, to improve the program, and we have something here today that is adding progress to that debate, that ongoing discussion, with the idea that we will see some very tangible actions in the not too distant future.

It is with pride that we think of the last budget and some of the things we have already incorporated into the EI program, something I believe we would all like to see enhanced in whatever way we can. It is important to provide opportunities for individuals to have the choice about when it is in their best interests to start receive those benefits.

I would like to read a couple of very tangible points that were introduced in the last 2017-18 budget, dealing with how we have enhanced EI benefits and leaves for parents. It is important to recognize that the Government of Canada is moving forward on those commitments to better support Canadian families by increasing the flexibility of maternity and parental EI benefits to better reflect the needs of Canadian families. This is something we have seen in a number of different measures, but this hour is to focus on some of those specifics.

These changes will provide more flexibility to pregnant workers to better take into account their particular health and workplace circumstances when choosing when to begin their maternity benefits. That is the type of flexibility that will have a real, tangible impact for many Canadians in all regions of our country. In fact, according to the “Employment Insurance Monitoring and Assessment Report 2014/2015”, there were approximately 169,000 maternity claims that were paid \$1.1 billion in benefits, and 191,000 parental claims, of which 86% were by women and 14% by men. This group was paid \$2.5 billion in benefits.

• (1820)

That gives a sense of the number of recipients in this program and the amounts that both workers and employers are contributing into what I believe is a very worthy program.

Between October 6 and November 4 of 2016, consultations were held to hear Canadians' perspectives on more flexible EI, maternity, and parental benefits and corresponding leave provisions under the Canada Labour Code, as well as their experiences in balancing work and caring for newborns and recently adopted children. A round table discussion with stakeholders was also held in November 2016. A summary of the consultations was posted online in February 2017.

I would like to emphasize the importance of flexibility. A pregnant woman now has the flexibility to claim benefits earlier, before the child is born. I have listened to many members talk about the importance of that flexibility in the work environments that women often find themselves in, whether it is on a cement floor in a factory, behind a welding machine, or any other job. Whether it is the woman's decision or the advice of medical professionals, it may be in the woman's best interest to use more maternity benefits before the child is born. This takes place, and we recognized it in the last budget. That is one of the reasons we made that change and provided the flexibility that is so critically important.

Government Orders

It went from eight weeks to 12 weeks to build in additional support. We need to recognize that not all pregnancies are the same and that not all women are engaged in employment in the same manner.

Nowadays, more and more fathers want to be at home to provide the care. It was very encouraging to see the number of fathers, which was roughly 14% back in 2014-15, and I suspect the increase in fathers wanting to take those early years is because they are so very important. I have been in politics for many years, and one of my regrets was not having as much time as I would have liked with my children, now young adults, when they were infants. Having that additional flexibility and allowing both parents the opportunity to share those life experiences after a child is born or providing a mother the opportunity to have additional weeks of leave prior to the child being born, for whatever reasons, we see as a very strong positive.

One of the common themes of this government is to assist Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be part of it in a very tangible fashion. Some of the actions in the last budget refer specifically to EI and making the necessary changes.

I will bring it forward to what we are talking about today, which is that there are always areas where we can improve.

• (1825)

We can in fact do better. I believe my colleague has provided that to us tonight, the ability to have that discussion, explore the issue, maybe listen to what other members have to say on the record, and look at what has been said in committee. We understand that there have been some amendments and changes since the bill was before the House last. That is one of the ways we believe the standing committees can play a very productive role.

I appreciate the opportunity to share a few thoughts and words on this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not say much other than to thank everybody who participated in the debate this evening, as well as the people who have taken the opportunity to participate leading up to this point.

This really is about trying to put the dialogue in place to change the discussion we are having about women in the workforce, particularly women who work in hazardous jobs. I hope the bill will pass and that the discussion can begin.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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): Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, May 30, 2017, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 14, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1830)

[*English*]

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. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before we engaged in the private members' business, I listened attentively to my colleague from Edmonton West and heard him talk about the need to consult very closely with municipalities.

I am glad the government does that as a matter of not just habit but good governance. I am glad the Conservative Party is starting to realize that talking to municipalities has a value, especially when they tell us good things and give us good advice. We can build a great country with them. We have been talking with municipalities about the need to support them with maintaining standards around this and the law enforcement around this issue, particularly in those areas where municipalities run their police forces.

We have met with the mayor of Edmonton on this precise issue and on other issues related to this. We have met with the mayor of Calgary as well. Are there any other mayors or reeves or local politicians in Alberta that members think we could talk to, many of whom support the bill with a great deal of clarity, to get their advice around revenue streams and other components of this? We want to make sure we reflect all of the municipalities and incorporate their perspectives into this process as we move forward with the best legislation around this issue this country has ever seen.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member made his way out west. He asked who else he could speak to.

He could talk to the mayor of Morinville, who is the president of the AUMA, whom we met with in Ottawa just a month ago. She expressed absolute disdain for the bill and how the government has not once picked up the phone and spoken to anyone in a rural area. She was absolutely disheartened by the government offloading all of its costs onto municipalities, while providing no support for policing and no support to the provinces.

Government Orders

There are a lot of people in Alberta the member could talk to. He could start with the head of the AUMA.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at this late hour, I am pleased to rise to ask a question of my colleague, the member for Edmonton West. My specific question is on the enforceability of many portions of the act.

It is fine to write legislation, even if it very poorly written, as I think Bill C-45 indeed is, but there is a lack of enforceability for sections such as how we will actually enforce the limit on four plants in a dwelling. For the marijuana tracking system that the Liberals have proposed in the legislation, there is no real money assigned to it in the budget. We do not really know how it is going to work. How will they track marijuana produced privately in someone's home or are they even thinking of tracking this type of information?

We know this means that thousands of joints could be out there that a person could then sell illegally on the market. There is really no way to enforce many of the provisions of the act. How does the member think the government actually intends to enforce these provisions?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the government knows how it is going to regulate or track this. Right now, we have a bill that would allow every household in this country to have four pot plants that could produce over 3,000 joints. There is nothing in the legislation about how they are going to track that. There is no funding for this.

When I used to work in Burnaby, I was great friends with the head of the Burnaby RCMP. There were such rampant problems with grow-ops in that area because they did not even have the resources to go after grow-ops then, much less when every single household will be able to have their own grow-op. There is nothing in the legislation explaining how the government is going to stop people from having five plants, or six plants. Is the government going to separate a building into apartments if it is a duplex, or if it is an upstairs-downstairs building?

The government has left so many holes in the legislation, we could drive an 18-wheeler full of pot through it any time.

• (1835)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of constituents in the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to highlight four problems with the PM's pot law.

This is a major piece of legislation the government has decided to push through Parliament. The government says the rush is so that weed will be legal for Canada Day in 2018. I am sure the Liberals want to have a great party next year, but I suspect there are other motivations behind this rush. Whether we are opposed to legal weed or support legalization, I think all Canadians agree, once they have learned the details, the PM's pot law is a bad trip.

As it currently stands, there are four fatal flaws in the Prime Minister's pot law. First, age restrictions are shameful. Second, the silence on edibles is deafening. Third, the costs are being downloaded onto municipalities, and fourth, who would benefit from the PM's pot law is a problem.

Those four problems must be corrected at committee, and none more so than the bill's treatment of young Canadians. Despite all the available medical evidence, the PM's pot law would legalize marijuana for Canadians over 18. Until the age of 25, the human brain is still growing and developing, and science shows that marijuana has a detrimental impact on that development. All the medical experts, including the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Association agree that anyone aged 25 to 21 should not be using marijuana due to the side effects on the brain's development. Let me quote from the CMA's journal:

The government appears to be hastening to deliver on a campaign promise without being careful enough about the health impacts of policy.... If Parliament truly cares about the public health and safety of Canadians, especially our youth, this bill will not pass.

This is what Dr. Prasad, president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association had to say:

There is a strong evidence-base showing that early and regular cannabis use can affect cognition, such as memory, attention, intelligence and the ability to process thoughts and experiences....

The experts agree that this law would fail to protect young Canadians by making it legal for young Canadians, 18 years and over, to buy up to 30 grams of pot. Of course, that does not even address the bigger problem with the PM's pot law, which is how it deals with Canadians under 18. The pot bill would make it legal for Canadians between the age of 12 and 18 to carry up to five grams of marijuana in public. That is 15 joints. All the doctors recommend an age of at least 21, if not 25, but the government decided that 12 years old should be the real cut-off.

The PM's pot law needs to be changed to protect the minds of young Canadians and prohibit pot possession for youth under the age of 21.

My constituents were angry to learn the bill would legalize five grams for kids 12 and up, but when they found out how the bill would fail to protect children 12 and under, they were rightfully outraged. They learned the PM's pot law is silent on edibles.

The legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington state has revealed a disturbing trend. Once legalized, the fastest growing market for marijuana was consumable food products, such as cookies, brownies, lollipops, chewing gum, and gummy candies, the exact types of products that appeal to children. The PM's pot bill has no controls or regulations on these products.

Government Orders

Our previous Conservative government banned flavoured tobacco products for the reason that they are aimed primarily at children and teenagers. Similar restrictions and regulations must be brought into place on marijuana food products to protect children under 12. Left unregulated, edibles will fall into the hands of small children.

The costs of caring for children who ingest edibles will not be paid by these Liberals, but downloaded onto our provinces and local municipalities, which brings us to the third problem with the Prime Minister's pot law. The pot law would place new burdens on local services, starting with policing costs. Municipalities in Ontario, already struggling with an infrastructure deficit as a result of Toronto Liberal policy that treats rural communities unfairly, have seen their policing costs skyrocket.

● (1840)

Ontario municipalities pay the highest policing costs in Canada. Liberal policy has shifted the burden onto smaller municipalities from towns and cities. In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, the Municipality of Greater Madawaska saw its policing bill from the province jump 192%. The Township of McNab/Braeside has seen its policing costs rise about \$650,000 in the last two years alone. Barry's Bay is looking at an increase of \$200,000 a year in policing costs. In the words of former Renfrew County Warden Peter Emon:

Not only are policing costs unnecessarily borne upon the residential tax-base, we are paying to enforce statutes which our municipalities did not enact. We are having real struggles accepting costs where we are footing the bill of federally and provincially-initiated legislation.

The costs of enforcement to municipalities will be astronomical. In this example, currently, there is no real roadside test for drug-stoned drivers. The current test can only confirm the presence of drugs, not the level of intoxication. Therefore, just the additional cost of testing required to determine the level of impairment alone will add hundreds of thousands of dollars to policing costs. In fact, the bill increases the role of police in pot enforcement, as officers will now be required to, among other things, measure the height of marijuana plants at private residences to ensure they are within the regulations. Residents will end up paying for the Liberal pot laws in one way or another. Demands on health care services, addiction treatment, and mental health services will also increase. All these increased burdens on our municipal services come with no new funding, meaning that our rural townships and small municipalities will be forced to choose between fixing roads and measuring pot.

Failing to protect children and downloading costs to provinces and municipalities are fatal flaws in this legislation. Those problems can be fixed by changing the legislation, but no amount of amendments can change the Prime Minister's real motivation for legalization. With the current government, all it takes is being one of the Prime Minister's billionaire buds to have preferential access to government funding and contracts.

The PM's pot law will have the effect of transferring the profits of the marijuana industry from organized crime to organized Liberals. Just like what happened with the Green Energy Act in Ontario, well-connected Liberals stand to make millions of dollars from the legalization of marijuana as owners of medical marijuana companies, law firms, and distribution shops. Just look at some of the Liberals who are already profiting from the PM's pot law. George Smither-

man, a former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister, is now a shareholder in a medical marijuana grow-op. Chuck Rifici, a former Liberal Party financial officer, co-owns a medical marijuana grow-op. Mark Zekulin, a former senior adviser to Liberal ministers, is now the CEO for a medical marijuana grow-op. Even the government's own pot czar attended a fundraiser hosted by medical marijuana grow-ops. We have all heard the term "cash for access", but this is cash for hash.

I wish I could tell Canadians that all of this is so outrageous as to be unbelievable, but this really is just business as usual with the Liberals. The only thing that is surprising is how the Liberals are not actually liberalizing anything. The regulatory hurdles facing prospective growers are designed to only be navigated by well-connected corporations. Farmers who have some experience with growing plants will need to buy a lot more tickets to Liberal fundraisers if they are going to have any hope of getting a permit.

The Liberal Party is falling behind on fundraising. That is why it is rushing through this legislation. It is obvious this is not about protecting teenagers and young adults, otherwise it would raise the age limits. This is not about protecting children, otherwise it would have legislated rules for edibles. This is not about saving taxpayers' money, the costs are just being downloaded to the municipalities. This is about Liberals helping their friends and lining their party's pockets.

● (1845)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just got off the telephone with the head of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the mayor of Morinville, Mayor Lisa Holmes. I asked her whether the question that came from the opposite way was true, that she opposed this bill. She does not. In fact, she said she wanted it passed faster, so municipalities can start to get the bylaws and enforcement process in place. She also mentioned that she has had several consultations with our government, including the parliamentary secretary on this file.

Members from the other side put up these sort of pretend arguments, reefer madness 2.0 perhaps, about the responsible and fundamentally important way we are regulating and legislating cannabis. As all this happens, they pretend there are mayors and municipal associations that oppose us, when quite frankly, they do not. All they have to do is talk to them and they will get that message. When they hear all of this, is there someone else they would like us to make a telephone call to, to contradict everything they have to say?

Government Orders

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I know the downtown, big city mayors get plenty of infrastructure money, so they may have money left over for the increased policing costs, but there is not a mayor, reeve, or even warden of our county who supports this legislation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I am very fortunate, sitting next to the hon. member, that I can hear her very well, but people sitting at the back, I am sure, are having a hard time hearing, because of the bantering that is going on. I want to remind hon. members that we do have rules. Please stick to them. It is nice to see both sides getting along, so maybe just come together and sit on one side and whisper, rather than yelling at each other across the floor.

I will let the hon. member finish her response.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, before this terrible law reared its head, municipalities were facing 200-fold increases in their policing costs. They cannot afford to have more police hired just for the sake of policing this new law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her contribution to the debate, which I consider to be extremely important. It is dividing Canadians much more than the government wants to admit, because it refuses to acknowledge that anyone might have concerns about one of its policies.

The Liberals think they have all the answers and are always right. They are the natural governing party, after all, so they come up with this great legislation on pot, and everything is going to be sunny ways, and everyone is going to smoke pot, and everything is going to be so awesome, and there will be no more organized crime, and young people will be protected and can smoke their joints in peace. That is not really how it is going to work though.

They tell us that everything will be easy and everyone is okay with this. Not so. Not in Quebec, anyway. The government is going to hold its own consultation. Many surveys have shown that people in Quebec are concerned.

You do not want to hear about their concerns. You just want to carry on and keep your little promises. Another very worrisome thing is the money that you are getting from your friends at the cannabis production companies.

You are laughing because you think you are above suspicion, but the truth is that you are just spinning this the way you want. The truth is that you are dragging the entire country into a war—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. I would remind the hon. member to address his comments to the Chair. I am sure that he was not addressing them to me, but rather to the members opposite.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I used the word “war”, but it was not the right word. The Liberals are dragging the entire country into a series of distressing consultations.

Does my colleague not have the impression that she is having to face a big communications campaign plagued with problems and

that the government across is hurrying to raise funds for its own election bank?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I agree. The Liberals are spinning, rolling, whatever they do with the marijuana to enrich their friends. In fact, this is what happened in Ontario all over again. First, it was big contracts to wind turbine owners, one of which happened to be the president of the Ontario Liberal Party at the time. They awarded all these contracts, and our constituents, as a consequence, have to pay far more per kilowatt hour for hydro.

All this is doing is enriching the Liberal Party's friends by providing them with the contracts and the grow-ops. That is how they are making the money. Because they are Liberal friends and well connected, they get the permits. In turn, when the profits start coming through, they will be making donations to keep this party going.

• (1850)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak to this important piece of legislation, a bill that would legalize and regulate the possession and sale of marijuana in Canada.

The NDP has been calling for the decriminalization of marijuana for 45 years. We support the legalization of marijuana as long as it is not marketed to children, as long as it generates reliable funding for public health programs, prevention, the treatment of addictions, funding for health research, and an effective impaired driving strategy.

Since the impaired driving piece is dealt with in a separate bill, Bill C-46, I will not say anything more about that. It certainly has been something that RCMP members and other concerned citizens in my riding have impressed on me as an important part of this project.

We in the NDP support the legalization of marijuana primarily because its criminalization has been a failed policy. The possession and use of marijuana has been illegal in Canada since 1923, but what has that accomplished?

I would like to point out some facts. About 30% of Canadian youth have tried cannabis by the time they are 15 years old. Some 12% of Canadians over the age of 15, that is over two million Canadians, have used marijuana in the last year. Through my door knocking experience in South Okanagan—West Kootenay, I would back that up. Use in my riding may well be higher than the national average. There were over 100,000 drug offences reported in Canada in 2014, and two-thirds of those related to marijuana. That is over 60,000 drug offences with regard to marijuana in one year.

The present law regarding cannabis has done little or nothing to stop young people from using marijuana. It has given thousands of Canadians criminal records, and has created a huge underground economy, much of it dominated by gangs and organized crime. It is clear that the status quo is just not an option.

Government Orders

At the moment we are in a state of purgatory around marijuana legalization. The Liberals promised legalization in the last election. They were elected 18 months ago, so Canadians have been anticipating the legislation since then. Despite that, people are still getting criminal records for simple possession.

More than 15,000 people have been charged for marijuana possession since the Liberal government took office. Now it is clear the government will not complete this action for another 15 months, and thousands are still suffering under their criminal records. These records severely impact people's lives. They have trouble getting jobs and finding housing. They cannot travel across international borders.

The NDP is calling for pardons for all Canadians who have criminal records for the simple possession of marijuana. This bill would legalize marijuana for that purpose, and the lives of thousands of people have been tainted by these criminal records. We are calling on the government to implement an interim policy of decriminalization so that no more Canadians will receive criminal records for something that will be legal within months. These actions impact young people disproportionately, young people who will face a lifetime of difficulties if they are convicted of simple possession.

These actions also fill our courts with pointless prosecutions. Even the Liberal Party of Canada website states that "Arresting and prosecuting these offenses is expensive for our criminal justice system. It traps too many Canadians in the criminal justice system for minor, non-violent offenses."

These pointless prosecutions add significantly to delays in the court system, sometimes to the point of serious cases being dismissed. Since the Jordan decision on trial delays last July, over 800 accused criminals have been freed simply because their trials were taking too long, some of them charged with murder. Filling the courts with marijuana possession cases only exacerbates this unacceptable situation. Again, the NDP supports legalization, and calls for immediate decriminalization for the possession of small amounts of marijuana.

I want to cover a few points on what the bill sets out regarding legalization and regulating marijuana.

• (1855)

First, it says that adults over the age of 18 could possess up to 30 grams of dried cannabis and grow up to four mature plants in their homes. As other people have pointed out, there are regulations around the size of those plants.

Provinces, of course, would be free to set a higher age limit. An obvious strategy would be to harmonize the age of use with the age for alcohol in a province. Provinces may wish to have a higher age limit, as there have been concerns about the effect of cannabis on the development of young people up to the age of 25.

I was talking to a friend the other day who is in his forties now. He said that when he was young, he used a lot of marijuana, and it really affected his memory. It really affected his development, so he was pushing me to make sure that I stated that it would be better to have a higher age limit.

The bill would allow for punishment of up to 14 years in prison for any adult providing cannabis to a minor. Some may consider that overly harsh, yet it is the same punishment for producing child pornography or attempting to leave Canada to commit terrorism.

What the bill does not spell out clearly is what the tax structure for marijuana sales would look like and how taxes would be shared with the provinces. The tax system would be important. It would be best to keep taxes low enough so people were not tempted to buy from the black market, from gangs and organized crime, but high enough to generate important funds that could pay for programs generated by this legalization process, such as public health education, particularly on drug and alcohol use, and addiction treatment and health research.

In my riding, and I am sure across Canada, there are several programs that help people with drug and alcohol addictions regain their health and return to their families with whole lives. However, all the programs in my riding are struggling for funding. They could do so much more if they had the necessary resources. I assume, again, that this is the case across the country.

This would be an important goal of any tax measures around marijuana, in my view. I think we need to generate proper funding for programs that deal with addiction prevention and treatment.

Research on the health effects of cannabis, both positive and negative, are very poorly known. This is, in part, because marijuana has been illegal for almost the past century. Canada could play an important role in elucidating these effects.

I have met many people across my riding who use cannabis for medical purposes, for the relief of pain, for insomnia, and to reduce seizures. Many of them have had to experiment with dosages themselves to find out what works for them. We really need research to give us a better idea of what dosages, what ratios of CBD to THC, work best in each circumstance. The legalization of marijuana, combined with a revenue stream specifically for health research on its effects, would be very beneficial.

To conclude, I would reiterate that I support the bill at second reading. I trust that the committee will do its due diligence to answer some of the many concerns of Canadians, many of which we have heard here today. We certainly cannot go on with the status quo. I think Canada could play an important role in the world as it does this important work.

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his remarks and for his conditional support for Bill C-45.

Government Orders

The member suggested that he would like to see as an interim measure the implementation of decriminalization. Decriminalization is a process by which the criminal penalties that enforce a prohibition are removed and replaced with civil penalties. I would simply ask the member if he has given any thought to what would then be required to implement such a system. What legislation would have to be passed? If he has any sense of how this new administration of civil penalties might be administered, what would it cost to establish this system? There is no existing ticketing scheme that could be used, so something new would have to be invented. How much training would law enforcement require?

I would like to ask the member if he has any sense of how long this would take, how much it would cost, and how much work would be involved. Has he thought of that with his recommendation that this might be done as a simple interim measure?

● (1900)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, obviously the member across the way has more experience on the law enforcement side of things than I do. However, I can say right now that there are law enforcement agencies across this country that are arresting people and charging them with possession of marijuana. I am not a lawyer, but I know we could change that system. We could send out a directive to law enforcement agencies to lay off those simple possession charges. This would free up the courts. It would keep people from getting criminal records. We could explicitly have a pardon built in so that people across this country with charges for simple possession, and not just in the last year, could be pardoned. They could then get on with their lives and take part in society, as they should, instead of being saddled with a criminal record.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians elected the Liberal Party with a platform to legalize marijuana, I think they were expecting that an adult would be able to smoke marijuana without committing a criminal offence. That is what they expected. I do not think they expected that we would make it easier for children to have access to marijuana. I do not think Canadians thought we would see the 32% increase in impaired-driving other places have seen without addressing it with a plan. I do not think they were thinking we would have a 30% increase in schizophrenia and psychotic diseases among youth. I certainly do not think Canadians thought the government would abdicate responsibility and download everything to the provinces and municipalities without any money or resources to guarantee that public safety was protected.

These are unintended consequences. I wonder if the member would agree.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, right now marijuana is very easily accessed by young people across this country. I have just raised two kids who have done very well, but I know from them and their stories how easy it is to access marijuana in our community. I hope this law will make it more difficult. It may not. Right now we have a status quo where it is very easily accessible. We have a status quo where people drive while smoking marijuana. We do not have adequate testing for that.

The status quo is not acceptable. We have to legalize marijuana. We have to regulate it sufficiently. We have to have mechanisms to do roadside checks for marijuana.

This is all happening right now anyway. I do not see a huge increase in the use of marijuana because of this. What I see is Canada admitting that 30% of its citizens have used marijuana and that we should stop the criminalization of this act.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, forgive me for rising at this late hour to raise this point of order. I do not believe we have quorum in the House to continue the government's business, which I thought was the purpose of these late sittings.

● (1905)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Indeed, we do not. Ring the bells.

And the bells having rung:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We now have quorum.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my estimation, and pardon the pun, this legislation seems to be sucking and blowing at the same time. We are at the point where the stated goal of the legislation is to keep marijuana out of the hands of children. The government has repeated that line over and over again.

My premise is that if something is illegal, that sends a signal to children that there is something wrong with that product and they probably should not be doing this. Speeding is illegal. We say people should not go over 100 kilometres per hour. People do, but it still is illegal. It indicates the norm, essentially.

We have a product that is dangerous to children's health. It has multiple complications. The medical community has said to step back and look at it, that when youth are consuming it, specifically under the age of 25, things happen that are not good. Psychosis and schizophrenia have been tied to marijuana use. There are mental health issues in general and addiction issues. All these things come into play.

Currently it is illegal, so when we tell our kids they should not smoke marijuana because they could suffer from paranoia or schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, we also say it is illegal. If those reasons do not convince them, maybe the fact that it is illegal will.

Now we are going to be legalizing it but working to keep it out of the hands of children. That is where I get the idea that we are sucking and blowing with this. We are saying one thing one moment and another thing the next moment. We are saying that we want to keep it out of the hands of children, but we are going to legalize it. In my world, those two things do not compute. If we want to keep it out of the hands of children, we should restrict it more, and maybe we have to work on some of the other things, like education.

That is my opening point.

Government Orders

I am going to harken back to some things I read in the past. I am going to refer to the work of C.S. Lewis. He talked extensively about a vast array of things, but one of the things he talked about was how we function as a society.

There are rules that are not necessarily laws in society. They are rules that allow us to operate cohesively as a society. He said there are three aspects we have to take into consideration when we operate in society. His gave the example of society as a fleet of ships travelling across the ocean. He said we have to look at all the rules in society as if we were a fleet of ships. First, we need to make sure that the things inside the ships work well. We have to make sure the engines are running, the rudders work properly, and the hulls are intact and have no holes so they do not sink. We have to make sure the navigation systems are working properly. All these things are very important.

He says that as a society, we have to ensure that the things inside of people work well as well. We have to make sure that their physical health is good, that their mental health is good, and that they are safe from the outside.

That comes to the second point he makes. He says we cannot have these ships crashing into each other. If we are going to make it to our destination, if we want to keep our ships without leaks and make sure our steering systems still work, we cannot have ships crashing into each other. If we crash into each other, we could damage the steering system or the hull and cause a leak. Therefore, we have to make sure we have rules to keep systems in place that keep the ships from crashing into each other.

● (1910)

On the other hand, he said, that if they were a fleet of ships and they wandered apart from each other, there would be no point in their being a fleet anymore. They would just be one ship in the night essentially. He said that was as important as the other. There were two things they had to be very careful with: that they did not drift apart, but also that they did not crash into each other. That was tied in, again going back to the first level of where they had to ensure all the things inside the ships were working properly.

Finally, he said that they needed to ensure that all the ships in the convoy got to their destination. If these ships had left Bristol, going to New York and they ended up in Sydney, they would not have accomplished what they set out to do. The end goal, where the ships were going, was just as important as the navigational systems. If the navigational systems were not working, they probably were not going to make it to where they needed to go. Therefore, all three levels were very important: what happened inside of the ship, what happened between the ships, and that the ships made it to where they were trying to go.

When we deal with the issue of legalizing marijuana, all three of these levels come into play. In this debate, we typically only talk about the interplay between the ships. We say that if we use marijuana, there will not be any collisions between the ships so we will probably be okay. However, that does not take into account the idea that perhaps the ships will drift apart. We do not often consider that. However, individuals within a society drifting apart is just as dangerous and tragic as crashing into one other. We have to look at that as well.

The other thing we have to look at is what happens within the ships, within individuals. I have mentioned some of those things before.

For particular people who use marijuana, especially youth, the Canadian Medical Association has been strong on the fact that schizophrenia, bipolar, paranoia, and depression can come from marijuana use. Therefore, we might say that people must keep their ship in order, keep their navigation systems working properly, and keep their steering systems working properly, so they should not use marijuana. We might also say that marijuana can affect people's relationships with their parents, their spouse, and their children. Therefore, we want to ensure that their marijuana use takes that into consideration. As a society, we might tell them to be careful so they do not drift apart.

Finally, as a society, we want the best for the people. That is why we are having this very discussion. We are saying that we do not think children should be using marijuana because it is bad for them, that later on in their life they will regret their actions. Therefore, we should be discouraging marijuana use.

I have laid it out in those terms and that gives people the idea of why we are opposed to the sucking and blowing that is essentially happening here. We want to keep it out of the hands of children but we will legalize it.

I hope I have laid a picture, using C.S. Lewis' picture of morality and ships. It was a good picture, in this instance. We want to ensure we make it to New York, we make it to a fulfilled life. I am concerned about that.

We all know individuals who have struggled with marijuana use and it has had detrimental effects in their lives. When they were 15, they began smoking marijuana. Now they are in their 40s, they not only struggle with marijuana use, but also with where their life has gone. They feel life has passed them by.

This is an article about a 34-year-old gentleman from Toronto. His name is Mike Stroh. He said that he was part of a generation who grew up smoking current strains of marijuana, which had been genetically selected to produce a powerful high, with THC levels of about 20%. That was up from around 7% in the 1960s and 1970s. He said from the age of 13, he got high almost every day until he was 30. He was into sports and he wanted to do stuff at school, but he could not make it to practice, could not make it to tryouts because he was either up at night selling drugs or trying to get them, falling into a drug induced coma and then waking up in a mess.

I hope I can finish my remarks in questions and comments.

● (1915)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was drawn back to the debate because I thought we were talking about the federal marine act for a while there. The nautical references and the shipping descriptions left me a little confused. Then I heard at the end the member get back into harbour with an issue which he could actually tether to a dock.

Government Orders

What I can never understand from members of the Conservative Party, and perhaps the member opposite can help me, is that they describe a drug, which they see is so profoundly dangerous, that it can only be left in the hands of criminals to give to children. If it is as dangerous as the member says it is, if it has consequences and we believe it to be true, the bill seeks to prevent it from getting into the hands of children. We do the same with alcohol. Even though it has been legalized, it cannot be sold to children. We do not let young people drive cars even though it is legal. We put firm rules in place. We enforce those rules and we keep roads safe, keep people away from alcohol, and hopefully keep people who should not indulge in cannabis away from it.

If it is so dangerous, the current situation has led to the horrible story the member told. The current situation is the medical evidence. The illegal manufacturing and production of it is what has led to these incredibly strong strains because we have left it in the hands of criminals. Why will the member not support a process that strictly regulates the chemical content, strictly regulates who shall and shall not have it, and remains illegal for young children to smoke? Why would the member suggest that leaving it in the hands of criminals is more safe?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, that gets back to my opening statement. This is about sending a signal to society. I do not think we are sending the right signal when we say in one breath we want to keep it out of the hands of children and in the next breath we will legalize it.

I am not the only one who is a little confused about what we are trying to achieve with this legislation. Dr. Diane L. Kelsall of the Canadian Medical Association said there were a number of things wrong with the legislation, but if it were truly an intent to produce “a public health approach and to protect our youth this legislation is not doing it.”

The medical world does not believe we are trying to keep it out of the hands of youth by legalizing it. It is an oxymoron position. If we want to keep it out of the hands of youth, legalizing it is not achieving that end.

●(1920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I like seeing in these images the idea of social cohesion and consistent regulation.

The government across is not taking the necessary precautions with the provinces and is not beginning by creating programs to get youth under the recommended age for using this product off the street. No preparatory program has been put in place, and everything is being downloaded onto the provinces.

During question period, I heard the Prime Minister say that in order to decriminalize simple possession, first the law had to be obeyed. He said that the law remains the law. This means that once people suddenly learn that it is legal, the number of users will increase. However, there is still nothing with respect to prevention.

I would like to hear from my colleague about this.

●(1925)

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's rapt attention to my speech. It is easier to speak when I have a little response.

To his point on prevention. During the last government, we implemented programs to reduce the usage of marijuana, specifically for age group from 15 to 25. We saw a significant reduction in the usage of marijuana. That was an avenue to take. If we were interested in reducing the usage, there may have been some avenues, particularly when we have this massive deficit. If Liberals wanted to put some more money into things like that, I am sure they could have found some money.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be joining this debate at this late hour and also the debate on the amendment that was proposed by my colleague, the member for Niagara Falls, seconded by my colleague, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

I want to start, not with a Yiddish proverb, but with a quote by H. L. Mencken, who once said, “For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong”.

This legislation is just that. It is wrong. It is not wrong on principle, but it is wrong in its execution of its goal. The problem with the recreational use of cannabis is not addressed by the legislation. In fact, it would do the complete opposite. It would make it easier for people to use it for recreational purposes.

Before I continue, I should probably be clear. On the principle of the matter, I am not opposed to ending or reducing prohibition on non-synthetic narcotics, specially on marijuana. I actually held a tele town hall yesterday evening with constituents in my riding. It was made very clear to me that there were a great deal of users who used it for recreational purposes and another group of people who used it for medical purposes.

In the time I am afforded in the House, I will go piece by piece to different sections of the legislation to point out errors in drafting, mistakes on principle, poor execution, and bad goals, simply put.

In the preamble, it does not even cover the black market. There is nothing in the preamble with respect to the black market. I have talked about this before and I have asked members of the Liberal caucus who are not members of the cabinet why that was.

Section 7, under “purpose”, only uses the word “deter”; it does not use the word “eliminate” the illicit activity. Because it does not say that, I very much feel the government is failing from the very beginning. The goal of this should have been always to eliminate the black market, not deter it, not reduce it, eliminate it. That should have been the goal from the very beginning, and the government fails from the very beginning because it does not have that goal in there.

Government Orders

Decriminalization and/or legalization must be about ending the black market. It also has to be about making it as difficult as possible for those who are involved in illicit activities today to whitewash and to be able to transfer the assets they have illegally obtained into legal assets so they can then use to continue a business activity into the future. Whether these are assets they procured, or bank accounts they have, or simply a business they have created for themselves, they should not be able to continue that business with the same assets in the future. “Deter” is the wrong word to use in Section 7 of this bill.

There is also poor drafting in this legislation. I want to point this out because Parliament should not be granting justices, the court system, the ability to levy unlimited penalties on organizations, corporations, or persons. That is exactly what it does in subsection 8 (2(a)(iii)), where it says that it is up to the discretion of the court. There is no limit on the financial penalty that can be levied on an organization.

Sure, an organization will be found guilty by the time this comes to the point of sanctioning it with some type of fine or penalty, but it is not right for Parliament to say that it can be unlimited penalty to be determined by a judge and he or she will simply decide what the penalty will be. That is not good legal drafting. It is not a good legal concept. It also is not right to do it in such way that it does not give businesses the certainty on how the law will be applied. It also affords far too much leeway to the justices.

On international treaties, I have raised this before in the House. On a previous late sitting, I asked the questions about the three international treaties to which Canada was party. I find section 11(1) of particular interest. Again, it goes back to the principle is wrong on a section and the drafting is poor. It says, “Unless authorized” import or export of cannabis is prohibited.

Canada is a party to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988. We have not received any clarity from the government, or any member of the government caucus, on when it is going to pull out of these treaties.

When is the government going to give notice to our international partners that it is indeed going to pull out of these treaties? If the government is going to be seeking amendments to the treaties or an exception for Canada, it should say so. It should tell our international partners.

We have an international reputation, and over the previous nine years while a Conservative government was in place, we actually improved. People knew that when Canada stood on the international stage, it stood on principle. People may not have liked the principle that Canada was standing up for, and that was fine, but they knew that when Canada spoke, it spoke on principle. What kind of principle does this enshrine, when we say one thing and do another?

That is Liberal Party policy, but it very much should not be that of the Government of Canada when it is speaking to our international allies, to our partners. We signed a treaty, we ratified it, and we agreed to its content, but we are not really sure if we are going to back out of it, so we say one thing and do something else. Now we do not know.

Specifically under subclause 11(1), it says, “Unless authorized under this Act, the importation or exportation of cannabis is prohibited.” I very much feel the act should simply say, “No import. No export.”

What possible export market could there be? Is it part of the revenue-generating aspirations of the government to potentially find an export market for Canadian cannabis and perhaps charge a licensing fee? Maybe it will charge an extra customs fee. Really, Parliament should be approving an act that will say no export and no import from any other country. The production should be in Canada. It must be, yet this is the direction that the government has taken.

On drafting, another portion of the act I find very peculiar is “Cultivation, propagation and harvesting—young persons and organizations”. Then it says the following:

Unless authorized under this Act, it is prohibited for a young person or an organization to cultivate, propagate or harvest any cannabis plant or any other living thing from which cannabis may be extracted or otherwise obtained, or to offer to do any of those things.

Those are popular words of the Prime Minister, “those things”. On this particular point, I find it interesting, because what is going to happen if parents have in their homes four plants, which this legislation allows for? Can a dad call home and ask his 15-year-old to water the plants for him? Does this section actually make it illegal? If they are not supposed to be doing that because they are not supposed to be interacting with these plants, does this portion of the act make watering that plant illegal? The government keeps saying that this will better protect kids and children, but how are we going to enforce it? How is it actually going to work? How does that make it any better than before?

I have three young children and I am one of the younger members of the House. I remember my times in high school. This is often a comment I hear from other members in this House, especially in the government caucus. They say it is so easy for kids to obtain it today anyway, so really there is no difference between the legislation and maintaining prohibition as it is right now.

I do not think that is the point. I am talking about the specifics of the legislation. There is poor drafting and poor execution. That is where it matters. This are 33 regulations. The bill is half-baked. We have a portion of the legislation that is already there in place that we are voting on, and then there are 33 regulations. The meat, the context, the actual execution of the matter is going to be left up to the executive council, to members of the cabinet to decide. I do not think that is right. We should be voting on a complete piece of legislation, not just on the little tidbits that the government wants to allow us to vote on. Too much is left up to the executive.

I know I only have two minutes, so I do have a Yiddish proverb: a guilty man is always self-conscious.

Government Orders

I really do hope members of the government feel guilty at this point, because the points they have made on the legislation, the reasons they are doing this, will not be achieved. None of their stated goals will be achieved. The PBO's report predicts an increase in consumption for 15-year-olds and older by 2018, from 4.6 million users to 5.2 million users by 2021. In fact, The PBO even predicts that the price necessary to generate enough revenue for the Government of Canada to actually make this worth it and destroy the illicit black market would be so high it would never happen. The revenues would never be generated in the volume that the government expects.

Why are we doing this? If we are not going to be eliminating the black market, why are we going ahead with such legislation? Why is it not in the purpose? Why is it not in the preamble? Why has the government not made an effort to draft complete legislation that does not require 33 regulations and orders in council so that it can complete its work?

I simply cannot support this legislation.

• (1930)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to suggest to him that one of the important functions of this bill and federal legislation is to create a regulatory framework for the development of a robust system of regulation to control production, distribution, and consumption of this drug.

We are talking about strict regulation. The regulation does not necessarily appear in this bill, but this legislation begins the process of enabling Health Canada, for example, to build a robust system of regulatory control to ensure that there is strict control of the production within that regulatory framework. It would also enable provinces to introduce their regulations to control the distribution of the substance and enable provinces and municipalities to put in place strong regulatory control so that we might have safer, healthier, and more socially responsible use of this drug than currently exists.

I know the member opposite agrees with me that the current situation is unacceptable. We have the highest rates of cannabis use among our kids. It is completely controlled by organized crime, and we have to do a better job. If we are not going to strictly regulate this drug, what would the member opposite do? I cannot imagine that the status quo would be satisfactory to him.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I have had conversations with the member and I appreciate that as the former police chief of Toronto—I know I got it wrong before, but I will get it right this time—he raises good points. Prohibition on cannabis has been hit or miss, successful in some situations and a failure in others. I remember my time in high school long ago—and I will assure the member that it was long ago—when it was easy to find a dealer at the high school. It was easy for people to figure out.

The execution is in the legislation, and this is a typical politician's dilemma: there is a problem, and I must do something. The government has proposed this as doing something, but this bill is not doing anything. This is not achieving the goals the government set out for itself. This is just delay. Thirty-three regulations will have to be passed, and as a former member of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations, I remember how tedious it was to go

through every single government regulation being proposed to assure ourselves that the content was correct and met the 13 principles set out when the committee was formed. I simply do not see this being achieved with this legislation. It is a failure from the very beginning.

It is interesting that the member says there will not be strict regulation. We heard the complete opposite from the member for Spadina—Fort York, who said there will be very strict regulation. Liberals have to decide. Is it strict or is it not strict? Are they going to be telling the provinces what types of regulations to pass or not?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it will be difficult for the Liberals to make a decision on that, because they are improvising. It was sad to hear the Prime Minister say today that until the law is changed the law remains the law and people must obey it. When he said that, we were talking about the legalization of marijuana and the many people who are being handed criminal records for simple possession. When the law is changed, there are going to be plenty of people who will have cannabis-related problems.

What if the Liberals had a financial stake in the companies that organize awareness campaigns on the dangers of smoking pot before the age of 25? Would those campaigns be launched first or would the Liberals still start with pot production just for the heck of it?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments and his excellent question.

Of course the Liberals are improvising. We have seen it in the budget, in the way cabinet members are chosen, and in the way the Liberals decide what they will do for question period, namely whether the Prime Minister will be there or not, and whether he will answer all the questions.

The government has spent a few million dollars on a program to educate the public about the effects of cannabis on young people. However, the State of Colorado in the United States spent \$45 million on an education program for youth, and that was before passing a law that gave them access to cannabis.

We would have liked to see the government launch an education program for youth to show them that smoking cannabis is not necessarily the best way to spend their time in high school. We will see in the next budget whether there is any money for public education on cannabis targeted at youth. There is some money committed in budget 2017, but the Liberals are still improvising.

• (1935)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to talk about Bill C-45, the cannabis act and the complications it will create, the planning that is necessary, and more importantly, what should be done for many Canadians as the legislation moves to implementation.

Government Orders

One of the things that concerns me the most is that we will continue to criminalize Canadians. That will be quite substantial for their record, especially given that our neighbour to the south, the United States, has a much broader definition of a criminal record as it relates to marijuana possession. Despite state movements to legalize and decriminalize cannabis, border complications become an impediment to this idea.

Liberals do not even care about the substantial repercussions. They are indifferent to the fact a life can be changed significantly by a federal criminal charge and the consequences of that charge for the rest of that person's life.

What is more interesting is that as we move toward legalization, we see a culture that becomes a little more emboldened before the law changes. We see it every single day out on the streets. People may accidentally get bold with this.

In fact, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice mentioned one of those things. He mentioned a case in which a person now has a federal criminal record. He is concerned about more of those. That can happen, and there are consequences, especially in border communities. Given the fact that 80% of Canada's population lives close to the U.S. border, we will have implications.

In the area I represent, 10,000 doctors and nurses commute daily across the border. Thousands of auto workers commute across the border on a daily basis. We have an aging population now, and the first chance in a while for some people to get good-paying, career-oriented jobs, with benefits and a return on investment on their education. If they make a mistake now—if they are around cannabis, or somehow get caught up in a charge as we are making this transition—it is not good.

Let us not confuse what can be done right now, and decriminalization can be done right now, independent of what we are doing here. It is as simple as that.

The Liberals choose not to do this, to instead hang those people out to dry in the interim, because if a truck driver, a nurse, or a doctor happens to have a teenager or someone else with marijuana in their household, or if they are around it or smell of it or any of those different things, they could be implicated at the border.

Worse yet is if they have a charge already. I know many professionals that we have to deal with on a regular basis who are so important to the Canadian economy and will forever need constant management on the border. That is what we do out of our office. We work over and over on certain cases. They have no other criminal record, no other consequential involvement, only good employment records and contributions to the community. This is where the bitter irony resides, from this moment on until we finally move to legalization.

All those victims in between the chaos—the ones who are emboldened to do it, the ones who get side-swiped during the transition, and the other ones who are going to crack down on it—will have their lives altered.

● (1940)

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister will walk free and clear. He could do that because he thought it was just a popular thing for him to say. He had been elected as a member of Parliament and he bragged about the fact that he smoked marijuana, a criminal offence in Canada. Is it not a little ironic that he has a security detail around him and the known fact that he has participated was willingly expressed? The fact is that we still do not know to this day where that marijuana came from. Where did the marijuana come from that the Prime Minister smoked? Did it come from a friend, a family member?

The fact is that his life never changed as a consequence. He used it as a political opportunity, whereas the people I represent cannot get their records cleared. They are working day in and day out with no other problems but are affected by this thing from 10, 20, sometimes 30 years ago.

As we go down this path, we will continue to have those people who are caught at a disadvantage because they are not the elite. They are not the ones with the family name. They are not the ones from the political corridors of this chamber or other chambers. Despite this being the House of Commons, and it has been for many decades, we will see them suffer a different fate from that of our own Prime Minister during this entire thing. That is a problem. That is called elitism because someone is separate or above the law and can flaunt it for political gain. In fact the political gain is an economic gain, but if someone happens to be a truck driver, a business person, or anyone else, they have that blemish on their record forever.

Why can we not fix that right away? The Liberals simply do not want to. It is interesting because we have heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice talk about criminalization, organized crime related to this, which is very true and very important to deal with, but he was the same as the Prime Minister in voting against single-event sports betting, which has \$8 billion to \$10 billion of organized crime and offshore betting accounts stuffed to the limit because we do not allow it. It happens in bars, in basements, with the click of a mouse, or off of a phone, and it goes offshore with no taxation. That \$8 billion to \$10 billion are modest estimates and the Liberals voted against even putting that to committee. The bill was supposed to at least get to committee. It had actually passed in this chamber before and it failed in the Senate. The Liberals decided to stop it right here and not to send it to committee.

There is very little credibility left for them with that argument. Canadians who are actually arrested, no matter where they are from, from the day of tabling of legislation here until the day it is not, will have to ask themselves, and they will get an opportunity to reflect, why is it okay for some to puff up their chests and smile with bravado and say they are cool because they smoked marijuana and do it for their own interests, whether it is political or otherwise, and not get a record, not be held to account, at the same time as others face a record that includes criminality that will affect them and their lives just because they were not the elite.

Government Orders

• (1945)

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked a similar question earlier, but I got a somewhat difficult response that I did not really understand, so I would like to ask it of this member.

There have been a number of people from his end of the bench who have been suggesting that we should, as an interim measure, decriminalize cannabis. Decriminalization is simply replacing the current criminal sanctions to enforce a prohibition with civil penalties. It would maintain the prohibition. It would not allow for any kind of regulatory control of production, distribution, or consumption, but it would impose a system of civil penalties. It requires legislation. It requires a new infrastructure that would enable law enforcement agents to enforce those new penalties with a ticketing scheme. It would require substantial investment in the training of police officers.

Given all of that rather complex requirement, could the member advise me if he has given any thought to how he might go about implementing decriminalization as an interim measure, given that it would require legislation and a significant investment in infrastructure and training for police officers? Has he any thought of what it would cost and how long it would take?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to share that. First of all, I would not ram through legislation, like this minister and his colleagues are doing, in an omnibus bill. I would actually do it separately and I would bring the testimony of witnesses through the parliamentary process. That is what could have been done a long time ago. It does not have to take place now. Therefore, he is throwing that back on us because of the Liberals' incompetence and lack of political will. The fact that their own Prime Minister is sitting in his own personal electoral trap on this issue has come back to bite him, hence that is why he is doing it.

As for the cost and all those things related to decriminalization, that is always the Liberals' excuse for something that they do not want to do, but they always find the money for their friends, and similar to this, the Prime Minister.

In terms of talking about role models, how is it that the role model, the Prime Minister, gets away scot-free, when ordinary citizens in my riding who pay taxes for his salary do not? As a former law enforcement officer, what does the minister think about that?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for bringing up an issue that is also of concern to me in my riding. I am also in a border community. We have people who work on both sides of the border and go back and forth, and a lot of cross-border transit there including trucking.

When President Trump has been clear he is not going to legalize marijuana and Canadians are going to be seriously impacted when they cross the border, I do not understand why the current government has done nothing to address that issue, in addition to the multiple treaties that the government is going to be in violation of if it does not take any action on that. It just appears to me that the government is in a huge hurry, without addressing any of the things that are the main concerns of Canadians. I wonder if the member could comment.

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, this is why I take this issue extremely seriously. I have witnessed job after job disappear in manufacturing and on value-added jobs, and I have witnessed those opportunities lost to Canadians through no fault of their own. There are cases where we have to continually help individuals because the officers change or the department changes or the way the Trump administration decides interpretation changes at the border. Most recently, Trump's immigration ban became a problem for a number of people who would otherwise go to the United States for hospital procedures because the Ontario government cannot perform them in our area and they cannot send them to London because it is life and death, or childbirth issues, or whatever. Therefore, on any given whim those can be made discretionary by the U.S. border patrol agency.

We see honest, law-abiding citizens who have a criminal charge against them on this one thing only, not even distribution but possession of a nominal amount when they were with their friends, at a party, in a vehicle, or wherever it might be, a long time ago, and they suffer continual problems henceforth. They feel the bitter irony of a place like Ottawa where the elite get away with doing what they have paid for.

• (1950)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre. I will point out to the member that we will be stopping in about five minutes for the vote.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-45. As several of my colleagues have already noted, the current approach to cannabis is not working. It has allowed criminals and organized crime to profit while failing to keep cannabis out of the hands of Canadian youth. In many cases, it is easier for our kids to buy cannabis than cigarettes, and the evidence shows that Canadians are using cannabis in greater numbers. In doing so, they engage with criminals and take on the added health risks associated with consuming an unregulated product. In addition, they put themselves at risk of a criminal conviction and of the lifelong consequences of a criminal record for possessing even small amounts of the substance.

Forcing a total prohibition on cannabis occupies the valuable time of the police and criminal justice system and diverts resources for more important priorities without any appreciable public health benefit. An unintended consequence of our current prohibition approach to cannabis is that it criminalizes our children. I am certain that the intention of the 1922 legislation was not to criminalize children in future generations. Getting caught with cannabis and being charged opens the door to the criminal justice system, and for many, stepping through this door is a one-way journey, especially for vulnerable and marginalized communities, and has lifelong consequences.

Government Orders

It is important to pose this question to members in the House. Is it the position of the Conservative opposition that Canadian adults between 18 and 25 lack the maturity and intelligence to make informed choices about their own health? They can get married, get a mortgage, build a career, start families, yet the Conservatives think that these Canadians cannot make informed choices about their own health.

I would say that we need to look at some parallels in the past. When I was growing up in the 1970s, Canadians had two choices if they wanted to gamble. The first choice was to go to Las Vegas. The second choice was to stay here and participate in illegal gambling dens. If we looked around the country, there were active anti-gang units within police forces. Why? It was because they were responsible for curbing the illegal behaviour of Canadians.

One of the great things about Canada is that our country has enshrined the rule of law, and what is important is that Canadians respect the rule of law. The laws that we pass in the chamber matter. When Canadians have a safer, legal, more socially accepted option, they choose it.

What happened in the 1970s? Governments made policy changes. They legalized and regulated legal gambling. What happened is that Canadians quickly changed their behaviour. They stopped going to the illegal gambling dens and started participating in regulated legal gambling. That changed the stranglehold that the criminal-controlled element of gambling had on that sector. Governments competed, governments drew down the price, people voted with their feet, and the criminal gangs could no longer compete with the governments. Then the criminal gangs left the sector, but more importantly, Canadians who have addictions to gambling can now get the supports they need, paid for in part by the revenues that this legal, regulated gambling now generates.

It would be hard to find any police force in this country today that contributes any significant resources to curbing illegal gambling. Why? It is because policies changed and governments regulated a former illegal activity. The parallels to what is happening right now with the resources police forces must use to curb illegal drug use and possession are stark.

The work our government is trying to do is to strictly regulate and legalize cannabis in small amounts of 30 grams to make sure that our children are protected. At the same time, we are boosting the criminal penalties for illegal possession, illegal distribution, and illegal trafficking of this substance. Not only are we going to have faith in Canadian adults to make choices about their own health, not only are we going to work with provinces and territories to strictly regulate the production and distribution of this substance, but we are going to make sure that protections are there for our children, because that is what we promised to do and that is exactly what this government will deliver.

● (1955)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It being 7:55 p.m., pursuant to order made on Tuesday, June 6, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill 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.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 30, the division stands deferred until Thursday, June 8, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

* * *

[English]

SALARIES ACT

BILL C-24—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

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

That, in relation to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, not more than five further hours shall be allotted to the consideration at the second reading stage of the bill; and

That, at the expiry of the five hours provided for the consideration at the second reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), there will be a 30-minute question period.

● (2000)

[Translation]

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, it is disappointing we will not be able to continue to debate this legislation as we have had very little opportunity to do so.

Government Orders

We recognize the government is making changes in terms of salaries for ministers, but at the same time we feel a bit frustrated. It is a bit disingenuous for the government to say it is going to give women important ministerial portfolios while not giving them the full resources to perform those ministerial roles. That seems to be the Liberal way of doing things. There is the flash, and then there is reality.

I want to ask the government a question about an issue that really is our biggest concern. We are quite concerned about the fact that the Liberals are taking away the regional economic development ministers from Western Canada, Quebec, Northern Canada, and Atlantic Canada. Economic development ministers from those regions are going to be centralized in the Prime Minister's Office under the direction of the minister from Mississauga. We have heard ministers from Atlantic Canada complain about how slow things such as applications to ACOA, are being processed and decisions are being made.

How can the government justify stripping away economic development ministers from important regions of our country, ministers who know their regions, and should be making decisions in their regions?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and to hear that the member wants to debate this legislation. We too recognize the importance of this legislation. We recognize the importance of a one-tier ministry where a minister is a minister is a minister. With respect to the member's question about the regional development agencies, they do important work. We recognize they need to be brought together to be able to work together.

When the Prime Minister says we are strong not in spite of our differences but because of our differences, and that diversity is a strength, he is also talking about the regional diversity of our country. This is important to us. We will continue to advance it. When RDAs can work together, share best practices, and also share their challenges, more Canadians will benefit. When Canadians benefit, the country benefits. When the country benefits, all Canadians benefit, and the country will be better off for it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since coming to power the new Liberal government has not been shy about imposing time allocation to shut down debate, even on very important topics.

We are talking about a major change in our society. We are talking about legalizing marijuana. We would have liked possession of marijuana to be decriminalized immediately because we know that 15,000 Canadians, mostly young people, will have a criminal record for their entire life because the Liberals botched things. What a mess.

I have here several pages of quotes on this mechanism for cutting debate short. I would like to read one.

[*English*]

One quote from the deputy House leader of the Liberal Party just before the last election:

The government, by once again relying on a time allocation motion to get its agenda passed, speaks of incompetence. It speaks of a genuine lack of respect for parliamentary procedure and ultimately for Canadians. It continues to try to prevent

members of Parliament from being engaged and representing their constituents on the floor of the House of Commons.

I listened to the good words of the government House Leader a few moments ago. She talked about the diversity of our country. Not everyone in Canada agrees with the legalization of marijuana, even if we know that it is a reflection of a change in our society. It has to be done right. That is why we are so upset to see the government once again cutting off debate. A guillotine is not used to cure a problem. Debate is continued because these are complex issues. We in the NDP know we are heading to legalization, and we support that, but we also support the rights of parliamentarians to a full debate. Canadians expect no less.

[*Translation*]

Legalizing marijuana will require quite a bit of work. We saw how the Liberals behaved toward Quebec on the constitutional file. Quebec was only asking to open a dialogue, but the Liberal Party slammed the door in its face.

It is doing the same thing here. Many families are worried about what we are doing. They want us to take our time and propose real solutions. They do not want the half measures we keep getting from the Liberal government.

• (2005)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go to a response, I want to remind hon. members that there are quite a few people who want to ask questions. If we can keep our questions and answers as close to one minute as possible, it would facilitate it for everyone.

The hon. government House leader.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we want the House of Commons to be effective and for all parties to agree to work here together and study legislation in the best interests of all Canadians.

[*English*]

I know we can work better together in this place. When it comes to this government, we have taken unprecedented levels of consultation to ensure that all voices are being listened to. We took on an ambitious agenda to ensure that we are representing the best interests of Canadians. For us to do that, it is important that we hear from Canadians, and that we hear from Canadians with a diversity of opinions, so that we can better represent them to ensure the legislation works in their best interests. That is exactly what we are here to do.

Therefore, I agree with the member that we can work better together in this place, and that diversity of opinion is needed and appreciated. I look forward to continuing to work with him and his party, as well as all members in this place.

Government Orders

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am just astounded at the incompetence of the government, with its mismanagement of the legislative agenda, and with the time that has been wasted up to this point. I can remember talking for days about minor environmental changes to Rouge Park that the average Canadian could probably care less about. Meanwhile, we have significant issues here, in this case, with this particular shutdown, with creating jobs. What could be more important to Canadians than creating jobs?

How do we create jobs? By looking at all of the opportunities across the country. How many sets of eyes do we want to have in charge of that? We want to have regional economic development people. Instead, we have consolidated it to one person, who is now the bottleneck preventing job creation across the country. Now, instead of talking about that and having the time to have an accurate debate on that issue, we have the government shutting it down, and then introducing frivolous motions through the week of things that have already been discussed in this House and voted on. The government's incompetence is no excuse for shutting down the debate.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I find it unfortunate that the member has to use such language in a place that really should be above that. For the member to imply that it was a waste of time to talk about Rouge Park, something that was important to the people in that community, is unfortunate.

What is more important to know is that, this year, as we celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary, we have opened up national parks and conservation areas, because we know the importance of them. When it comes to the tourism industry there are 1.7 million jobs, jobs that everyday Canadians care about, because that is what supports their families and puts food on their table. Those are the people who we are working hard for.

It is unfortunate that the member finds those jobs, and those people not worthy of the time in this place. This government and I will always fight for those communications. We find every single voice in this House important, regardless of what we are debating, because we know the voices of Canadians matter, and we are committed to ensuring their voices will be heard in this place.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members know, this bill was originally put on notice back in June 2016, yet it has been languishing, unloved, and unmoved pretty much ever since. At the same time, these ministers in question have been receiving their payment. How are they being paid these extra salaries? Through the estimates, a process that not only I would argue is inappropriate but so does the other place itself. The national finance committee of the other place argued:

Our committee is concerned about the recurrent practice of using supplementary estimates to pay certain ministers' salaries prior to the enactment of amendments to the Salaries Act, and raises this question in the context of Bill C-24.

Here we have a bill that has been here for over a year, the minister has been getting paid through the back door, through the estimates. Why is it that in the dying days of this session, all of a sudden the government sees this as a priority?

•(2010)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and respond to the member's question. We know that this government has been working on many legislative priorities in the best interests of Canadians. All members of the ministry have had equal status since our first day in office. I am pleased to have introduced this important legislation to ensure, and formally recognize, that a minister is a minister is a minister.

It is interesting that the member would talk about the back door. Under the previous government, there were important measures that were often brought through the back door, not providing members of Parliament the opportunity to debate them, because it knew that it could put in the quick bits, bring them in the back door, and not provide all members in this place the opportunity to debate and represent the voices of their constituents.

We have committed to Canadians that we would do things differently. We promised a more open and transparent government. I can understand that the members opposite have a hard time—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe I am hearing the House leader tell us that it is okay for them to do it because someone did it once before in another government. I cannot believe that the rhetoric we are hearing in this place will be heard as genuine by Canadians. It is so shallow and so repetitive that it is becoming a joke. Frankly, it is very insulting to be sitting here until midnight, as committed and dedicated as we all are, for the kind of substance being thrown at us by the governing party. This is really upsetting. We can hear the Liberals convincing themselves of their own argument. This brainwashing and rhetoric is very frustrating. Canadians are seeing it, and I am starting to feel like this is some kind of joke and there has to be a hidden camera somewhere. This is ridiculous.

I want all Canadians listening to know that they can look up in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* a definition for ministers. What is happening here, removing the ministerial title for regional economic development, is counter to what the House leader is saying tonight.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, in this place there is a lot talking, and sometimes there is not enough listening. I believe that the member for Windsor—Tecumseh is mistaken. Those were not the comments I made. I encourage her to check the record so she can see the comments I made.

I have never said that because the previous government did it, it is okay to do it. What I am saying is that it is important that the ambitious agenda this government has received from Canadians be advanced.

We know the importance of the portfolios and the ministers in these positions. We know that a minister is a minister is a minister. When it comes to the regional development agencies and the economic diversity of the country, they are important. We know that they need to work better together. We continue to support the important work the RDAs do. We know that they need to be supported so that the economic benefits for Canadians are in the best interest of the entire country.

Government Orders

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the government House leader said is so absurd that it could not go unchallenged. She talked about so-called unprecedented consultations and waxed, I would say aimlessly, about the importance of hearing the diversity of opinions while we are debating a time allocation motion that prevents the diverse opinions here in this House from being heard.

It is absolutely ridiculous. I would like her to maybe try it one more time, and let us see what we get.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member does not understand that we are at second reading and this legislation will be advanced to committee.

Committees do very important work in this place and in the process when it comes to legislation. We know that the previous government had no appreciation of committees so that they could do the independent work they do. They hear from witnesses. They study legislation clause by clause, phrase by phrase.

This government knows the importance of committees. That is why we have increased their resources, because they have to do important work. They can look at this legislation. They can hear from witnesses and hear from stakeholders to recognize why this legislation needs to be advanced, and I hope the member is part of that process.

• (2015)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of our Prime Minister, who was very courageous, wise, and forward thinking when he appointed a cabinet that had gender equality. I am very proud of that.

Here we are talking about a situation where all ministers will be equal, so no matter what one's gender or title, it is equality one will experience. I believe that is the only fair way of working together and having a working relationship where everyone is respected and treated fairly and equally.

How will this impact working relationships in a very positive way so that everyone at the cabinet table feels heard, feels equal, and feels valued? I would appreciate the government House leader's comments on that question.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question, and I appreciate the ability to respond.

To be around the cabinet table and hear the diversity of opinions matters. When the Prime Minister appointed a cabinet in which there were the same number of men and women, that was a really empowering moment for Canadians. I cannot tell the House the number of people I speak to who aspire to and want to run to be part of this place. We know we need more women in this place. We know we need representation from more under-represented groups. That is part of the mandate I have received. That is important.

This legislation treats a minister as a minister as a minister. Why should the Minister of Status of Women or the Minister of Science or any other minister not be equal to any other minister? We know that the work they do is imperative to the functioning of this country. We will continue to advance that.

I agree that the actions the Prime Minister has taken are unprecedented. They were needed, and Canadians are appreciating it.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a former minister of state for seniors, I think I have the most powerful authority to tell the government side what exactly Bill C-24 means.

If the Liberals really believed in elevating women, they should have been given full ministerial positions. Is the government claiming that the only way to elevate women is by appointing them to an inferior position and then elevating that position?

The Liberals talk about equal work for equal pay. Without giving equal resources, such as a deputy minister and a full budget, how can they call that equality?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I am sure members would call that equality. What is unfortunate is that the previous government did not recognize that, but this government does.

When we talk about our seniors, we are talking about the fastest-growing demographic. We know the numbers. Their voice should be equal to any other portfolio around that table.

The member speaks about nuance and details. What is important is the ability to represent stakeholders and to be the voice for people who need to be represented around the cabinet table when the decisions are being made. That is exactly the case, and that is why we are saying that a minister is a minister is a minister. It is important that we treat all ministers equally, especially when it comes to seniors. This population has contributed to the best interests of our country for a lifetime, and it is important that they be treated equally as well.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind hon. members that when another hon. member has the floor, members should not be interrupting them when they are trying to make comments. It is also difficult for other members to hear the answers or questions, as the case may be. I implore hon. members to keep the noise to a minimum when another member has the floor. Questions.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in reference to the hon. government House leader's comment that a minister is a minister is a minister, that is not quite the way it is, because not all ministers have equal portfolios and equal resources for dispatching their duties. That needs to be recognized, and it has been in previous Parliaments.

We know one thing for sure, that a Liberal is a Liberal is a Liberal. Eventually a Liberal behaves like a Liberal. A Liberal displays those attitudes of arrogance and unethical behaviour. When they talk about paying their junior ministers a senior minister's salary, they do it through a backdoor through the estimates. That is just plain unethical.

• (2020)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the member in regard to recognizing the importance of the work we do in this place.

Government Orders

Ministers have portfolios to advance the best interests of their stakeholders and Canadians, just like every member of Parliament has a role in this place. We know that under the previous government, there was a huge differentiation between cabinet ministers and backbenchers. The opposition, at that time, had no voice.

However, we see things differently. Every member of Parliament has a role to play. We welcome those perspectives. We want to ensure that all Canadians are represented.

The member talked about Liberals. This government represents Canadians. We are the Government of Canada. That is partly why I ran, because I was tired of the previous government representing Conservatives alone and not having my voice heard or listened to.

I will make sure that we represent all Canadians and listen to different perspectives. Whether we agree with them or not, it is important that we listen to them when we make decisions. We will continue to represent them.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, listening to my colleague across the way, I was compelled to rush over to comment on what she said.

My colleague talked about the Liberals. She said that everyone here speaks on behalf of Canadians. Let us talk about it, then. We too were elected to represent Canadians, and we too want to have a voice. It is not just the Liberal Party who speaks on behalf of Canadians. The Conservative Party does as well.

The member should know that, on this side of the House, we have the respect of Canadians. When we talk about transparency, we want actual transparency. We want to have discussions here, not on behalf of the Liberal Party, but on behalf of all the parties, because they all have a voice in the House.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, that is what I said. Each member works for their community. We will respect the work of our colleague.

We look forward to having the bill sent to committee, where it can be considered and where each party has a responsibility. We will also have the opportunity to hear from expert witnesses. We want to have an effective House of Commons where all the parties agree to work together and consider legislation in the best interests of all Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about ministers, all equal, in the words of our esteemed colleague. Is the government House leader telling me and the Canadian public that every minister the Liberals appoint is going to get a vehicle, a deputy, and a secondary deputy minister? Is he or she going to get staff equal to every other minister, and are they going to charge those finances to the Canadian public so that every one of their ministries has a full, complete staff, deputy ministers, etc.?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we believe that a minister is a minister, and every minister has been treated exactly the same way since we took office. We recognize the

importance of their voices. This legislation is currently at second reading. We would like to see it go to committee, where it can be studied. The committee can call in experts. It can study the legislation clause by clause, phrase by phrase. We recognize the importance of this legislation, and we welcome that opportunity.

The previous government would perhaps not have seen me as an equal minister. I am an equal minister. It is not just about the resources. When I have a voice at the cabinet table, that voice matters. As the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, I know that small businesses are the backbone of the Canadian economy. They employ 99% of the private-sector workforce. When it comes to the tourism industry, we are talking about a \$90-billion industry. We are talking about 1.7 million jobs.

If the member does not recognize the importance of the work these Canadians do, it is unfortunate. Perhaps he too should be part of the committee to recognize that our small-business owners are crucial to the best interests of Canadians and this country.

• (2025)

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question. I must have missed it, but perhaps the government House leader could inform the House when legislation was brought before the House to make the department of tourism and small business a stand-alone department outside the department of industry.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, for the first time in the history of this country, and we are talking about the 150th celebrations this year, we have a full Minister of Small Business and Tourism. We have an equal voice at the cabinet table. We are talking about 18 departments and agencies working together on a regular basis to ensure that their voices are being heard.

We recognize who the job creators of this country are. We know that they are small businesses. We recognize the importance of the tourism industry. We are talking about a \$90-billion industry. We are talking about 1.7 million jobs across this country.

When we talk about the tourism industry, and the backbone of the tourism industry is small business, every single community across this country benefits from the tourism industry. When we talk about inclusive growth, we are not just talking about urban centres. We are talking about rural and remote areas as well.

We know we can do better. We will continue to improve conditions so that Canadians can succeed. When Canadians succeed, this country succeeds.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back when the Prime Minister first formed cabinet, there was a great deal of anticipation as to who was going to be in cabinet, but there was a huge sense of pride. The minister is part of a historic cabinet, the first cabinet in the history of Canada that was appointed with just as many women as men. That was a very powerful statement.

The other thing is that the Prime Minister indicated that all ministers were going to be treated equally. They might have different portfolios, but when they sit around the cabinet table, they are all equal.

Government Orders

Because of the minister's insight from being part of this historic cabinet, I would ask her to reflect on how important the message to Canadians was and the sense of pride that followed.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, what a thoughtful question, and it is appreciated, because I recognize the value of it.

I was born and raised in Canada. I have been in the Waterloo region my whole life. Did I ever believe that I would be part of a cabinet with gender parity? Many Canadians did not, nor did I, but I am a living part of that team.

We will continue to advance the best interests of Canadians. I visit many schools, as do many members in this place. It gives many Canadians great pride to recognize the diversity in the chamber. When this government talks about diversity, we are not only talking about the diversity of the shelves that we occupy but also about the diversity of experience, the diversity of knowledge, the diversity of where people come from, and it is such an exciting place.

I know that one Liberal member is the first female engineer to be elected to this place. I know that gives engineers a lot of pride because they too know that they belong here.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous government recognized the importance of representation for Canadian seniors. Uniquely, there are more Canadian seniors than youth. In the mix of Canadian seniors, there are more women than men. I was honoured that the member in front of me was the former minister for seniors and, appropriately, a talented woman.

Why are Canadian seniors being ignored? Why are Liberals not appointing a minister—a minister is a minister is a minister—for seniors, and why is it not a woman?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: First, Mr. Speaker, we are taking the whole-of-government approach. Every minister has the responsibility to represent all Canadians. Perhaps the member was not present at the time, but even his colleague referred to herself as a minister of state. Conservatives saw the voice of seniors as a junior ministry. This government does not see it that way. We do not see it as being two-tiered. We see the importance of a one-tier ministry to ensure that every voice is represented.

When it comes to seniors, we know they are the fastest-growing demographic. I know the hard work that seniors have contributed to building this country. We will represent their voice and we will represent their best interests. We know that we need to treat them better. Unfortunately, under the previous Stephen Harper Conservative government, as it was known, that voice was not heard. It is heard today, and we will continue to be the voice for them.

● (2030)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

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 yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (2110)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 310*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Alleslev	Amos
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Beech
Bennett	Bibeau
Bittle	Blair
Boissonnault	Bossio
Bratina	Breton
Brison	Caesar-Chavannes
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Chan
Chen	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Dhillon
Di Iorio	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)	Fraser (Central Nova)
Fry	Fuhr
Gameau	Gerretsen
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Hajdu	Hardie
Harvey	Hehr
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Iacono
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Jowhari
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
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)	McCrimmon
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	MacKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Medicino	Mihychuk
Monsef	Morneau

Government Orders

Murray	Nassif
Nault	Ng
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
Ouellette	Paradis
Peschisolido	Peterson
Picard	Poissant
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Rioux	Robillard
Rodriguez	Romanado
Rota	Rudd
Ruimy	Sahota
Saini	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Schulte	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sikand
Simms	Sohi
Sorbara	Tabbara
Tassi	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesnewskyj	Zahid— 158

NAYS

Members

Aboultair	Albas
Albrecht	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Benson
Benzen	Bernier
Berthold	Bezan
Blaikie	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boucher	Boudrias
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau	Brown
Calkins	Cannings
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Clarke
Cooper	Davies
Deltell	Donnelly
Dreeshen	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Eglinski	Falk
Finley	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Hardcastle
Harder	Hughes
Johns	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Kwan	Laverdière
Leitch	Liepert
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Malcolmson	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Moore
Motz	Mulcair
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	Nuttall
O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Plamondon
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Saganash
Sansoucy	Saroya
Schmale	Shields
Shipley	Sorenson
Stanton	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Stewart
Stubbs	Sweet
Tilson	Trost
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vecchio	Viersen
Warawa	Warkentin

Watts	Waugh
Webber	Weir
Wong	Yurdiga
Zimmer— 113	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.**SECOND READING**

The House resumed from October 19, 2016, consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and address the chamber. Bill C-24 is one of those pieces of legislation that one would expect that all members of the House would get behind and support. I want to highlight three aspects of the bill that are really important so that members across the way understand exactly what they are voting against, or, we hope, voting in favour of.

One of the things that I am especially proud of is the fact that this government has recognized the importance of infrastructure in Canada in a very real and tangible way. One of the things the legislation does is reinforce that. It does that by recognizing that the Minister of Infrastructure, Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs is going to change to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. As we all know, the Prime Minister deals with intergovernmental affairs and I will provide a brief comment on that shortly, but I want to pick up on the issue of infrastructure.

I have always thought that all parties in the House recognize the value of infrastructure. The Stephen Harper government talked a lot about it. Their actions did not really follow through, but they talked a lot about it. The NDP members have also talked a great deal about infrastructure. For the first time, not only do we have a government that talks about infrastructure, but we understand the benefits of investing in Canada's infrastructure and we are doing it in record amounts. Never before in the history of Canada have we seen so much money allocated to infrastructure.

It should not be any surprise that we have a Prime Minister who has acknowledged that we need a minister who is responsible for and dedicated to the infrastructure of our country. That is something we as a government or as a caucus have recognized and believe in because we understand that municipalities have been talking about the importance of investing in infrastructure for years. It is not only municipalities. Provincial jurisdictions and many different stakeholders recognize if we do not invest in our streets, bridges, community centres, green projects, and housing, we cannot advance our communities in every region of our country.

Government Orders

For the first time we have, through the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, a solid, tangible commitment to reach into the many different communities in all regions of our country and invest in Canada's infrastructure. One could talk about the very direct benefits of x millions of dollars committed to a community, which will see the construction of something through that money, but we can also talk about the indirect benefits. By investing in infrastructure we are enabling our businesses, small, medium, and large, to be able to have a higher level of commerce. We could talk about our community centres or the many other investments in Canada's infrastructure and how they will benefit.

It was telling when the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities last week talked about the difference between this government and the former government when it came to real investments and announcements in regard to improving Canada's infrastructure. In the month of May, we made more announcements and investments in infrastructure than Stephen Harper did in four years. That is significant in every region of our country, including areas where there is concern, where many of the Alberta MPs are standing up to say they want to see more action by the Government of Canada. They started asking those questions well after the Alberta Liberal MPs were lobbying and suggesting that we needed to be able to get on the ground floor in terms of making sure that Alberta's needs were being taken care of.

• (2115)

That is why we saw special attention, from the very outset, paid to how we could work with the Province of Alberta. That is not to say that Alberta will get more. We understand the importance of treating every region of our country equally. Whether it is in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, B.C., or the territories, we are seeing incredible amounts of investment of public dollars in infrastructure, because we recognize just how important that is. It is not just announcements. We are talking about real, tangible dollars that are going to have a real, desired impact.

With the passing of the legislation, we would be sending a very clear message. The message is that given the importance of infrastructure, not only for today but into the future, we need to make it very clear that we have a stand-alone department of infrastructure that has the sole purpose of ensuring that Canada's infrastructure is moving forward in a very aggressive and progressive way. We have seen the minister do an outstanding job of not only using those public dollars but looking beyond that to ensure that we maximize the benefits.

With the infrastructure investment bank, we now have the opportunity for organizations, such as organized labour, to assist in investing in our infrastructure, as opposed to looking in other countries outside of Canada and using those union dollars, for example, in infrastructure. We have singled out the importance of infrastructure, and I am very glad that we have taken the time to introduce that aspect to the legislation.

I had the opportunity to ask the government House leader a question on this very important issue. I recall, so vividly, after the last federal election, when the Prime Minister introduced the federal cabinet to Canadians. We were all so very impressed with what we saw. We saw gender equality. We saw an equal number of women

and men in cabinet, and that is historic. I believe that we not only have a Prime Minister who talks about being a feminist but who is actually a feminist. He does us all proud with the types of actions he takes, day in and day out, to reinforce just how important it is that we recognize that women's role in society is not for tomorrow, it is for today, and where we can take action, we need to take action. We saw that as one of the very first announcements that the Prime Minister made.

When we look at the legislation we have before us today, we see it was not good enough to say that we were going to have a cabinet that was gender equal. We are also going to have a cabinet where every minister is treated the same. It is a one-tier cabinet. That is something we understand and appreciate. Whether it is the Minister of Status of Women or the Minister of Finance, when they sit around that cabinet table, they are equal. It is one vote.

I know the Minister of Status of Women has just as strong a personality as the Minister of Finance or any of her other colleagues, and she should have that equal voice around the cabinet table.

I am very proud that we have a Prime Minister who has recognized that we need to have one level of cabinet ministers. This ensures there is that sense of equality. That will not take effect once the legislation passes. In fact, that took effect from day one when the cabinet was sworn in.

• (2120)

The government House leader reminded me of pay equity. This is something we all talk about a great deal. I heard an interesting quote from a New Democratic MP across the way, and I want to repeat it. When we were talking about pay equity just over a year ago, I believe on an opposition day, the member said:

In 1981, Canada ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which recognizes women's rights to equal remuneration and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value. It has been 40 years since Canada committed to these three foundational documents, and we are still not where we need to be.

I agree. We need to improve and do better. Groundbreaking pay equity commitments were made by Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government. This is something one of my New Democratic colleagues from across the way highlighted. It has taken a while, but what are we saying in this legislation? We are saying that all ministers should receive the same pay. When we talk about pay equity, a statement needs to be made. I am not sure exactly how members are going to vote, but we have legislation that takes that into consideration. I suggest it is a wonderful opportunity. Instead of just talking about it, we can vote on the issue.

I again want to highlight there are five ministers of state, which we say are full ministers. They are the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, the Minister of Science, the Minister of Small Business and Tourism, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, and the Minister of Status of Women. They are the ones we said we had to change and put them in full minister positions, ultimately being one-tier.

Government Orders

I truly believe, whether it is sitting around the cabinet table or looking at departments, that if we wanted to do a department-by-department cross-check, one of the most important departments, which I have mentioned before, is small business and tourism. Earlier today, the minister talked about how small businesses are the backbone of Canada's economy. When we think in terms of growth for our country, small businesses have to be at the table. We do not have a minister of state responsible for that, but a minister who, when she sits at the cabinet table, is treated in the same fashion as any other minister.

Along with business comes tourism. We have seen incredible increases in the last year in tourism. We are talking millions-plus of additional tourists who have come to our country in the last year. It was 2016 over 2015, I believe, when I saw that number a while ago. Let us think in terms of jobs. If we ask Canadians what they are concerned about, those in the middle class or those striving to become part of it, they are all concerned about jobs. Think of the jobs created when a million-plus additional tourists come to our country. That creates opportunities. We take that very seriously. The minister who deals with small business, entrepreneurs, and tourism is just as important as any other minister who sits around the cabinet table.

• (2125)

That is why I would challenge members across the way when they start saying there are two tiers, and they start to favour that, or they have questions about issues of pay equity, or questions about infrastructure. These are all good reasons for why the opposition should be voting in favour of this legislation.

Another component deals with regional development. We have a number of different agencies that we are looking at to bring under one ministry: Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Western Economic Diversification Canada, Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, and Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency.

I am somewhat sympathetic to what some of the opposition members have said with respect to this. However, let me encourage them to take a broader approach to the benefits of having one of the ministers lead the whole issue of innovation, technology, and development. He, in this case, has a multitude of different programs that he happens to be responsible for and is doing an incredible job. All members need to do is look at some of the numbers that have been coming in, and the trend looks fantastic. He is responsible for those agencies continuing to be not only effective but he is actually making them more effective. We have a government and a ministry that is better coordinated to do that.

I believe that is the best way to approach it. We have a Minister of Health, and I will use health as an example. The administration of health care is a provincial jurisdiction. I do not hear members across the way arguing that we should break it down into regions, and then have those regions report to the Minister of Health nationally. No, we have one single Minister of Health who has the responsibility of health and all the components, including mental health, hospice care, emergencies, health accords, all that responsibility and so much

more. Even though there are differences in the different provinces and territories, the minister is able to pull it together and come up with some wonderful things.

I would suggest we have another wonderful minister who is able to look at Canada as a whole, respecting the importance of investments in our different regions, and supporting not only those regional agencies but also has his hands on a multitude of different programs, ensuring they are working as one, so that these organizations will be healthier. I do not know about the other caucuses, but in our caucus the ability of my colleagues to communicate the importance of their individual regions let alone their own constituencies to the different ministries, and advocate for them is very strong. I do not believe we are losing out by moving forward on this particular bill. For many reasons, I would encourage members across the way to have an appreciation that this is a bill that is worthy of support.

In conclusion, I have made reference to this before and other members have addressed the issue of why we are using time allocation. At times there is a need for a government to use time allocation, and I said that when I was in opposition because I recognized that. I also voted in favour of sitting until midnight, even when Stephen Harper requested that. It is because we are prepared to work hard in order to make a difference in the everyday lives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, and that is why I do it.

• (2130)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about all ministers being tier one ministers now, but of course, we know that is not true. The responsibilities do not match all of them. Some of them have deputy ministers, and some of them do not. Some have junior portfolios, and some have far greater responsibilities.

The great thing about Parliament is we are all tier one members of Parliament. We all have an equal voice. Of course, it does happen that the government then uses time allocation and shuts down debate on us, and allows its members to have a say within their caucus when introducing government legislation. However, we also know why there will be three mystery ministers added in Bill C-24, because the government will make sure the member for Winnipeg North, who has worked hard, will join cabinet. The minister for disinformation would be a fine title for him.

I would introduce a private sector concept based on my human resources background, pay for performance. I would introduce performance-based pay, and I know that the former minister for democratic institutions did not meet the requirements of her mandate letter, insulted the electoral reform committee, and failed actually to achieve what the Prime Minister and the electoral platform the Liberals ran on was set to do.

Would he agree with me that we should introduce performance-based pay for all ministers of the government?

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have to disagree with the member, and really challenge him to revisit the way he might be considering voting on this legislation. Let me just use one example. He points out the deputy ministers, and those ministers who have deputy ministers. The Minister of Status of Women, to whom the member made reference, has a deputy minister. In fact, if the member was aware, he would know that one of the most senior indigenous women is the deputy for that particular department.

In terms of getting the job done, we have seen the minister, along with other ministers within this government, demonstrate day after day that they know how to get the job done, something with which Stephen Harper's minister were challenged at the best of times.

• (2135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague will find I am already sold on the basic principle of equal pay for equal work, but where are the job descriptions? It seems to me that the Liberals are trying to quietly pass ministers of state off as ministers.

Here is a very simple example. When I ask the Minister of Science a question about pyrrhotite, which affects many families in my riding, I get an answer from the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. This shows, or at least seems to suggest, that a hierarchy is forming.

If a hierarchy does exist, then there have to be multiple job descriptions; in other words, equal pay for equal work does not apply. This seems to me like a massive cover-up by a government that appointed a number of women ministers without giving them any major portfolios. Now they are backpedalling by saying everyone should have the same salary, regardless of job description. Their argument is that every minister has a vote at the cabinet table.

I would like some clarification on the job descriptions of the various ministers.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, maybe the member across the way does not recall, but there was a commitment by this Prime Minister to be more transparent and accountable. Let me use his question as one of the ways we can demonstrate that. We all know that Stephen Harper, as the former Prime Minister, used to have ministerial mandate letters. It is something that is fairly common, but we did not necessarily realize back then, and I know my colleague across the way was here when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister, that it was a private issue between the ministers and the Prime Minister.

Along with the gender equal cabinet that was announced, and along with the announcement that there is only one level of cabinet minister that sits around the cabinet table, we also made public and transparent the ministerial mandate letters.

A good starting point for the member might be to review some of those publicly. They are out there to be found. If the member has a challenge finding them, I am sure we can assist him on that. I can assure him in a very transparent, open, and accountable way, we have a Prime Minister who shares with the public every minister's mandate letter. We see that as a positive thing.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see priority areas, not just for this government but for Canadians, in each one of these titles. We see it in the performance of each one of these women, what they are performing, and the sense of duty they bring to these jobs. I have to concur that their effort level and the requirements they are fulfilling, this type of a one-tier cabinet is absolutely essential. These are priority areas for all of us.

As the father of a 15-year-old daughter, and as the son of a single mom, I am proud to come to work every day with these fine ministers. I see no reason why they should not be on an equal par. Could the hon. member comment?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question gives us a bit of a mindset with respect to the importance of the issue of pay equity among Liberals.

Earlier today, the Minister of Status of Women told me that they were aggressively looking at ways to ensure there was more pay equity among federal workers. This is a very popular discussion within our caucus. I have had the opportunity to comment on it in the past as have others.

I can assure members that I have not only heard from that member, but I have also heard from the Minister of Status of Women on this issue. This is a very popular discussion point in many circles. It certainly is a popular discussion in the Liberal caucus.

• (2140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I never get tired of listening to what my colleague opposite has to say. I must admit that I was due for my fix because it had been a while since I heard him speak. It feels good. We are indeed in the House of Commons, he is speaking, and all is well.

I want to know if he realizes that his government once again promised the moon during the election. They came here and said that everything would be fine and that there would be a gender-balanced cabinet.

Am I the only one who noticed that most of the ministers of state in their cabinet are women? Now the Liberals are backpedalling saying there is equality because they get the same pay.

Is it not obvious that it is women who hold these minister of state positions?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member across the way will never convince me that the minister responsible for small business and tourism is a junior minister, given that small and medium-size businesses are the backbone of Canada's economy. Stephen Harper had it wrong. If he genuinely believed that small business was important, he would have done what the current Prime Minister did. I would have treated the then minister of state for the status of women the same and elevated that. They should all be equal, and the legislation would do that. We should be proud of that fact.

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister Harper at the time lowered small business taxes, which is the best way to help small businesses, not adjusting the pay of ministers.

I want to go back to my performance-based pay example and ask a question of the parliamentary secretary.

It seems that every time the Liberals talk about openness and transparency, they end up fleecing the taxpayer more, which triggers parliamentary investigations or the failure to appoint potential candidates to the position of official languages commissioner.

Why are we talking about raising the pay of certain ministers instead of lowering the pay of all ministers to that of those ministers who do not earn as much? Why does the taxpayer always wind up paying more instead of less?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, given the amount of time I have, I will pick up on two points. The member made reference to taxes and small businesses.

Need I remind the member that when we reduced the tax on the middle class of Canada by hundreds of millions of dollars, which affected over nine million Canadians and their families, the Conservative Party voted against that. That put hundreds of millions of dollars back into the pockets of Canadians. By doing that, we increased the disposable income of those Canadians, which allowed more Canadians to spend money in small businesses. What does a small business want more than anything else? It wants customers, and this government has delivered on all points.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has historically drawn a distinction between ministers of the crown and ministers of state based on the scope and scale of the work in their portfolio. For example, small businesses and tourism are important components of the Canadian economy. Indeed, they are important enough to warrant a voice in cabinet dedicated to representing their interests. However, speaking up for small business and tourism during policy discussions in cabinet is not the same as overseeing a volume of case work, which for example the minister responsible for Service Canada supervises. Nor is it the same as being responsible for the budget overseen by say, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The distinction between full ministers of the crown and ministers of the state is based on the requirements and responsibilities of the position, not how useful or how important a given policy area is, and certainly not on demographic characteristics of the office-holder.

This distinction is lost on the Liberals. In this bill, they are attempting to justify officially changing the title of various ministers of state to full ministers. They claim that just changing the names and salaries but not the responsibilities of ministers of state somehow make them equivalent to full ministers. This is not only disingenuous; it is actually insulting to the ministers of state in question.

When this bill first came up for debate, the opposition House leader accurately observed that it insulted someone to actually appoint him or her to an important but subordinate position, a position without a deputy minister, without a dedicated department, and without the sort of budget that accompanies a full ministry and then tell him or her simply that the positions were equal because they

would have the same title and the same salary. It makes the position appear equivalent on paper, but not in fact. The government should be honest with its ministers of state and honest with Canadians.

The discussion about equality between ministers is a distraction from the much more pressing matter contained in the bill. The more substantial concern raised in the bill is democratic accountability by ministers for funds they are supposed to supervise. Indeed, it is a shell game. It is a bait and switch, mere window dressing to cover for their plans to reduce democratic accountability by rolling six regional development agencies into one minister's office.

Before I continue, Mr. Speaker, I plan to share my time with the member for Richmond Centre.

These six agencies represent very different regions with unique challenges and opportunities, which is the core reason why these agencies exist.

I do not question the Minister of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development's capabilities. He seems like a talented and capable man. However, being responsible for so many areas at one time will pull him in too many directions, and that reduces ministerial oversight. If the minister himself cannot direct sufficient attention to these disparate portfolios, the task will end up falling to unelected staffers and unelected civil servants. That is not good for democratic accountability.

Canadians elect members of Parliament who serve as ministers. They do not elect staff or civil servants. If staffers and bureaucrats end up mismanaging funds for regional development, it will then be as a result of the minister not being able to have adequate oversight, thus there is no loss of democratic accountability.

Accountability for tax dollars is not just important to Conservatives; it is important to all Canadians. The real effect of the proposed changes to the Salaries Act has nothing to do with salaries. It is a bait and switch. It has everything to do with centralizing spending power in Ottawa and reducing democratic accountability for the spending.

Earlier in the debate on the bill, the member for Yukon expressed his disappointment that the House was devoting significant time to debating it at all. He said way back in October that he thought we would not need to talk about the bill and was surprised the opposition was prepared to debate it. I wonder what he would have thought then that we are debating this at 9:45 on a Wednesday night in June.

Tinkering with titles and salaries for positions may seem like small potatoes to some members, but these seemingly small changes do matter to Canadians, and people will inevitably wonder why newly elevated ministers of the crown have no departments, deputy ministers, or designated budgets. Canadians are not impressed, and will not be impressed, by empty honours and titles without commensurate responsibilities.

The measures of the bill and the disdain for discussion, which the member opposite displayed during the first period of debate, further provide evidence of the current government being out of touch with Canadians.

Government Orders

• (2145)

Instead of heading regional development agencies with ministers from the regions, the Liberals are handing over significant spending power to unelected civil servants and one over-worked minister from Mississauga.

The Liberals say that they want more consultation and consensus. Then they say that they want to listen to Canadians. Then they say that they want to co-operate with the provinces and municipalities. Then they go and abolish the regional ministers who keep these communication channels open. Rolling these development agencies into one minister's portfolio also abolishes regional voices in cabinet.

Previous governments routinely appointed these regional ministers as liaisons between cabinet, the provinces, and municipalities.

Living in the regions and in the municipalities gave regional ministers skin in the game, which distant bureaucrats and one single member from the GTA will lack. Without regional ministers, mayors and councillors will not have a dedicated regional level person to whom to provide their perspective on the needs and opportunities of their jurisdictions.

For a government which constantly boasts of holding consultations, abolishing regional ministers demonstrates a lack of interest in listening to local advice on how best to allocate funding. In fact, when the government says that it is holding consultations, it increasingly looks like a stalling tactic, delaying making a tough decision.

When the government wants to get something done, it usually just puts the bulldozer blade down and does it, just like when it ran over the mortgage and housing industry with mortgage rule changes in October last year, which were done without consulting anybody. However, when it wants to delay a tough decision or maybe not make a decision at all, it can hold consultations that last for months at enormous expense to the crown, such as it did with democratic institutions before breaking that promise.

Previous governments knew that regional ministers strengthened our federal system by giving regions a voice at the cabinet table.

Bill C-24 also asks Parliament to let the Liberals create three new ministerial level positions with portfolios to be determined later. They want us to authorize spending without knowing what it will fund. That is like asking for a blank cheque. It is like asking for a sizeable loan and telling the bank that we have no business plan, no major purchase in mind, but we are sure we will find a way to spend the money. We cannot do this with the government at a time of out-of-control spending, broken promises on deficits, mounting debt, and complete abandonment of an election promise to balance the budget by 2019. We are not going to give the government any more blank cheques.

Canada does have precedents for ministers without portfolio. They could be appointed as needed. They do not have to have space carved out long in advance just in case the government wants a particular minister at a particular time. At a time when the government is demonstrating that it cannot be trusted to manage public funds prudently, we cannot agree to these new ministries.

Canada does not need fully staffed ministries for sport, democratic reform, or small business and tourism with whole departments and deputy ministers backing them. These are important areas and it is important that there are cabinet voices at the table, but they are well served by ministers of state.

Canada does not need retroactive paper equality in its cabinet. Nor do we need ministers with blank portfolios to be filled later. Instead, we need democratic accountability and financially transparent ministers whose work we can understand now. We do not need an ever-bigger and more centralized government ruling distinct regions from Ottawa. We do not need unaccountable and unelected staffers and bureaucrats directing funds for regional development. Instead, we need attentive ministerial oversight on spending. We need responsible representation from regional ministers with strong ties to the communities they serve.

Perhaps the member for Yukon was right, that we ought not to spend a lot more time, while we are in extended sitting hours, on this legislation. We should just defeat it promptly and move on to other areas of priority.

• (2150)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little rich when I hear the member talk about regional ministers and ministers of state. I recall the Stephen Harper government and James Moore was the regional minister for Western Canada. We never went to the minister of state for western economic diversification. We went to Colin Metcalfe in British Columbia. Ontario had a minister of state for FedDev but nobody went to that minister. They instead went to Stella Ambler, who was the director of regional affairs and worked for the minister of finance.

I find it a bit rich that the member says we need a regional minister. Back then, we still went to staff. We did not go to an elected official.

What does the member have against having ministers recognized at the cabinet table on the same level playing field as their other colleagues? I find it a bit rich that the member talks about unelected officials being unaccountable.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, that is the bait and switch. This is not really about who is equal at the cabinet table but about centralizing power, and in this government, the only place one goes to get a funding decision is to Gerald Butts.

• (2155)

[*Translation*]

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

This is certainly a head-scratcher. What drives the government to come up yet again with something like that, something that is clearly just for show?

Government Orders

It is not clear to me and I just wanted to make sure that my colleague truly felt this was an urgent matter. I hope that all the parties know that parity, equality in terms of the proportion of men and women in cabinet, is a priority for both the ministers and the ministers responsible, right?

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the gender of a minister or a minister of state should not matter. If they are a minister with the responsibilities of a minister, they should be paid as such, and if they do not have departments to run and all of the things that attend those same responsibilities, they should not be paid as such.

Much of the bill is simply a distraction from what they are really doing with the consolidation of decision-making.

If I correctly understood the part of his question urgency, here we are with a bill that was tabled last June, debated a couple of times, and pushed down in October. Here we are, following a couple of days of debating motions on legislation that has already passed while under extended sitting hours. Here we are, moving on to the middle part of the night, talking about something that with better House management could have perhaps been dealt with much earlier.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a feminist Prime Minister. We have laid out gender equity as a priority for our government. It is a priority for Canadians. We have a gender-balanced cabinet. We have a pay equity bill. Why should the Minister of Status of Women not be on a par with other ministers? This is clearly a priority for the government.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, of course, by that logic they could simply lower everyone else. I reject the premise that everything always has to be about raising salaries.

This is again the distraction. The point is not what the department is or what the gender of the holder of the office is. It is about having a minister paid to do a minister's work, or a minister of state doing the work of a minister of state and being paid as such.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise again this evening to speak to Bill C-24, regarding the Salaries Act.

This bill aims to change five important aspects of ministerial roles and designations. These include the creation of new positions, the removal of several important positions, the creation of legal backup for departmental support for these new mystery positions, the transfer of authoritative powers, and the correction of references to the Minister of Infrastructure.

There are two prominent aspects of this bill that I would like to speak to tonight. The specific changes proposed in Bill C-24 that I will mention are particularly relevant to me, my riding, my province, and also my experience as a parliamentarian. In the previous government, I served as a minister of state, the role in question in this legislation, and I represented Richmond Centre, a riding in British Columbia, which used to have a regional ministerial representative at the cabinet table until the Liberals came to power.

As a result, this legislation directly impacts my riding, and I believe that my own experience has allowed me to have a good understanding of what is at stake in Bill C-24.

Let me start by addressing the first prominent aspect: raising the salary of ministers of state, who are women in the current Liberal cabinet, to be equal with full ministers. There should be more than that for it to be truly equal.

Here is my own experience. As the minister of state, I had my own team and budget, but I worked closely with the minister of employment. The most notable difference between a minister and a minister of state is that the latter does not have a deputy minister devoted to the file. Additionally, a minister of state does not manage the same departmental budget or have the same authority as a minister.

The Liberals are claiming that the changes in this legislation are just simple changes aimed at addressing equal pay. The reality, however, is that this is just Liberals being Liberals, just like a duck that quacks like a duck and walks like a duck is a duck.

I am always supportive of equal pay for equal work. I would not have minded being paid more as a minister of state. I did an excellent job, not because of the pay but because of an excellent staffer and because of my passion. I was able to protect seniors. I was able to create legislation with help from the Prime Minister to make things really happen. It did not matter if I was called a minister or a minister of state as long I was doing the job. I was proud of my ministerial position.

I am always supportive of equal pay for equal work. Unless these roles are made to be full ministers with the authority, responsibility, and departments that are required of all other files, I do not believe they will accomplish true equality. Moreover, we believe in a merit-based system. We believe in giving women an equal chance based on their hard work and abilities, not by appointing them to fill a quota just because they are women.

This legislation shows the government is only seeking to elevate their positions and salaries for political purposes, rather than using a merit-based system that would mean much more in helping to empower women.

I would also add that the government chose to appoint only women to the minister of state roles. That was its decision, and it does not exactly fall in line with the government's gender parity rhetoric.

Had the Liberals thought about that even before they appointed all the ministers, they would have appointed all the women as full ministers. If the Liberals really believed in elevating women, they should have been given full ministerial positions, as I said. Is the government claiming the only way to elevate women is by appointing them to an inferior position and then elevating that position?

• (2200)

Let me discuss the other issues in this same bill.

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The present Liberal government is neglecting the unique challenges and needs of regional issues in British Columbia and, truly, across the country. My province of British Columbia provides tremendous opportunity. We are proud of the role we play as Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific. However, with this great potential for growth, we are also presented with challenges that other parts of the country do not face. British Columbians are eager to overcome these barriers, but they do not see a government willing to support their efforts.

Stakeholders of our terminals are looking forward to exporting resources, while remaining committed to balancing economic growth with caring for our coastal waters.

In addition to opportunities presented with exporting resources, the tourism and the tech sectors are also expanding rapidly. We have a younger generation that is underemployed, but they are educated and eager to join the workforce. By not recognizing the need to address these issues by appointing a cabinet minister to take on this role, the Prime Minister is failing the people of British Columbia. He has also failed all the western provinces, which share similarities in their resources and challenges and the need for strategic planning in their economic growth.

I know that my province and region is not the only one feeling the effects of a lack of representation at the cabinet table. There has been significant discussion regarding representation of the Atlantic provinces and the apparent lack of funding and opportunities. In a report put forward by the Liberal Atlantic caucus, the members acknowledged that people have indicated that standard processing times have tripled due to the wait on ministerial approvals for things like programs or funding. I fear this will only continue for other regions. I would encourage the government to listen to its own Atlantic members and bring back proper regional representation.

We are always open to hearing ways to make government operate more efficiently. However, removing key regional ministers is a failure to recognize the unique needs of the different regions of the country. The Liberals' top-down approach to governing does not make government more efficient; rather, it is neglecting those it claims to be helping. Local jobs are at stake in B.C., and the Liberals are playing politics to make cabinet fit its agenda rather than listening to needs of local people.

I will also note that the removal of these positions is counteracted by the addition of new roles, for some of which we do not even know the titles.

I still remember how wonderfully our minister for western diversification had been working tirelessly for all the western provinces in the days when we were in government. That was the time when we could market our products collectively overseas and that was the time when we were able to create record-breaking full-time jobs. Trade is the number one job creator. Small businesses, as has been mentioned, are depending a lot on our trade opportunities.

Let me get back to the first prominent aspect of the bill. The Liberals are claiming equality to justify this bill. Equality has nothing to do with it. If the government truly wanted equal positions for every minister, the bill would have included the other appropriate

changes. Simply changing the pay does not change the role or level of work.

In Bill C-24, the Liberals have also opted to leave out regional representation for no apparent reason. I believe my experiences show exactly why the changes outlined in Bill C-24 are unnecessary, and I strongly urge the government to reconsider its decision to eliminate the role of regional ministers.

● (2205)

I believe it is irresponsible to assume that a single minister from Ontario can appropriately represent all the region-specific concerns, despite what I presume are his best efforts. I hope the government will recognize these concerns and choose to continue with the appointment of regional ministers, as has been the tradition for many decades.

Pat Carney, who was Brian Mulroney's B.C. regional minister in the 1980s—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am afraid the hon. member is out of time.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening throughout the course of this discussion to try to understand the viewpoint of the other side. We have contrasting management systems: the Stephen Harper Conservatives top-down approach; and the current Government of Canada approach, which is across all regions of the country, with gender diversity and all backgrounds, all at the table as one voice. We are recognizing that formally through what we are proposing in Bill C-24, where all ministers would have not only an equal voice but equal pay for equal work.

Could the member look at what we are seeing from our side and comment on a model of equal pay for equal work?

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I have no problem with equal work or equal pay. However, Bill C-25 has not addressed the other equal supports. If only the salaries are raised, without giving these now full ministers the true support they need, it is just window dressing. That is why this should have been taken out of this bill and discussed in greater detail. Being Liberals, they are very good at lumping everything together so that if members vote against the whole bill, they would be voting against, for example, pay equity for women.

Had they been really serious right at the beginning, they would have given to these ministers of state who are women full support. Why wait 18 months to do that?

● (2210)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think she just answered my question

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Does my colleague agree that, if the Prime Minister were truly a feminist and truly believed in gender equality, he would have appointed female ministers from the get-go and given them the full suite of powers instead of appointing them as ministers of state with fewer powers?

[*English*]

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the point. Liberals have been saying that they are feminists and that they value women, but right at the beginning, when they appointed women to these ministerial positions, they had already carved out some female ministers who were not good enough to be full ministers, and now they say there is something wrong with that. They then attached Bill C-24 to something else. That shows that they are not serious about this. This is exactly why I say that the Liberals are only paying lip service in saying that they want to give equal respect to women, but that is exactly what they have not done.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the incredible work she did previously as the minister for seniors. As I mentioned earlier, there are more women seniors in Canada than men seniors, and it is the largest-growing demographic in Canada. The previous government recognized that and was working hard for seniors.

I am also disappointed that the member has been ridiculed and belittled by the Liberal government, which is so-called feminist. I was wondering if the member feels that the Liberal government, which calls itself feminist, really is feminist and is really standing up for the dignity of all women.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what I have been saying. The Liberals only pay lip service. The fact that they do not even have a ministry for seniors, a minister of state, or a full minister for the benefit of seniors shows that they do not care. This is exactly why we have said we want to have more debate. They are now cutting the debate with time allocation. We represent our constituencies. I am standing firm to fight against this because of my riding, my senior women friends, and also me.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to say hello to all the viewers at home tonight who are paying attention to what we are debating, doing the good work Canadians sent us here to do.

I am pleased to rise to speak at second reading of Bill C-24, an act to update and modernize the Salaries Act. I would like to emphasize a few points made by my colleagues who have spoken before me. They bear repeating.

The bill would update the Salaries Act to reflect the structure of the current ministry by adding five titled positions. It makes good administrative sense that the legislative framework reflect the operating reality. The five positions that would be added to the Salaries Act are already occupied by ministers who are working on important priorities for this government and for Canadians: science, small business and tourism, status of women, Francophonie, sport, and persons with disabilities. The amendments would formally recognize that these are full ministers with equal status around the cabinet table, something we should all be applauding.

I wish to focus on the status of women portfolio, because our party and our government under the Prime Minister have much to be

proud of. Yes, I am a feminist as well. On our recent trip to Italy, I was proud to hear our Prime Minister speak to the Italian deputies about the importance of having a gender-balanced cabinet and of having young women be proud of their government.

Our government believes in putting an agenda forward that has gender equality. If we look at the policies we have adopted, there is the Canada child benefit, which removes approximately 40% of children from poverty, which helps single mothers. We can look at the recent EI changes in the budget implementation act, which give women or men a choice to extend their paternity leave from 12 months to 18 months. We look at the Canada caregiver tax benefit. We amalgamated three tax measures. Again, it is family friendly. For the most part, we know that women do a lot of the work at home taking care of their loved ones. Those are facts, and we have put forward an agenda that reflects them.

When I was in Italy with the Prime Minister, he spoke to the Italian deputies and the trade delegation. I saw the reactions from the speaker of the house in Italy. They commented about having a prime minister in this world who stands up for women and puts gender equality first.

I have two daughters at home, and I am proud that they have a wonderful future ahead, because they have a government that is paying attention to their needs and to all Canadians' needs. That is something the opposition parties can learn from.

Our investments in child care, the funds we have set aside and the work we are doing with the provinces is groundbreaking and helpful for working moms. We need to get the labour force participation rate up for women at home who wish to enter the labour force. It is good for the economy, for Canada, and for our future.

On infrastructure, Bill C-24 would formalize the naming of the ministry of infrastructure and communities. One of the things we ran on in our platform was to invest in Canada and Canadians through infrastructure. I am proud to say that we are investing over \$180 billion over 12 years, something that is growing our economy. Our job numbers in the last seven or eight months and our growth rates have easily surpassed the last 10 years of the Harper government. Look at the job numbers. We are leading the G7 in job growth and GDP growth. Our unemployment rate has fallen almost a full percentage point. It was 7% and change. Now it is in the 6% range. Again, it is something to be proud of.

At home in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, we are going to be getting a wonderful subway through investments in infrastructure. In Ontario we are investing \$2 billion in GO Transit and getting people home more quickly after work for their kids' soccer games, hockey games, or piano lessons.

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Those are the priorities of our government, and I am proud to be part of that government. That is why Canadians elected us. That is why Canadians sent us here and gave us the mandate to invest in Canada and Canadians from coast to coast to coast. That is something I am very proud of.

• (2215)

I think about the announcements we have made about clean water and waste water funds in York Region, where I was proud to stand with my York Region colleagues just two or three weeks ago. We put over \$50 million into projects in York Region for water and waste water treatment facilities. Canadians can be assured, and people in York Region can be assured, that their infrastructure is up to date, that it is modern, and that we have clean drinking water for our families.

Those are investments that pay off today, tomorrow, and for the years to come. That is something we are proud of.

On the infrastructure side, we are investing in buses, regional transit, ports, services—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening to the member's speech, and I fail to see how any of that infrastructure spending is related to the Salaries Act debate we are having right now on ministerial pay. Perhaps I could have the member return to that subject matter. I have been trying to figure out how it is connected.

I leave it to you, Mr. Speaker, to determine whether it is relevant.

• (2220)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. government House leader would like to respond to this.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is definitely relevant. Within the legislation, there is a change in the ministries. One of the changes is that it would establish a minister of infrastructure. I would suggest that any topic related to infrastructure—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I believe we are moving into the area of debate.

As I have said before, when the Speaker is up here, we hear stories, and we often hear things said and wonder how they are going to be relevant or wonder where they are going. However, there are 338 members in the House whose constituents put them here to speak about their constituencies and represent them. How they represent them, I will leave up to them, and hopefully they will bring it back and it will be relevant. I have a lot of hope in all these 337 members, other than me, and I am sure it will all work out.

I will let the hon. member continue, and I will keep an ear open. I want to thank the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

The hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, looking at the name of Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, there is no irony in “communities”, because Canada is made up of communities from coast to coast to coast. That is what we are doing and what our minister is doing, and I am proud to stand beside him in this House to invest in Canada and Canadians.

Again on status of women, I go back to chapter 5. We have created an equal tier of all ministries. This is why it is important for status of women to be a full portfolio, which it is of course. Chapter 5, a gender-based analysis, is a gender-based view of our budget for the first time ever. Women make up something like 52% of our population. It is our government that put forward this feminist agenda to ensure that women are participating in the labour force.

For small business and tourism, the numbers are going very well for Canada. We are attracting more and more tourists. When we travel the world, people tell us that they want to come to visit Canada and see what we are doing here. They like it and they like the direction this government is going. Again, small business and tourism will be a full ministry. Small businesses, or SMEs as I like to call them, are the driver of economic growth in my wonderful riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. They employ thousands of people in Vaughan and thousands of people in York Region. We need that focus on small business.

One thing we have done is that when we cut taxes for the middle class and we raised them on the 1%, we created aggregate demand so people felt better about themselves, felt better about the future, became more optimistic, and they spent and invested in their families, in their regions, and in their communities. Therefore, yes, it is a full ministry for small business and tourism. Tourism continues to be an economic driver for Canada. We need to do more. We will do more. We are investing in our marketing agencies and so forth.

When I look at these five title changes and what is in the Salaries Act, I say to myself that we are going in the right direction. Our focus on status of women and on small business and tourism is exactly the direction we need to go in as a government and I am proud to be part of that government. These updating exercises are not new. The list of Salaries Act ministers has been amended several times in the last decade, most recently in 2013. In each case, the changes aligned with the priorities of the times and with the Prime Minister's preferences with respect to the composition of his ministry and the organization of the government administration.

The bill would also modernize the Salaries Act by introducing a measure of flexibility to cabinet-making going forward.

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It would do that by adding three untitled ministerial positions. These positions would provide room for prime ministers at a future time to appoint and title ministers to reflect and respond to the changing priorities of their day. To me, that is smart planning. I worked in the private sector for 25 years. The world is evolving. There is a lot of global uncertainty. Things are evolving at home. We want to make sure the government has flexibility to introduce ministers or ministries as it sees fit and to respond to changing circumstances. It makes sense to me. That is what we would do in the private sector. I like that, and we bring it here to government.

Members on the other side have asked what the Prime Minister's plans are for these cabinet posts. Why are they needed? Why are they not named? To that, I would say that this change looks to the future. It builds in a degree of flexibility in the structuring of future ministries to reflect the priorities of the day. This is a government that looks to the future and that values adaptability to change in big ways and small. This is a small but an important way. It would enable a modern, adaptable ministry well into the future.

There are safeguards too. The bill would not enable the installation of an oversized cabinet, and we all know what that looks like from the past administration. The proposed increase in the number of Salaries Act positions would be offset by the removal of six regional development positions. The maximum number of ministers that may be appointed under the Salaries Act, including the Prime Minister, would increase by two positions from 35 to 37.

I have heard comments from the members of the House on the removal of the regional development positions. For them, I would like to emphasize that removing these positions from the Salaries Act in no way affects the status of the regional development agencies themselves. Let me re-emphasize that point. FedDev, ACOA, and the regional development agencies would continue to operate and do a great job for the regions they represent. They would continue to invest in Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

I grew up in a small town in northern British Columbia. I understand what it means to come from a region where the next town is two hours away, or 144 kilometres, if I remember correctly. People feel like they are far away from a big city, whether it is Vancouver or Toronto, and they want to make sure their voices are being heard and that investments are taking place in their area of the country. This Salaries Act would not change the prerogative or the role of the regional development agencies. It is misleading to suggest otherwise.

● (2225)

The regional development agencies will continue to be a vital part of this government's economic development work, and will be overseen by a minister. Regions are not being ignored under this government. Accountability is not being ignored under this government. These administrative amendments to the Salaries Act would change none of that.

I would like to correct a misconception about the bill that has been asserted in this place. It has been suggested that its effect is merely to authorize a raise for the five ministers who were appointed by orders in council on November 4, 2015, as ministers of state to assist other ministers, and that those orders in council make it clear that these are junior ministers, subordinate to other ministers, and therefore not deserving of the same salary. Let me be clear. To those comments I

would first say that all ministers have been paid the same salary since day one. Equal pay for equal work is what we believe in. The bill would not change that. There is no raise for any minister under the bill.

Then let me say that I believe our government has been clear in explaining that the legislative framework in place on November 4, 2015, prevented the appointment of four ministers to these five positions. Use of the Ministries and Ministers of State Act allowed ministers to be appointed to those positions and to get to work on the priorities of this government and Canadians on day one.

The Prime Minister committed to introducing legislation that would formally equalize the status of all members of his ministry. A promise made is a promise kept. I am proud to be part of a government that keeps its promises to Canadians and is investing in Canadians. We have seen that handsomely in the recent months with our economy growing at a rate of over 2.5%, which had not been achieved under the Conservatives, from my understanding. We see job growth taking the unemployment rate down to the 6.2% range. We see income growth. We see exports rebounding. We see business investment starting to show green shoots. These are all things that we can be proud of as a government. When the full ramp-up of infrastructure spending takes place, which it will and it is, we will see further gains in employment numbers across the country from coast to coast to coast.

The bill fulfills this commitment. When it comes into force, the orders in council that appoint these ministers as ministers of state to assist other ministers will be repealed. They will be in law, as they are in practice, full and equal ministers.

In closing, let me repeat what I said at the beginning of my remarks. The Salaries Act amendments are administrative in nature. It makes good sense to update and modernize the legislation to reflect the structure of the current ministry, and to enable flexible and adaptable ministries, now and in the future. I hope all members will join me in supporting this bill.

When we look at our government's agenda, including Bill C-24, Canadians sent us here to do the good work they wanted us to do, and what we told them we would do in our platform. We have fulfilled many of those promises. I look to the Canada child benefit, our middle-class tax cuts, and our investments in infrastructure, and I say to myself, where are we taking Canada?

I look at these changes in Bill C-24, where we would appoint full ministers for the status of women, la Francophonie, small business and tourism, and my finance background tells me that our government is taking Canada to a place we need to go. We are not only passing the puck. We are going to where the puck is going to be, if I made that analogy correctly from my former ice hockey days. We are going to score the goal, and we will continue scoring the goals. For me, scoring the goals is ensuring that Canadians have a brighter future, that Canadians find the jobs they are looking for, that they come home to their families quicker in the evening, and that we continue to invest in them. That is the mandate of our government.

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For me, it is to ensure that my two daughters who visited Parliament here yesterday, Eliana and Natalia, have a bright future. When this privilege ends, and I can say that it will not end for a long time, there is nothing more important to me and my family.

I will close my remarks off there. I look forward to answering any questions from my humble colleagues.

• (2230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member began by talking about programs that help women, but I would like to talk about the real issues.

For example, a low-cost day care program would really help women return to work and give them a fair shot at earning a better income in the labour market, but there is no such bill on the table.

Instead of introducing an empty shell of a bill like this one, why does the government not introduce a meaningful bill that will really help women by creating a low-cost day care program?

[*English*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, our investments in Canadians and in Canadian families, specifically women, are groundbreaking. The Canada child benefit, which increases benefits for nine out of every 10 families an average of \$2,300 more than what they were receiving. That is incredible.

The investment in child care is approximately \$500 million a year, creating 40,000 annual spaces in child care for low- and middle-income folks who really need child care, who really need the help. We are working with the provinces, Canadians, and women's groups, and we are listening.

Those investments, and I could name off another five or six, are just two that are going to make a difference in families' lives from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member touched on some interesting points.

As parliamentary secretary for innovation, science, and economic development, I see the impact first-hand of removing the old ministers of state for the regional development agencies. I echo his comments about the fact that we have created a much more lean and efficient ministry and department, and that the departmental functions of each of the regional economic development agencies has in fact not been impaired, but I would argue, improved with standardized practices.

I would invite the hon. member to elaborate on the fact that this is reflecting a reality in good governance, making government more efficient and making the regional development agencies more effective.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, about two or three months ago I was able to make an announcement in York Region, where FedDev provided a \$3-million or \$3.5-million repayable loan to a commercial aircraft parts supplier. These were high-skilled jobs. Jobs that paid well north of \$100,000 a year. We made that announcement, and I was proud that FedDev was making that announcement in a manufacturer providing good-quality jobs in York Region and

competing against companies globally. Those types of investments are the investments we need to grow the economy. We need to grow key sectors. In this instance it was the aerospace sector. It was something that I was proud of. I spoke to the owner that morning and he thanked us for being partners with his company. He thanked us for that repayable loan, or if one wants to call it a grant.

I remember our conversation vividly. I said that we are investing in high-tech, high-margin industries, in industries where we see growth. Here was a company in York Region manufacturing parts for the Boeing 787 and the Airbus A330 and A320. It was something we could be proud of and that was provided by FedDev.

I agree wholeheartedly on governance. I come from the private sector. Governance is very important to me. I would not invest in a company if it did not have good governance, and I would not believe in government if it did not have good governance.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member and I have had lots of conversations about the Kurdish issue in the parliamentary friends of the Kurds group that we are in together.

I want to ask him about these late sittings that we have had. We are considering C-24, which is a bill that was introduced pretty much a year ago. Is this really the urgent matter that the government wanted to have debated in evening sittings, a salary increase for Liberal cabinet ministers? We could pretty much retitle this the pay raise for Liberal cabinet ministers.

Why is this such a critical, important issue for the government when we could be debating lowering taxes on small businesses, actually getting control of the budget and reducing the deficit down to zero, actually following through on infrastructure, or the completion of projects instead of just announcements and more press releases. Why are we having late sittings to debate Liberal cabinet pay increases?

• (2235)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct something. Bill C-24 would not increase and does not result in any new spending or any new salaries. The salaries were effective the date that these ministers were appointed. The salaries are unchanged. There would be no new spending in place with the bill. I do wish to correct that. I think my friend had mentioned that. I do wish to correct the record on that because he is incorrect.

I am here to work. I was sent here by my residents to work. Frankly, if I have to stay here until midnight every night to work for them and their priorities, I will be here. That is what we get paid for. We get paid by the taxes that our constituents and Canadians pay. I will be here every night to work until midnight if I have to, to get the good work done of all the voters across Canada.

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Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know a lot of people are watching tonight, and I just want to say that all the Canadian daughters are being spoken of very proudly by their fathers, and rightfully so. I am a proud daughter who learned from my father not to get schmoozed, not to worry about the names we might be called if we are smart or assertive, and we are applying our critical thinking to some of the things people say. I would say to these same daughters, who are watching tonight, to think about this. There are a couple of questions, and maybe the hon. member would like to answer them.

Does this mean these ministers of state will now have power and responsibility equal to the ministers under the definition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*? Does this mean we will have ministries of state now? Does this mean we are so serious about gender equality now that we will implement this legislation that has been committed to? Does this mean people who are taking on roles and responsibilities in senior positions will be equally men and women? Does this mean the word feminism is more than just a charade? What exactly do ministers of state do? Are they equal to the power of a minister of a department if they do not have a ministry?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the responsibilities for each of these ministers is laid out in the mandate letters provided by the Prime Minister. I look at the Status of Women ministry, and I think to myself, that is the right direction everyone has to go in, and that is the right direction that all Canadians wish to go.

For me, personally, I want to make sure that labour force participation rates for the women across the country increase and match those of men. That is important. I want to see this globally as well, women empowered, and that is very important for us.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, finally, I am starting to see agreement on both sides of the aisle, but that might be because the hon. member is from a different part than the other people on the other side of the aisle. We have been discussing issues of governance, and the hon. member mentioned his private sector experience. Right now, we are talking about governance. Could he expand on the range of governance we are now introducing with equal say around the table?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend and colleague from the wonderful riding of Guelph, which I had the chance to visit a few times.

Governance is a very important transparency, and with Bill C-24, the first thing it does is equalizes the ministers, and that is very important. Equal pay for equal work is supremely important, and the responsibilities are laid out in the mandate letter by the Prime Minister, so there is full transparency there and what his ministers are directed to do. As a result, there is full accountability by the mandate letters, and that is also very important. It is very important to me, and very important to my voters back in the beautiful riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, which I hope to visit soon again.

• (2240)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in debate tonight on Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act.

I have a few problems with this bill. I want to speak to two aspects of it. I am going to start by speaking in my former capacity as the minister of state for western economic diversification. My understanding is that if parliamentarians vote in favour of this bill, essentially all of the economic diversification agencies in Canada would formally come under the auspices of one minister. That minister is from Mississauga. I have nothing against Mississauga. It is a wonderful place. I was just there a couple of weeks ago. However, Mississauga is not western Canada.

One of my Liberal colleagues applauded that. I am not sure why they would applaud that Mississauga is not western Canada. It was somebody from western Canada, fantastic, good to know.

Now that we have established that fact, and there seems to be some enthusiasm for that fact, it is important to note that economic diversification agencies were created to essentially underscore the fact that while we try to come up with national economic development policies or national economic policies, Canada does in fact operate under a heavily regionalized economy. There are differences between the different regions of our country, and in order to ensure we function as a cohesive unit, these agencies work to bolster the economies of each part of our country, to essentially ensure we are greater than the sum of our parts.

I was the minister of state for western economic diversification. My background is in intellectual property management. I spent most of my career prior to politics in several fields, but the last position that I occupied had some role in managing the intellectual property portfolio, to a certain extent, of the University of Calgary, as well as managing its sponsored research portfolio. I actually had the privilege of working with some of the great public servants who were in this department prior to entering politics.

I came in with a certain level of domain expertise. It was really interesting to be able to marry some domain expertise with an understanding of why it is so important to use an agency like this to incent innovation, and bolster different parts of the economy to see long-term economic growth in that region of the country.

I am a Winnipegger by birth, and a Calgarian by choice, much to the chagrin of some of my colleagues. The point is I have a deep understanding of western Canada. I was appointed as a minister to help bolster the economy of western Canada. I am happy to speak to some of the successes I had there.

The point being, it was important to have a minister of state at the cabinet table who was not only responsible for grants and contributions, and managing the process related to grants and contributions to western Canada, but also meeting with stakeholder groups and taking that opinion, in terms of an economic minister, up to the cabinet table, and formulating economic policy for the entire nation. What this bill would do, if we adopt it, is we would essentially lose that very fundamental linkage of a regional minister and regional economic development agency with the cabinet table for expediency sake.

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I want to speak about the specific need of why we need an economic diversification or an economic development minister from western Canada, but I am actually going to speak to some of my colleagues' concerns from Atlantic Canada. I read a report that came out earlier this year, I believe it was from the industry committee, that talked about how ACOA was actually seeing close to 12-month delays in seeing some of its innovation grants being approved. It was because of the bottleneck going up to the minister from Mississauga.

Many of my colleagues from across party lines have heard great frustrations from stakeholders in Atlantic Canada. They were saying that this 12-month delay, because a minister is not signing-off on these grants, was not particularly conducive to many start-up companies, many industries where they needed to have that seed funding in a very short runway in order to see results. That was not conducive.

● (2245)

I just do not understand why the Liberal government would enshrine in legislation a bill that would make Atlantic Canadians apply for these innovation funds and go through a minister from Mississauga. That is defeating the purpose of the agency, to a certain extent. I have no idea what is going on. I just do not understand why we would do this.

We could have an entire philosophical discussion on whether we need regional development agencies at all, but if we are going to have regional development agencies, part of whose mandate is to bring to the cabinet table and to Parliament the viewpoints of regionalized economic concerns in each part of the country, then surely we should have ministers who are representing those agencies at the cabinet table. That has been lost. It is just not there anymore.

When I was minister of state for western economic diversification, I took my domain expertise and went into the agency with a great team of public servants. Whenever I have a chance to speak about how fantastic they were and put it on the record, I do that, and I am doing that again today. We sat down together and asked how we could make this agency more effective. The mandate I gave them was to go to the stakeholders that utilize our services in our communities, and ask them what the mandate and purpose of this agency should be, and that we should do it on an ongoing basis because that is not a static question. It changes from year to year. What we need to do to bolster the economic diversification of western Canada should be evaluated on an ongoing basis. That was the first thing we did. We said we would have a formal consultation process to establish what we are managing as an agency.

I undertook a very extensive tour, close to six months, of western Canada. It was very formalized. We took feedback from industry, not-for-profit organizations, academia, small business owners, and came up with a set of five priorities that we felt at that time were important to ensure there was economic diversification in western Canada. Those things included first nations economic participation; ensuring there was skilled labour because there was a significant shortage of skilled labour in western Canada at the time, and still is; ensuring that western Canadian businesses were participating in trade agreements or taking advantage of agreements, such as CETA and how we could position that; bolstering innovation; looking at things like the R and D life cycle, not necessarily basic research but

things like prototype development, start up-scale up, these sorts of things; how WD could play in that; and a variety of other aspects as well.

We made those criteria very formal and from there, I asked my department to translate what we are managing to there down into our grants and contributions, and make sure that our funding programs reflected the goals and objectives of what we are managing to through that contribution process.

As well as having a background in intellectual property management, it is also in academic research administration. I understand how to manage a grants and contribution process and said I was not comfortable with ministerial direction all the time in terms of some of the processes, that I would like to move it more toward the minister's direction in terms of the policy outcomes of what the grants and contributions would achieve, and that I would like to move to a call for proposals model.

We changed the process by which people applied for grants through WD. We launched an initiative of \$100 million over five years because at the consultation I mentioned. We heard that one of the key determinants of economic growth in Canada for small and innovative business was a start-up capital gap, particularly in prototype development and start up-scale up phase, so we tailored a program specifically for that with very defined criteria.

The point I am trying to make is that took a lot of my time as a minister. It took a lot of time. It was probably one of the most rewarding two years of my professional career, because I felt like I could go to the cabinet table of a G7 country, and then take my policy expertise, but, more importantly, the feedback of a very specific group of people in Canada, that being western Canadian businesses, tailor our grants and contributions programs to ensure that everybody had equal participation, and then make some magic happen.

● (2250)

Now, three or four years after that process, we are starting to see the results. Jobs are being created through intellectual property being commercialized and retained in western Canada. There are innovative skills training programs with first nations communities in a wide variety of sectors. These metrics that are now reported through the departmental report are a result of the fact that this economic development agency had a minister who was providing political will through the bureaucracy and the outcomes of the grants and contributions process.

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That might not sound very romantic, but that is really the job of a minister. Some people think the job is photo ops or swanning around, but really, it is saying, “As an executive member of the government, I have a political mandate to fulfill.” It is taking that mandate and working with public servants to ensure that political will comes to fruition through process, procedure, and a lot of hard work. Sometimes ministers have to bring their bureaucracy onside with them. Sometimes it is a bit of a struggle. Sometimes they have to bring stakeholders on board with them and flesh out that mandate a bit.

The point I am trying to make is that it takes work and it takes time. If we are going to have economic development agencies, we need to have someone who is willing to be the fulcrum of that particular work to work with the bureaucracy. Bill C-24 would eliminate that relationship. It would eliminate the relationship between a minister and the bureaucracy and the relationship with the stakeholders in the community. It would centralize it.

I am all for government efficiency. It is very important to look at our processes and ask how we can deliver services more efficiently and effectively, but what we have seen, from the evidence in stakeholder groups like ACOA, for example, is that these grants and contributions are not being approved.

I have to give a lot of credit to my former deputy minister, Daphne Meredith, who was one of the most talented public servants Ottawa has ever seen. She is very smart, very gentle, and very firm. I learned so much from her. However, she could only do so much without having a mandate from a minister and an understanding that the minister had her back in implementing certain process changes.

There is a gif on the Internet. It is a dog playing the piano, saying, “I have no idea what I’m doing.” That is probably what a lot of the deputy ministers in some of the economic development agencies are feeling right now. It is not from a lack of skill. It is a lack of political oversight because of bills like this.

If the government wanted to eliminate oversight in economic development agencies, it should have put forward to stakeholders a plan on how it was going to engage them and how it was going to overhaul grants and contributions processes to achieve the objectives I mentioned before it put this bill forward. The bill, without that detail, provides a lot of uncertainty for small- and medium-sized businesses, academic groups, and other groups, especially first nations communities, which often rely on these economic development agencies to achieve outcomes.

There are critics who say that economic development agencies should not exist at all. One of the fundamental things we need to ask ourselves as parliamentarians, and as people who have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent in the most efficient and effective way possible, is what we are managing to. What is the outcome of the tax dollars we are spending?

The problem with not having political oversight of these development agencies is that it is very difficult to set those parameters and measure whether they are successful without having political oversight. The reality is that the member for Mississauga—Malton, who is the industry minister, has a lot of competing concerns in the industry portfolio. He has announced \$1 billion for something

on superclusters. We could have an entire other debate on the efficacy of that. He has to look at things like the internal trade agreement. He has some responsibility for government procurement with regard to supply chain development, indirect cost benefits, and all these sorts of things.

What is happening with Bill C-24 is that we are saying to let us manage economic diversification or economic development agencies off the corner of a really overstuffed desk. I do not think that is the best approach.

• (2255)

I think the government needs to say, “Look, we’re either in the business or we’re not, and if we’re not in the business, let’s be honest with our stakeholders rather than making them wait for 18 months.”

This might seem like a very pedantic debate, but at the end of the day, if we are going to have these agencies and be able to explain to taxpayers that this is worth their while, we need to have political oversight; otherwise, it becomes bureaucrats shovelling cash off the back of a truck. That is not anything that anyone in this place wants. Some of my colleagues question that, and fair enough. Perhaps we can answer that in question-and-answer period.

I honestly think that without political oversight, it is very difficult to say, within these agencies, “What are we managing to?” and then “Do our processes reflect our ability to get to that point?”

To be honest, for that reason alone, I cannot support Bill C-24.

We are going to get a little feminist in here tonight. In Bill C-24, the Liberals have stood up and claimed that there are housekeeping items to legislate equal salaries for all ministers. That is just a talking point. For my colleagues in here who have not served in cabinet or perhaps do not understand the cabinet process, in order for us to take what is called a “memorandum to cabinet” as a minister, we need to be a full minister. A memorandum to cabinet is basically a direction to cabinet. It is saying, “This is what I want the executive to do and vote on.”

This bill does not address the fact that people who have been named as full ministers by the Prime Minister in his “gender equity cabinet” still do not have the capacity, on their own accord, to bring that direction to cabinet. I do not understand how that is gender equity. There are still women in this cabinet who are being called full ministers, yet they have to report to a man to bring their own memorandum to cabinet. That is not equality at all.

I have worked really hard to get to where I am in my life. I have men laughing at me in here for that. I find that highly amusing.

I sacrificed a lot. I have made choices to make sure that my career has been placed first and foremost in my life. That is a choice that I have made.

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For someone to come up to me and say, “Oh, you know, you’re part of a gender equity cabinet. By the way, the Prime Minister announced that the day before cabinet happened. I might not agree with them on a lot of things, but there are women in the Liberal cabinet who have resumés or CVs that should stand. Canadians should say, “Look, these are talented women.” However, he took credit for their CVs by saying, “They’re here because it is a gender equity cabinet.” However, some of these women now do not have the ability to bring memoranda to cabinet on their own. They still have to go, “Oh, hey, Mr. Minister, can you please sign off on my MC?”

This bill would not fix that. I would prefer that the Prime Minister just be honest about the fact that he actually does not have a gender parity cabinet. He does not. If he did, these women would have the capacity to bring memoranda to cabinet on their own, and they do not. We can pay women one way, but this bill also does not address the fact that many of these women do not have their own deputy ministers. That is also the hallmark of a full minister.

I do not understand why we have this bill in front of us. There are so many things that are affecting this country, from foreign policy issues to our immigration processes at home to people being out of work in my home province, yet we are spending valuable House time debating a bill that would not help the economy in any way, shape, or form and would not make women more equal. To me, that is the hallmark of the Liberal government: useless legislation, legislation in name only that really does nothing at the end of the day. It is a *Seinfeld* episode. For that reason, I encourage my colleagues not to support Bill C-24.

• (2300)

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after having spent a fair bit of time in the ministry of innovation, science and economic development and having gone out west and worked with WD on the ground, I now have a fuller understanding of why there was no diversification in the west under the previous government and why the regional development agencies all generally failed to do what they had to do.

When we took office, we had to fix ACOA. We have fixed it, and it is now working very well. We have 32 very satisfied members of Parliament from the Atlantic region who are happy with ACOA, as well as stakeholders in Calgary, Fort McMurray, and Saskatoon, where I was last week with WD officials on the ground, in universities, and in other settings. People are very happy with the way we have restructured.

I would invite the hon. member to comment on why one would not want to restructure in good faith with the ministry and with officials from regional development economic agencies to have a more coherent innovation and skills agenda. This is precisely what we are doing, and the regional development agencies, including WD, are putting this policy into practice on the ground.

Why would it not be a good thing to be sensitive to the needs of the west and sensitive to the needs of Atlantic regions and other regions in Canada through a more efficient, coherent, and diversified economic policy?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for the chance to correct his odd mashup of

Orwellian Newspeak and Internet buzzword generator. I heard “innovation”, “synergy”, “synergistic”, “work together” without any sort of metrics, and that is the point.

I would like to clarify some of my colleague's points.

First, the government does not have 32 satisfied members. It has 32 very whipped and gagged and muzzled Atlantic Canada members, four of whom had the courage to put their names on a report talking about the fact that ACOA is about 12 to 18 months behind in terms of approving grants and contributions. That is not an improvement.

In terms of western economic diversification, if the Liberals had any desire to look at diversification of the western economy, they would understand that the natural resource sector, particularly the energy sector, has an enormous capacity to be a receptor for innovative technology, including clean technology, carbon capture and sequestration, and things like flocculent development for the oil sands for tailing ponds.

I could go through numerous technologies that are being developed in academic institutions in western Canada, yet we do not have any commitment from the Liberal government to see the long-term development of that sector. Intellectual property that is developed for that is licensed out to other countries. There is no desire to retain it in western Canada. As a result of the Liberal government's detrimental policy in the energy sector, the tanker ban, no contributions to pipeline development, no contributions to keep skilled labour in western Canada, that intellectual property is leaving and the economy cannot be diversified.

I absolutely reject the premise of the question, the idea that the Liberals have any authority to speak on economic diversification in western Canada.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go to the next member, I just want to remind hon. members that if they are sitting near a microphone and they are speaking, it picks up what they say and it really does interfere with what we are hearing.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very interesting speech. She once held the kind of position that we are talking about tonight, the ones this government has decided to do away with. It was really good for all of us to hear her experiences, which clearly show that there are indeed advantages to having ministers responsible for economic development in the various regions.

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Today, I would like to ask my colleague whether she thinks that these positions, which were so good for our regions' economic development, are being completely eliminated to cover up another broken promise. Essentially, that promise was catching up with the Liberals and they would have had to allocate funding to pay those ministers. They had to do away with something of value to fix a campaign mistake.

• (2305)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree with my colleague. The Liberals spend for spending's sake. It is like fun coupons. That was the point I was trying to make in the earlier part of my speech. The Liberals have not defined what they are managing in spending taxpayer dollars. It is all about spending for spending's sake.

In the budget this year, we saw an increase in the deficit year over year for the fiscal year 2016-17, but we saw a decrease in the GDP projections from fiscal year 2016-17. In that component, the Liberals have spent more to get less.

With respect to how the economic development agencies could be utilized, if we are to invest in these agencies, we should have political oversight from people who have expertise and understanding of the economies of those regions of the country and marry that into an overall economic growth strategy that operates within the context of a balanced budget. That has not happened.

That is part of the problem with Bill C-24. It is like let us getting rid of political oversight on something and hope that everything turns out all right. That is not management. I do not know what to characterize that as, a #fail, some great socks, I am not sure. I just know that the public servants who work in these departments and the stakeholders that depend on them would not want us to support this.

There is a lot of consternation about the fact that the bill has been tabled without any sort of operating plan being put forward. If the plan is to let public servants completely manage the oversight of grants and contributions related to regional economic development agencies, that is a bad plan.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, by the member's description of what she did and what she accomplished in her time as the minister responsible for western economic diversification, she worked hard, applied her knowledge and her skills, and had some really good results. We will not debate that part of it, but did she get paid as much as other ministers in that cabinet?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I was appointed as a minister of state. I was not appointed as a full minister and I understood that going into my position.

The minister of state position has a certain level of salary attached to it and a full minister position has a certain level of salary attached to it. It would be like me being hired as the VP of a company, but expecting to be paid as the president of a company. I had the responsibility of a minister of state, which I think I exceeded, and I was paid accordingly. I was very proud of the fact that I was a minister of state in the past government. I think I did a fantastic job. I do not like being humble so I was awesome, it was great and I was paid accordingly.

The point is that I did not try to say I should be paid equal to my peers without having the responsibility of my peers. If my colleague opposite truly felt that I should be paid at the level as his female colleagues in cabinet should be, then I should have full rights to bring memorandums to cabinet. I should have a deputy minister and have the accountability of an entire department.

Given my managerial expertise, my CV, and my political experience, I would expect that had we formed government, I would have been appointed as a full minister, and I am happy to say that here, and I should have been paid accordingly. However, for that level of responsibility, I was paid to what my responsibilities were. That is not sexist; that is the way it is. Sexist is trying to claim that women are paid one way, but do not have the responsibility of their peers. That is embarrassing and disgusting.

• (2310)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Shepard.

I am thankful to be speaking to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act. However, it is late at night and the government has made it clear that it is not interested in hearing further input from the opposition parties. Once again, it is shutting down debate and sending it to committee where, based on what it has done with other bills, it will not accept any of the amendments. Therefore, I am not sure what kind of an impact I will have tonight. However, I will go ahead and make a few points about the concerns I have with Bill C-24.

My first concern has to do with the elimination of the six regional development agency ministers. We have heard other people speak to it, but I will provide my thoughts on that. Also, the creation of three entirely new mystery ministers is of concern to me.

Amending the Salaries Act to legislate equal pay for all ministers concerns me. All of this has already been done. We heard testimony earlier that at the very beginning, once everybody discovered the Prime Minister had put women in junior minister roles and paid them less than other ministers, there was an outcry and it was immediately fixed via the estimates. The Liberals had already rid themselves of the regional ministers. Therefore, I am not even sure why we have to talk about it if they have already done that, especially when the government has failed on its legislative agenda, is having us sit late at night, and is now bringing forward items on which action has already been taken. Therefore, whatever we say here tonight is kind of irrelevant.

With respect to regional economic development, I want to share why I think that those six positions were important.

One of the things we need in our country is to create jobs. We need to get that economic growth happening. Every region has different industries, different constraints, and different provincial and municipal regulations. There is a lot to know about.

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Sarnia—Lambton had a southwestern regional minister who was familiar with the industry in Sarnia—Lambton, in London, in Windsor, and did a lot of work to help start our bio-economy, helped get us into advanced manufacturing, and helped us partner in the water industry. Time is required to get to know the industries and the economic opportunities in the area, coming with a voice in government to advocate on behalf of those opportunities, and then help the wheels of government turn to get that money out in a timely fashion. For example, when we are trying to start up a new bio-industry or trying to get into a new business, time is of the essence.

I have heard similar stories when I look to the Atlantic provinces. I have a lot of connections there, so I hear about what is going on there, I hear about what is going on in Quebec, and the importance of these regional ministers. Therefore, it is extremely concerning to have those eliminated. The departments have not been eliminated, which is of some comfort. That means the government recognizes the need to have that local and regional information. However, there is nobody to direct the ship other than the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. He is a great guy, but he is a busy guy. He does not have enough time for the oversight. He has to be in the House and he has responsibilities in his municipality as well.

These are some of the things the minister is responsible for. In addition to all of the economic growth in the different regions across the country, he is also in charge of the rural Internet initiative, which is really important. We have a huge need for that in the north. There is a huge, ambitious program under way, which I appreciate. He is also the one who is trying to initiate the superclusters. That involves developing a plan and that is a huge change. It requires a lot of coordination of different players. He is responsible for the census. He is responsible for the innovation agenda. He is also trying to launch new areas like artificial intelligence. He is trying to advance us in green technology, while maintaining our leadership in the aerospace and automotive industries. If we look at all the things involved there, they are all important. If we take focus away from them, then we will not make progress as quickly.

● (2315)

That is why these six ministers were so important. It was because they could spend the time to look at what the opportunities were and move those forward, and now we are missing that.

We have heard complaints. I have heard complaints from Quebec that things are not moving quickly now that those ministers have been removed. I have heard in the Atlantic provinces the same thing that the member for Calgary Nose Hill shared, that there are delays of 12 and 18 months. It is taking three times as long to get things approved. When people are in the innovation space trying to take ideas and turn them into jobs, time is of the essence. This whole idea is not good.

With respect to the mystery ministers, nobody here was able to say who they are. Maybe they will come up eventually. Is it really a priority to talk about things that may or may not happen in the future and to pick three of them that might happen in the future? It just speaks to the government's lack of openness and transparency. We have seen all kinds of evidence of this in the refusal to answer questions in the House of Commons. We see that on a daily basis.

We see, when we try to get access to information, that they black out the costs of the carbon tax for the taxpayer. We see that they are trying to rearrange the parliamentary budget officer so that members of Parliament cannot get information out of him. I could go on, about partisan appointments and all the other things that the current government is doing that are not open or transparent.

Clearly, these three mystery ministers are something that does not exist, and if it does exist and there is a hidden agenda, then it is just another example of what I am talking about.

That brings us then to the discussion on the salaries and whether the salaries of the women who are serving in these junior minister roles should be equal. Certainly, as the chair of the status of women committee, I am somebody who firmly believes in gender equality and in pay equity. I was on the pay equity committee and sat endless hours talking about what we could do, and made recommendations to the government on which it has done nothing in budget 2017. For all the talk of being a feminist, there is absolutely nothing happening from that point of view.

I would also say that in my career I have experienced discrimination as a woman so I am probably an extra advocate for trying to make sure that things are done fairly. One of the things that is important when we talk about pay equity—and they can even Google this on the government web page—is that when we try to figure out whether jobs should be paid equally, an analysis is done. The analysis looks at skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions.

When we compare some of these junior positions, for example the Minister of Sport with the Minister of Finance, let us look at the budget that the Minister of Sport handles versus the budget that the Minister of Finance is handling. Let us think about the Minister of Democratic Institutions, now that we are not going to do any electoral reform because we broke that promise. If the minister of electoral reform does not do a good job, what is the consequence of that versus the Minister of Public Safety not doing a good job? There is a huge difference there. Let us think about what the responsibilities of the Minister of Status of Women are versus the defence minister, for example. She has a \$38-million budget.

When we do a pay equity analysis we are going to see that in fact there is a different level of responsibility in these positions, so I do not personally think that they should have been restored to a full minister's salary because I do not believe they have the same responsibility. They clearly do not have the same effort and in some cases the skill level that has been put into these roles is actually troubling. The government House leader is a rookie with no experience with parliamentary Standing Orders, and we have seen how that has jumbled the government's agenda and made for all the filibustering and the delays that have resulted in our sitting this late.

These are my main concerns with the bill. Obviously, it does not really matter what I say because all of these changes have been put into effect anyway, and I expect there will be no amendments at committee.

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Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to talk about math because they are very focused on math on that side. I recall in 2006 when Prime Minister Harper said he was going to start with a tiny cabinet. It was about 28 members and then the cabinet grew to 41 members. When the Conservatives talked about saving money and being really good with the taxpayer dollars, we know that was the wrong approach.

What we have decided to do and the path we have chosen is to say that women deserve equal pay for an equal voice at the cabinet table. I do not understand what is wrong with an equal voice at the cabinet table with equal pay. Does the member not support that?

• (2320)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, the government's own procedures on how pay equity should be implemented say that having the same voice at the cabinet table in terms of a vote is not part of responsibilities, skills, efforts, and working conditions. It is one small element of that whole equation.

While I agree that women should be paid equally to men in the same job, I have just given a number of examples of why that is not true. I will tell the House about one position, a minister, that has changed with the focus of the government on infrastructure. That would be the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, who has now been given \$180 billion to spend over the next 10 years, with only \$2 billion for rural of course.

That responsibility has changed, because of the focus of the government on the responsibilities, efforts, and skills required to do that job. The minister has the infrastructure bank, and that is going to be a big schmozzle that will take a lot of time. In that case, I can see a reassessment of what the job is worth based on what is being put into it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. It is always interesting to hear her thoughts.

I must admit that I would prefer to be discussing a real bill on pay equity. Then we could have really made some progress. In a past career, before I got into politics, I fought for the cause of pay equity in the Quebec school system. Before equity could be achieved, we spent months and years comparing job descriptions to make sure that the positions in question required the same skills and involved the same duties.

Are we really expected to believe that the Liberals will manage to solve the problem overnight and until the end of time simply by declaring that everyone will have the same salary?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

Definitely, the government has had every opportunity to take an excellent example from the folks in Quebec who actually testified at our committee on pay equity, about the legislation that was brought in that rapidly closed the gap between men and women, and what they were paid.

The government has had 18 months to do something about it. We see no legislation. We see nothing in the six pages of the gender statement of budget 2017. It has certainly missed an opportunity there.

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here listening to my colleague across the way. I know she is an engineer, and has professed many times that data should guide, facts should be what informs us and helps us make our decisions. I have been listening to her speech, and I am really quite shocked. What she is quoting is not at all the experience that I have had with the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. We have seen amazing work coming forward. We have not seen a slowdown.

The member has been quoting that there have been some delays and lots of problems. I would like her to tell us where this data is coming from. It certainly is not the experience that I am having. I am confused. I would like to hear her explain where that data is coming from.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I will just give one example, and that is from Sarnia—Lambton. In November 2015, the minister agreed to provide funding. By the time we got it out the door, it was a year and a half later.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad I am debating at so late an hour. It is not quite midnight, but we are getting there.

Like I mentioned before during the questions and comments of other members, I made comments that, really, we should be renaming the bill “the pay raise for Liberal cabinet ministers”. I really do feel that way. I know some people say that the pay was adjusted before. Then the logical question is, why are we considering this legislation if it is just to change a bunch of titles? The Liberals could have done that before. They really did not need to do anything. They could have just scribbled all over their notepads and on their business cards, and got it done.

They come into the House, consuming so many hours of the debate that supposedly, they said, was to improve the middle class. I do not really see how the Liberal cabinet getting a higher pay raise improves the fate or the economic ability of the middle class.

As for the content of the bill, I am looking at it and I have read through it several times now. It formalizes its eight new Liberal cabinet ministers. These are so-called full ministers, but as we heard from the member for Calgary Nose Hill, they actually will not be full ministers because they will not be able to bring MCs directly. They will still have to ask the ministers that they report to in order to be able to do that.

They are also asking for three new cabinet ministers yet to be named. I will be referring to these as the mystery cabinet ministers, and a good deal of my speech will focus on them, because what the Liberals are asking us to do, just like the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge said, is to give them a blank cheque. They want these three new cabinet ministers to be appointed some time in the future, so I have a bunch of suggestions on roles they could fill on their side in areas in which I feel they need desperate help. They need reinforcements to actually get their agenda through.

Government Orders

I do have a Yiddish proverb. It will come up very soon, because I know several members are looking at me, expecting one ready.

As for raises for salaries of junior ministers to cabinet ministers, like I said before, every time there is talk of openness and transparency in this place, it seems to cost the taxpayers ever more money. Why are the Liberals raising cabinet ministers' pay? Why not lower all pay? I see some ministers in the House are probably very worried when I mention this, but that would be the right thing to do for taxpayers when we have a nearly \$30-billion deficit we are rolling through and for which the Liberals will be punishing the taxpayers of the future, who will have to pay for it.

This would be a great way to treat everybody equally: just lower everybody's pay. It is equal. It is fair to everyone. It is open. It is transparent. It is generous. Why not? Like I said, we could do the opposite. That would just require a minor amendment on the government side. Why is it always more money, more expenses, a car, a deputy minister, more exempt staff, more ability to travel. It is always more money, more money from the taxpayers. It always winds up being that way.

The Yiddish proverb I wanted to use is, "A wise man hears one word, but understands two", and I feel like that wise man when I say, "Read the legislation", because there is much more at stake here than simple pay. There are these three mystery cabinet ministers the Liberals will be introducing. It is not as if they do not have enough cabinet ministers already. We see week after week so-called ministers not delivering on their press releases, not delivering on their mandate letters. In fact they had cabinet shuffles, and I fully expect another cabinet shuffle in the future and certain ministers to be moved around, especially after the week they have had with the failure to appoint a Commissioner of Official Languages who will be fair to all parties in the House and with the true consultation of all members in the House.

Let us talk about these mystery ministers, because I think that is the right terminology. If the Liberals had amended the legislation and called them mystery ministers, I might even have considered voting for it, just a little bit.

Now who among the Liberal backbench has worked hard enough to join and become a mystery minister? What kinds of positions could they hold? Who has distinguished themselves the most? I have wondered that, and I have a few suggestions. However, let us go to those new portfolios first.

I think we should have a minister for balancing budgets, because I can see the Minister of Finance suffers terribly in the House not being able to follow through on what he believed when he was in the private sector working for Morneau Shepell, for a company that worked in human resources, a well-known EAP. I worked in human resources before with many HR professionals. It was the company that was involved in it. It was considered an expert in the field. Now they need to help. A full minister responsible for balancing the budget could find those savings all across government, and they would not even need to rely on the Minister of Finance to accomplish that.

Now I think they also need a minister for the tabulation of Liberal broken promises. I say that tongue in cheek, but there is just so many

of them, it would be a full-time job. It would probably mean overtime and many late hours of tabulation. I also think they could use a minister for strategic photo-ops, or photo bombs, as the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge likes to say, maybe Instagram as well, because that seems to be an all-consuming passion of the Prime Minister. Why not make it a full ministry while we are at it?

• (2325)

The minister for seniors is a very serious suggestion. There is no minister for seniors, but I have a colleague here who was the minister of state for seniors. That is the seriousness of what we are doing for seniors and the growing seniors population in Canada. There are many members on our side of the House that advocated for the government actually appointing a person, a champion, an advocate for seniors in government to bring those issues forward. That one is far less tongue in cheek. That would have an actual impact on government legislation and government regulation, and their focus areas as well.

I will suggest another one: a minister for anti-corruption. We have had Liberal cabinet fundraising on the cocktail circuit, and really iffy appointments being brought before the House for an official languages commissioner, which is now pulled. Many other ones have come through for ACOA and for other organizations in government. We are still waiting on those judges to be appointed.

How about a minister for procurement to actually fix what is happening on that side of the House. Between the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of National Defence, they just cannot get it done, and they will not get it done. Why not appoint a person whose sole job in this government will be to procure equipment for our Canadian Armed Forces, for the Coast Guard, and throughout government? Just appoint someone, and not the Minister of Public Works. Obviously, she cannot get it done.

How about we appoint a minister dedicated to holding the President of the Treasury Board's hand to actually follow through on his mandate letter that says he will go ahead and amend the Access to Information Act, which he has now said he will not do. They are not following through on those reforms. They have no intention of doing it anymore. Why not actually have meaningful transparency and fulfill a campaign promise, one of which I thought was not a bad idea? Why not do it?

I have been on the receiving end of ATIP and how it does not work. Right now I have an access to information request with a government department for what I think is the fictional orphan drug framework. I have been basically told that I will not get it for another eight years. It is a very reasonable access to information request, but they told me they would use the extension provisions in the act to prevent me from getting what I am actually asking for, the thousands of documents, until eight years from now. That is far beyond the mandate of a member of Parliament.

Government Orders

How about a minister for sock selection? That is more tongue in cheek. Obviously, we have seen there are lots of different permutations they could have.

Mr. Speaker, you do not have interesting socks like the Prime Minister does. I am sorry to see that.

Like my colleague for Perth—Wellington said, the government is all socks, no action. We seem to spend way more time talking about the Prime Minister's socks than his achievements. What has he actually done? What has he actually achieved almost two years into this mandate? There is barely any achievement, any legislation passed, a massive deficit, a huge debt, a carbon tax, and really no plan. Actually they are forcing carbon taxes on every single province whether the population wants it or the government wants it.

I will say that there are lots of good members on that side of the House who could make it into these mystery ministerial portfolios. I am looking at one gentleman whom I am sure would desperately want to get one.

How about the member for St. John's East, a member I travelled with on the Canada Post review committee through Atlantic Canada, or the member for Malpeque, who has an independent streak?

I will end on this one point, I think the last ministerial position they could appoint, from one of my very favourite shows, is the minister for administrative affairs. I am sure Paul Eddington, Nigel Hawthorne, Derek Fowlds, and Diana Hoddinott would be supremely pleased by such a title in this government because I think *Yes Minister* represents exactly the fulfilment in this government of everything they are able to achieve, which is very little, blocked by the bureaucracy that seems to love them very much, but is unable to actually achieve any of the goals they were elected on, unable to actually follow through on any of the goals set out in the mandate letters, and actually have achieved very little in the past two years. Except now, we have a late evening sitting and we are debating cabinet raises, pay raises for cabinet ministers as opposed to the Cannabis Act or maybe balancing the budget or actually any number of the other pieces of legislation before the House that could have been brought forward by the government. They have chosen not to.

It is just a poor piece of legislation and I will not be voting for it.

● (2330)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member not agree with me that when we look at the five portfolios, such as science, something that we believed in and I think the past government really did not believe in, science and looking at facts and evidence and making decisions based on facts and evidence, they should each be a full ministry? Status of women is the same thing. How about small business and tourism? It is the backbone of the economy. Tourists are coming to Canada in greater numbers. Small businesses are growing and our economy is growing.

Is it not important that these great members of our government who serve their residents and serve Canadians have the authority of our full ministers and are paid equally? Again, I correct the record that there are no salary increases with C-24. I would like to let the member know that.

● (2335)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the bill does not achieve any of those goals. All it does is set different pay levels for cabinet ministers. All of the ministers already have a voice at the table. They are already working on files. The problem is that they do not have the same responsibilities. They cannot present directly to cabinet. As the member for Calgary Nose Hill said, they do not have the ability to push MCs without the approval of their lead ministers. They do not have the same pay because they do not have the same responsibilities. It really has nothing to do with their gender.

I made a point earlier and posed this question when other members spoke. How about pay for performance? How about we pay them based on their performance, their ability to meet their mandate letter requirements? That would be a great way to pay cabinet ministers.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hate to disappoint the member, but in the previous government, no ministers had decision power because they had to go through the kids in short pants.

I will bring the member back to what the ministers of state were under the previous government. I recall a minister losing some power under her senior minister. Her crime was that she gave \$400,000 to the Toronto gay pride parade. That was the state of those ministers under the previous government.

Again, I go back to having an equal voice at the cabinet table and equal pay. What does the member not understand about equal pay for equal work?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member said “kids in shorts pants”. I would rather kids in short pants than kids in Prada pants.

I believe the member worked for Dalton McGuinty. I worked as an exempt staffer for Gordon O'Connor when he was in national defence. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones, either. We should not slag those in our profession who are now occupying exempt staffer positions in ministers' offices. I do not do it to those who served in the Conservative government. I also do not pick on staff in the different ministers' offices.

The Prime Minister's Office is very different. Everything runs through Gerald Butts. How about that? Nobody seems to want to talk about that as much. On this side of the House, we mention that all the time. It seems that everything is decided by the Prime Minister's staff at the highest levels, not the Prime Minister.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, different governments have different priorities. We have been very clear. The Prime Minister was very clear right from the beginning when cabinet was first appointed that the ministers would be on an equal footing. This is bringing that about. We have set out our priorities clearly for each one of them: the francophone minister, the small business and tourism minister, the status of women minister, and the science minister, and I am missing one. Each one is a priority. We have been transparent, we have been clear, and the bill will set the record straight and put things where they should be. Why does the member not understand that these are the priorities of this government?

Government Orders

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, the member and I serve together on the foreign affairs committee. I have deep respect for his specialization on human rights. We oftentimes agree at the committee level. However, the priority of the government should be reducing the deficit to zero, building up a surplus, paying down the national debt, and helping the middle class instead of offering up pay raises for Liberal cabinet ministers.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be sharing my time with the hon. member for Hochelaga.

I want to take this opportunity tonight to speak to Bill C-24, and to discuss the reasons why it is an illusory attempt to cover-up a key political charade with regard to the Prime Minister's commitment to gender parity. That commitment rings hollow when we get down to the heart of the matter, and the substance of the bill which creates a new set of problems for economic development.

The whole thing is a diversion from the real issues and required actions. Canadians deserve a candid account of what is before them with the government's Bill C-24. There are three key measures contained in the bill. First, it adds the current ministers of state to the minister's section of the Salaries Act, thereby giving them the same salary as ministers. Second, it creates three new place holder cabinet positions to be filled and defined whenever the Prime Minister chooses to do so. Third, the bill removes ministers who act as the heads of regional economic development agencies from the Salaries Act.

The effect is that if someone is the head of a regional economic development agency, it no longer makes them a minister. That is significant because it stands to reason that the minister in charge of economic development of a region must also know and understand that region. The Liberals have made a crucial error in consolidating all the economic development agencies under a single minister. Central control of regional development was an ill-advised move that should have been turned back, and now the bill removes all possibility of appointing a minister specifically responsible for the economic development of a particular region. What they are doing is entrenching their mistake into legislation.

In a press release issued by the government when it introduced Bill C-24, it said that the legislation was meant to show that the Government of Canada was committed to creating a one-tier ministry that recognized the equality of all cabinet members and supported their work on the government's priorities. The government would have us believe that there is an important principle of equality at stake with the bill, but in fact, the bill fails to demonstrate any greater equality between ministers or between men and women in cabinet, for that matter, than an existing legislative regime already does.

The NDP has long championed the closing of the gender wage gap in cabinet as well as for all Canadians. The problem with the bill, however, is that it is not so much designed to close the gender wage gap as it is meant to fix a political problem the Prime Minister created when he boasted about having a government with gender parity, but appointed a disproportionate amount of women to junior posts.

Members will recall that the Prime Minister originally bragged about having gender parity in his cabinet. However, he quickly came under criticism for having made most of them ministers of state instead of full ministers. As I pointed out, ministers of state are not department heads, and between 2008 and 2015 inclusively, they have not been paid as full ministers.

Changing the law so that ministers of state receive the same pay and status as full ministers is the Prime Minister's disingenuous solution which only deals with the issue of his contrived gender pay gap in cabinet. It does not deal with the issue of whether or not real gender parity in cabinet means appointing an equal number of women to be department heads.

By papering over the distinction between ministers of state and full ministers, the Prime Minister is prioritizing equality of compensation over equality of responsibility with respect to gender parity in his government.

• (2340)

In addition to that huge problem, we are also deeply concerned about the Liberals' move to consolidate the economic development agencies under one minister, from Mississauga, who is the current Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. This is a huge mistake. It should go without saying that the minister in charge of economic development in a region must know and understand the region. Our provinces and territories will be best served by economic initiatives designed to meet their unique challenges and issues, something that a pan-Canadian approach will not do.

I have to underscore that what makes it worse is that this bill would remove the possibility of appointing a minister specifically responsible for the economic development of a particular region. Regional economic development should absolutely be a priority of the government, but the current approach of centralizing control of regional economic development under a solo minister from Ontario is broken. The government should not entrench its mistakes in legislation.

The law currently allows for the provision that ministers of state with the appropriate level of responsibility be paid as ministers for departments. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* clearly states and specifies the difference in their roles. I will quote a portion of it:

The principle of individual ministerial responsibility holds that Ministers are accountable not only for their own actions as department heads, but also for the actions of their subordinates; individual ministerial responsibility provides the basis for accountability throughout the system. Virtually all departmental activity is carried out in the name of a Minister who, in turn, is responsible to Parliament for those acts. Ministers exercise power and are constitutionally responsible for the provision and conduct of government; Parliament holds them personally responsible for it.

In other words, one minister must ultimately be accountable for the actions of a department. While ministers may delegate responsibilities, they are ultimately responsible for the actions of those to whom they delegate.

Government Orders

Either the Liberals are creating a situation where the lines of accountability are not clear, in which case they are compromising the principle of ministerial responsibility, or they must admit that some ministers will still be subordinate to others; i.e., not all ministers are equal.

There is nothing wrong with having some ministers who run departments and some who do not, nor is there anything wrong with having a convenient title, like minister of state, to designate those ministers with less responsibility.

Canadian taxpayers are being asked to pay more for junior ministers so that the Prime Minister can be spared the embarrassment of explaining that a gender pay gap in cabinet existed because he failed to appoint enough women to senior posts. If the goal of the bill is simply to eliminate the gender pay gap created by appointing a disproportionate number of women to junior roles, it is completely unnecessary. This could be accomplished in two ways: by making the current ministers of state ministers of departments, or by establishing ministries of state for the current ministers of state.

Meanwhile, the gender parity argument is cringeworthy. The Liberal government is dragging its feet when it comes to implementing pay equity for all Canadian women who are not in cabinet. We are still waiting for this feminist Prime Minister to implement proactive legislation on pay equity before the end of 2016. We are still waiting for the repeal of the unfair 2009 Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, and last but not least, we still await the adoption of the recommendations of 2004 pay equity task force.

If the government is sincere, we need it to conduct and publicly release a gender-based analysis of this bill, close the gender wage gap, and address the responsibility gap in cabinet by making more women department heads. The government must address pay equity and equal opportunity for all Canadians in conjunction with those meaningful initiatives.

• (2345)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated hearing the comments by my colleague across the way about different women's issues and all of that. She focused on the importance of women's issues in this country. What I heard in earlier debate from across the way is that the position of Minister of Status of Women is a less important role. It is not as important and does not have the same responsibilities as other roles. As far as I understand, that is a role that covers 50% of our population.

I wonder what she has to say about the idea that the Minister of Status of Women is not as important a role as other roles in government.

• (2350)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I think that is twisting words and distracting from the point.

If you go back and look up the definitions of ministers of state, you will see the difference and the nuances. It is not a matter of it being less important per se and ideologically; it is a matter of the salary structure.

That is why Bill C-24 is being proposed. It is because you are changing the Salaries Act.

We have a legislative framework that is contradicting what the ideological stance is. That is why I would encourage all of the members to go back and read the definitions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to assure the hon. member that I am not changing anything. I am sure she meant the Liberals, not the Speaker.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on that very heartfelt speech and ask her if she thinks it is sad to see the Liberal government once again flatly refusing to admit to even the tiniest mistake.

The government wants to slap a band-aid worth hundreds of thousands of dollars on this problem and is making MPs put in hundreds of hours of work at all hours of the day and night to get it done.

One of these days, will the Liberals acknowledge that they do not actually know everything and that they are not perfect all the time?

[English]

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Speaker, I am very fortunate to come from the riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, where people are extremely progressive and extremely well informed. I think part of the reason is that we are a cross-border community that is in proximity to our wonderful neighbours in Detroit, Michigan.

We have a chance to discuss policy in a very collegial way, and people drill down into the meaning of it. I love going home and listening, because I hear people talking about the charade of politics, which is really what got me involved in politics. I saw the cynicism and I felt the cynicism growing within me, but I feel that there was a hopefulness that intrigued people.

Now we see a charade that really boils down to an emotional immaturity and an arrogance. Instead of stepping up to say, "We are going to be collegial. We are not going to make unilateral decisions. We are going to be sincere with the campaign promises that we made. We are going to sincerely work with you", instead words have been twisted in very much the same way that words were twisted in the fairytale that we tell our children to teach them a valuable social lesson, called *The Emperor's New Clothes*.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. I would remind the hon. member for Hochelaga that she has about seven minutes left before we wrap up.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to get right to the point, even though it is not easy.

I want to talk about equity. My colleagues may be familiar with the concept of a *trompe-l'oeil*, which is a drawing that really looks like the object depicted. I think of Bill C-24 as a *trompe-l'oeil*. It is a fake, an illusion. The bill is supposed to ensure that ministers of both sexes are equal, but that is not really what it does.

The Prime Minister changed a title, reclassified a particular position, and gave both jobs the same salary. Ministers of state will now get the same pay as ministers. Is that really equity? I think not.

Earlier, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill showed us that there is no equity between these two types of positions. Personally, I would add that a designated minister can delegate tasks to another category of people, called ministers, for whom departments are designated. What do we call ministers for whom departments are designated? We used to call them ministers of state.

Some categories of ministers can delegate tasks to others. The hierarchy seems pretty clear. Those to whom powers, duties or functions can be delegated are all women. They will get equal pay, but they will not have equal responsibilities. Every junior minister is a woman. They do not have the same powers.

If the Prime Minister were a real feminist he would have appointed more women to head departments from the outset. Instead of introducing bogus bills that are not substantive and do not solve the real problems, why not work on something that would truly help women, all women? I have two examples. The first is pay equity. I will be brief.

We have already talked about the fact that Canadian women earn barely three-quarters of what Canadian men earn. Traditionally female occupations are undervalued in the job evaluation and compensation systems.

Do my colleagues not think that a truly feminist government would have introduced legislation on pay equity as soon as it was elected, rather than Bill C-24, which merely scratches the surface, and only for a tiny fraction of the population? Meanwhile, women continue to get poorer and poorer.

The second example is the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act. I think that piece of legislation should be completely repealed. The Harper government imposed that act on public sector workers eight years ago, and it is truly an abomination. I will explain why.

It forces women to lodge complaints as individuals rather than obtain the support of their union. It prohibits access to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. It also makes pay equity an issue for collective bargaining, rather than a human rights issue. It forces unions to make a choice between addressing systemic pay discrimination and seeing what is left to improve working conditions for all the employees they represent. This places the blame on women.

As my colleague from Trois-Rivières was saying earlier, he negotiated in favour of pay equity. I too negotiated pay equity at the museum where I used to work. It is a very long and complicated process. Filing this type of complaint must seem like an impossible task to a person acting alone. It is very difficult. I suppose most women do not file complaints because of those rules.

Adjournment Proceedings

Obviously, the NDP is in favour of eliminating the gender wage gap in cabinet. We believe in equal pay for equal work. However, while Bill C-24 may change salary amounts, it does not achieve equity. Men still hold more power than many of the women in cabinet. For true equity, we need to create equal opportunities for and give equal responsibilities to men and women. The provisions of the federal pay equity legislation must be enforced right away. I believe we should also immediately repeal the legislation I just mentioned, the terrible Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act.

Bill C-24, an act to amend the Salaries Act and to make a consequential amendment to the Financial Administration Act, is not very useful in achieving real gender equality in cabinet.

I did not mention the other reasons why I will not be voting in favour of this bill.

● (2355)

This government's lack of good faith shows in this bill. It could have introduced much more meaningful legislation. I will therefore be voting against this bill, and I hope that every other real feminist will do the same.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to revisit the question I asked the Minister of Public Safety on February 21.

At that time, I raised the matter of the influx of migrants illegally crossing the border into Canada from the United States, an issue that has been directly impacting residents in my riding, particularly those living in border communities like Emerson.

I have raised this issue several more times since then, including with the official opposition critic for immigration, the member for Calgary Nose Hill, to invite the Prime Minister to visit Emerson to see the situation first-hand. The Liberals have taken no action to step in and our invitation has gone without response.

When I asked my question in February, approximately 160 illegal migrants had been intercepted by the RCMP in Manitoba. The provincial total to date is 477, nearly triple the number we saw by the end of February, and that does not even include the month of May. It is June already and we still do not have the May information. The Canadian total at the end of April was a whopping 2,719 illegal crossings. At this rate, we could see 8,000 individuals cross our borders illegally from the United States by the end of the year. These are only the individuals who are intercepted by the RCMP.

Adjournment Proceedings

These skyrocketing numbers stem from the confusion that the Prime Minister has created. On several occasions, he has tweeted remarks such as “Regardless of who you are or where you come from, there’s always a place for you in Canada.” Many in the media have pointed out just how misleading these statements are.

For example, in an April 3rd piece for the CBC, Graeme Gordon, wrote:

Anyone with the smallest bit of knowledge about the immigration process understands that Canada's doors are anything but wide open, but [the Prime Minister] isn't just blatantly spreading falsehoods by sending that message — he's actually enticing people to uproot their lives, throwing another wrench into an already chaotic immigration system, all based on disingenuous messaging.

He is exactly right. When the Prime Minister places virtue-signalling ahead of good public policy, there are real world consequences. Many Canadians, including myself, want a Canada that helps those fleeing war, violence, or persecution. In light of the dramatic increase in illegal crossings, the Prime Minister had to know these messages, shared the world over, would lead many would-be illegal migrants to believe that Canada's border was just a suggestion.

We recently received the tragic news of a woman who Minnesota authorities said died while attempting to cross the border illegally. I expressed concern about this many months ago; that individuals would choose to enter Canada illegally and dangerously because of the Prime Minister's misleading rhetoric.

There are also security concerns. The head of the union representing Canada's border service officers shared that nearly half of those crossing into Manitoba illegally were being detained because of serious criminal records. Then we learned that a female CBSA officer was assaulted by a male migrant while undertaking her duties. Thankfully she was not seriously injured. We have also seen evidence of human smuggling.

Canada is a generous and accepting country. We have an immigration system that reflects that, but we also need to protect the integrity of our border. With so many people looking to Canada as a land of opportunity, we need to ensure that our immigration and refugee system is consistent and fair for everyone seeking to make Canada their home.

The Prime Minister is still not willing to condemn these illegal border crossings even as the number of instances continues to climb. As with any problem, before it can be solved the person with the power to fix it must admit that the problem exists. Meaningful action from the Liberal government is long overdue. The Prime Minister must step up and show some leadership. Again, what action are the Liberals—

• (2400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to again thank the citizens, service providers, and first responders in the areas most affected by the arrival of asylum seekers, particularly in Emerson, Manitoba, and the Hemmingford and Lacolle region of Quebec. I

truly applaud the compassion and generosity these communities have shown towards asylum seekers over the past few months.

The government knows that the influx of asylum seekers is having an impact on Emerson and on border communities in Quebec, and to a lesser extent, British Columbia, and that this has raised some security concerns.

I want to assure the House and all Canadians that government security officials are working together to ensure the integrity of Canada's borders. The integrity of our borders is proactively maintained by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canada Border Services Agency, who continue to effectively deliver on their respective mandates to enforce the law at and between our ports of entry.

As has already been stated, the safety and well-being of Canadian communities, and the individuals who are crossing the border, are of utmost importance to the government and to front-line officers.

The government is in constant contact with the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency and receives regular detailed updates on the arrival of refugee claimants from the United States who cross the border between ports of entry in Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia.

The RCMP is the lead responder between ports of entry, and in response to its ongoing assessment of the situation, additional resources have been temporarily deployed to the most affected regions. The RCMP and its partners recognize that the situation is evolving rapidly, so they continually assess it to determine whether they need to adjust their response or their operational requirements.

The RCMP has a multi-faceted approach to border security that includes technology, intelligence, and domestic and international partnerships, especially with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Homeland Security Investigations.

I want to make it clear that crossing the Canadian border without reporting to a port of entry is illegal and a crime under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Customs Act. Anyone caught breaking the law can be arrested and is liable to applicable sanctions. Canada has requirements for entry be it a normal immigration procedure or a refugee claim.

The RCMP is being vigilant. That is why it is stopping asylum seekers crossing into Canada between ports of entry. The asylum seekers are screened and escorted to the nearest port of entry where the Canada Border Services Agency initiates the applicable immigration procedures.

The collaborative and co-operative efforts between the RCMP and its partners, including non-governmental agencies, health authorities, and immigration services agencies, demonstrate a genuine community response to the situation.

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For now, the government has faith that the RCMP, together with the Canada Border Services Agency, is handling this complex and evolving situation properly and effectively.

• (2405)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I too want to acknowledge the very good work our CBSA officers are doing and the RCMP in providing assistance in between our points of entry in apprehending these illegal migrants.

However, the issue is still one of border security and maintaining our border integrity. There appears to be a loophole in the safe third country agreement with the United States that needs to be addressed. It still is encouraging illegal migrants because of the Prime Minister's reckless tweets. Once they are here, I know our law enforcement officials are very disappointed with how they have to proceed with processing those individuals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP and the Canada Border Services Agency continue to actively monitor the border between ports of entry and to effectively intervene when asylum seekers cross the border from the United States.

The RCMP has temporarily reassigned additional personnel to deal with this situation. The federal government has made it clear that it is prepared to discuss all options to ensure that Canadian law enforcement agencies have the tools and resources they need to do their job.

The government continues to be fully involved in the situation and will keep the House apprised of key changes.

[*English*]

HEALTH

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to first say hello to the folks who are watching on our Facebook Live feed. We are broadcasting this on Facebook Live because we want Canadians living with autism, those who follow us, to hear the types of answers we have been getting in the House of Commons. I am hoping that the Liberal member who is going to answer questions today will not just simply read the same talking points that we have been hearing.

We have asked 13 questions on the issue of the Canadian autism partnership. For background, in 2015 the Conservative government of the day invested \$2 million in a Canadian autism partnership working group, a group of experts to advise the government on a way forward regarding a Canadian autism partnership. These 12 experts, in concert with seven incredible self-advocates, in concert with the Canadian autism community, consulted and came to the current government in the fall of 2016 with a modest budget proposal of \$19 million over five years, \$3.8 million per year, and that was subsequently rejected.

We had a motion in the House in the last couple of weeks to fund that Canadian autism partnership, and every single Liberal except for one voted against it. Every Conservative, every Green MP, and every NDP MP voted for it, but every single Liberal but one voted against it.

In the questions that we have been asking, I could summarize in three categories the reasons given for this vote against.

One is the fact that the government is consulting and having meetings on accessibility legislation now. I admit that accessibility legislation is important and will be important when it eventually comes to the House, but the MP member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke summed it up best when he said this during the debate: “However, we have heard yet another one of those speeches that talks about consulting people, thinking about it, working on it later, and finally coming to a conclusion sometime over the distant horizon.” Canadians living with autism need support now, and the Canadian autism partnership would provide that support.

The second of the answers that we continually get in question period from the Liberal government is that the government is investing in things like Ready, Willing and Able and the autism surveillance program. Those programs were put in place by the previous Conservative government. I am very familiar with them because I was a part of the decision process that got them into the budgets in the first place under Jim Flaherty, who had something in every single budget for people living with disabilities. That is his legacy in this House.

The third thing that gets brought up repeatedly and was brought up by the Prime Minister today in question period is the \$39 million that has been invested over the last five years in autism research. I suspect that we are going to hear the member talk about that \$39 million in his talking points again today.

First, that \$39 million was largely invested by our previous Conservative government. Second, very important, on the working group whose advice the government rejected were Lonnie Zwaigenbaum from the University of Alberta, Jonathan Weiss from York University, Stelios Georgiades from McMaster, and Stephen Scherer from Sick Kids, some of the world's top researchers. What those researchers want more than anything is for their research to actually be used to benefit Canadian families living with autism.

It is time for the Liberals to stop hiding behind those researchers and actually stand alongside them in support of Canadian families living with autism.

I look forward to hearing the hon. member, hopefully avoiding his talking points and answering to Canadians living with autism why every single one of his colleagues, except for one, voted against the Canadian autism partnership.

• (2410)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the challenges that Canadians with autism spectrum disorder are facing. We know that their families and caregivers have to overcome health-related, social, and financial challenges.

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The federal government's investments will help advance research, encourage collaboration with the provinces and territories to improve the data, and support the necessary professional training to improve the quality of life for the families.

Thanks to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, we are supporting researchers who are advancing scientific knowledge in order to develop new diagnostic tools and new treatments. For example, Canadian scientists are at the forefront of genomic techniques, an area where discoveries advance our knowledge and understanding of this disorder much more quickly.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research and their partners fund a research chair in autism spectrum disorders at York University to study mental health in the context of autism. Since this chair was created, Dr. Jonathan Weiss and his team have produced several publications informing doctors and parents of the best approaches to addressing mental health problems in young ASD patients. Dr. Weiss also started a blog geared to caregivers and parents in order to share with them the findings of new studies in plainer language.

It is also essential to have accurate data about the rate of autism spectrum disorder in Canada. The Public Health Agency of Canada is working with the provinces and territories to establish a national ASD surveillance system in order to determine how many Canadians are living with autism and how many new cases are being diagnosed. This system will improve the information and evidence base and thus help organizations, health care professionals, and families to address the health, social, and other impacts of ASD.

Employment and Social Development Canada invests \$40 million a year in community support and job training through the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities. Additional investments in the ready, willing, and able initiative of the Canadian Association for Community Living and in the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance help people with ASD to integrate into the workforce.

Once fully implemented, this initiative will support up to 1,200 new jobs for persons with developmental disabilities, including ASD. We invested an additional \$11.4 million to support the Sinneave Family Foundation's CommunityWorks program, which helps people get the skills they need to find jobs by enhancing the programs offered by the network of vocational training centres across Canada.

Our government is consulting Canadians about the development of federal accessibility legislation, which would remove systemic barriers and ensure equal opportunities. All levels of government play an important role in supporting families affected by ASD.

Our government is committed to working with its provincial and territorial partners and with the organizations that support these families. I have a great deal of admiration for the dedication of our partners, who provide important services and seek to increase people's awareness and understanding of ASD every day.

We will continue to work with stakeholders, including the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance, to ensure that federal initiatives meet the needs of individuals with ASD.

● (2415)

[*English*]

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, that speech highlights exactly what I said. I predicted exactly what he was going to say, because he read the same talking points the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister have been reading day after day in the House.

In fact, the hon. member actually credits organizations like the Sinneave Family Foundation and Dr. Jonathan Weiss, the very people and scientists working in genomics who are part of the Canadian Autism Partnership Working Group. Of the 12 experts in the working group, the hon. member just named six of them in his speech. These are the ones who are identifying the challenges and coming to the government in a partnership asking for a mechanism that will provide evidence-based advice to the provinces to help them deliver the services families so desperately need in this country.

If the hon. member is serious about this issue, why did he and every member of his party, except one, vote against the Canadian autism partnership?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance and the members of the autism spectrum disorder working group for their proposal to set up a Canadian autism partnership. I also thank the alliance for its ongoing dedication to supporting children and families living with autism.

I recognize the scope of the consultation process and how many people were involved in developing the proposal, which takes into account discussions with groups that advocate for the rights of people living with autism.

The federal government will continue to work in partnership with people involved in the field to meet the challenges set out in this proposal.

I see the alliance and the expert working group on autism spectrum disorder becoming important partners in this effort.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill not being present in the House to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*English*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day, at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12:18 a.m.)

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