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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 5, 2018

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1105)

[English]

UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ACT

The House resumed from December 5, 2017, consideration of the motion that Bill C-262, An Act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be in the House today to talk about Bill C-262. At the outset, I would like to thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his passion and his lifelong work to advance the causes of indigenous peoples, both in his riding and across the country. He is a passionate defender of indigenous rights. He is a passionate defender of indigenous languages. He is a survivor of the residential school system.

It was a pleasure to work with the member when I was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of aboriginal affairs in the last Parliament. We had discussions about this. He brought forward a similar bill calling on the Government of Canada to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canadian law. At the time, when I spoke to his bill, I said:

It must be said at the outset that our government is dedicated to protecting aboriginal rights in Canada. Indeed, Canada already boasts a unique and robust legal framework through which aboriginal rights are protected....

More than just lip service, we have enshrined the rights of aboriginal peoples in our Constitution, one of the only countries in the world to do so. As my hon. colleagues will know, aboriginal and treaty rights are recognized and affirmed in section 35 of the Constitution Act and reaffirmed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Moreover, our government has also issued a statement of support for the principles of the very document at the core of this bill, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which are consistent with our own commitment to continue working in partnership with aboriginal peoples to improve the well-being of aboriginal Canadians.

However, we have also been clear from the outset that while we support the general principles behind the declaration, there are several portions of the document with which our government has grave concerns, and we have articulated those

concerns clearly to Canadians and to the international community, particularly as they relate to the concept of free, prior, and informed consent....

That really is at the crux of this debate. Can the concept of free, prior, and informed consent reconcile with section 35 of the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Can we reconcile free, prior, and informed consent with the Canadian concept, which has been developed by Canadian legislatures, by Canadian Parliaments, by negotiations, and through jurisprudence, of the duty to consult and accommodate where necessary? Can the two be reconciled, or would the implementation of UNDRIP and FPIC, as they are called, supersede the work that has been done over the last 15 years especially, by the courts, by government, to create the duty to consult and accommodate? That is still a concept that is under constant refinement. It is one that is uniquely Canadian, and it responds to the unique circumstances Canadians have, which include section 35. We are one of the only countries in the world that specifically outlines indigenous rights and has them enshrined in our Constitution.

There is grave concern that if we were to simply adopt the United Nations convention how it would interact with our laws. That is why our previous government supported the goals and the underlying principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People but said that it was an aspirational document that should serve as a guide, not as a legal text.

That is a significant difference between the vision of the NDP and the current government. The government has now indicated that it will support the bill, which says that the Government of Canada must adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and make Canadian laws compliant with it.

One of the issues the member took with my speech and my position in the last Parliament was the subject of whether free, prior, and informed consent constituted a veto.

There are specific articles of the United Nations declaration that speak to natural resource development, for instance, on traditional territories. The member took great offence when I indicated that this would constitute a veto for indigenous communities, but I am not the only who has said that. Dr. Pam Palmater, an indigenous activist and commentator, said very clearly in a CBC interview:

Private Members' Business

We have...a legal right to free and informed and prior consent.... First Nations aren't asking for anything. First Nations have the right to free, informed and prior consent. That right is guaranteed in law and in effect that is a veto. First Nations say no on their territory, that means no. And [the Prime Minister] said very clearly that no means no when talking to First Nations. His job is to try to find ways in which to go forward with a yes to make sure that...the environment is protected and the economy goes forward, but not one at the expense of the other.

On February 8, 2017, under the headline “[The Prime Minister] has forgotten his promises to Indigenous Canadians”, she went on to say:

During the 2015 election campaign, [the Prime Minister] told First Nations that if we elected him, he would absolutely respect our legal right to veto any development on our territories. And yet his government has approved two major pipelines.

We have no choice but to challenge the Canadian government over its pipeline plans, and continue to fight.

Clearly, there are some indigenous scholars who believe that simply agreeing to the principles of UNDRIP means that a right to veto has already been granted to indigenous communities. Clearly, more work needs to be done. We cannot simply rush into a process where there is no agreement on what these articles mean and how they would be applied in Canadian law.

I want to quote Frank Iacobucci, the former Supreme Court justice, who said:

An important tenet of UNDRIP is the consultation of indigenous peoples “in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent.” Future legislation, government policy and judicial interpretations will determine whether these principles differ significantly from Canada's existing jurisprudence on the duty to consult.

Regardless, the principles of free, prior and informed consent and the existing duty to consult share the same goal: to protect Indigenous peoples, remedy historical disadvantage and provide a foundation for a more respectful and mutually beneficial relationship.

Clearly, that is the goal of all parliamentarians. We want to find a way to make our laws and system work better for all indigenous communities in Canada. We want to make sure that they see the benefits of responsible resource development. We have certainly seen cases where the government has had no concern for the indigenous communities that support natural resource development. On the Eagle Spirit Energy pipeline, for instance, they were not consulted at all on the issue of the tanker moratorium in northern British Columbia. The northern gateway pipeline was cancelled without consulting indigenous communities that stood to benefit by a \$2-billion equity share in that project. There is not even agreement yet in Canada as to which group would grant free, prior, and informed consent, the new concept that has been envisioned in UNDRIP.

We all want to move together toward reconciliation. Conservatives have made efforts on that. It was the Conservative government that launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the Conservatives believe that we should respect Canadian law, Canadian jurisprudence, and the duty to consult and accommodate. We believe that this bill goes down a path of uncertainty that would create greater uncertainty in Canada, which would not lead to reconciliation. It would lead to greater fear and discord. We believe that we need to work together to come up with a Canadian solution to this issue and not simply adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We need to work together, using the tools available in our Constitution and in our courts.

● (1110)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish at the outset to recognize the testimony of over 6,000 Canadians before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the many who have advocated for the enactment of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I particularly wish to pay tribute to my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, for his dedication and persistence in both the creation of the UNDRIP and its affirmation in Canadian law.

It is truly an honour and a privilege to speak in support of Bill C-262, an act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The bill was tabled by the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, the NDP critic for reconciliation. It affirms the UNDRIP as a universal international human rights instrument with application in Canadian law. It requires that the government take all necessary measures to ensure that Canadian laws are consistent with the declaration and to do so in consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples in Canada. It also requires, through that same inclusive process, an action plan to achieve those objectives.

As early as 2006, former NDP leader Jack Layton expressed our party's support for the UNDRIP, saying that it was our belief in social justice and equality that led us to support the declaration. Related bills and motions were introduced during past Parliaments by former NDP MP Denise Savoie and the member for London—Fanshawe. In the previous Parliament, a bill similar to Bill C-262 was tabled by the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, but it was defeated at second reading by 17 votes.

This declaration was overwhelmingly adopted by the members of the UN General Assembly in September 2007, following more than 25 years of deliberation and debate. This process included decades of dedicated work by a number of esteemed Canadian indigenous leaders, among them the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild, esteemed commissioner of the TRC.

As my colleague has shared, this milestone in the enshrining of human rights was the first time that rights-holder indigenous peoples had been given a central role in the creation of a global rights instrument. The declaration affirms the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination across every matter touching their lives. It underlines the prohibition against discrimination and genocide in international law.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-262 would enshrine the UNDRIP into Canadian law. It is important to note that voting in favour of a UN declaration is just the first step in showing commitment as a nation. A next critical step is the enactment of a law to affirm those principles in law, and then an action plan must be developed and delivered to actually implement the principles. By way of example, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity was enshrined in Canadian law through the Species at Risk Act. However, the struggle continues to ensure that the rights and benefits accorded under separate treaties are also observed in implementing that law.

It may be noted that the Federal Court held that a previous federal minister of the environment had erred in law by failing to consider the rights accorded to indigenous peoples, under treaty, for the recovery of woodland caribou. Sadly, little has changed, necessitating continued intervention by the courts and UN agencies. Indigenous leaders will be closely examining the coming bills regulating environmental assessment, major energy projects, fisheries, and navigable waters to verify that they are made consistent with the UNDRIP.

We were encouraged that the current Liberal government has moved beyond the position of the previous Conservative government that the UNDRIP is merely “an aspirational document”. In May 2016, then minister of indigenous and northern affairs announced her government's full support of the declaration, without qualification. However, confusion remained due to continued qualifiers for that support and a continuing refusal to enact the declaration in federal law.

The final breakthrough came in November last year, when the Minister of Justice publicly announced:

our government will support Bill C- 262. The bill acknowledges the application of the UN declaration in Canada and calls for the alignment of the laws of Canada with the UN declaration.

In enacting the UNDRIP in Canadian law, what will the Liberal government be committing to deliver? The declaration contains 46 articles specifying the rights to be accorded to indigenous peoples to affirm self-determination and an end to discrimination and genocide. It provides a detailed framework for justice and reconciliation.

• (1115)

Bill C-262 is consistent with the TRC call that any legislation be developed in consultation and collaboration with aboriginal peoples.

It is also important to recall the commitment made by the Prime Minister to deliver on all 94 of the calls to action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Calls to action nos. 43 to 52 specifically call on the “federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.”

Bill C-262 mirrors the TRC call for a national action plan, measures to ensure consistency between the UNDRIP and all federal laws, and government accountability through annual state of aboriginal peoples reports outlining plans to advance reconciliation. By this promise, the Government of Canada has therefore committed to “develop a national action plan, strategies and other concrete

measures” to achieve the UNDRIP goals, including to enact legislation to establish a national council for reconciliation.

The TRC, in its interim report, recommended that all governments use the UNDRIP as the framework for reconciliation in Canada. The council, now established, is led by former TRC Commissioner, now Treaty No. 6 Grand Chief, Wilton Littlechild. As he recently reminded me, the declaration also clearly calls on all states to honour and respect the treaties and other agreements entered into with indigenous peoples.

In closing, I wish to share a message that Grand Chief Wilton Littlechild shared with me, which he recently delivered to the leaders of treaties nos. 1 to 11. He stated, “As with the eagle that represents first nations, one wing of the eagle represents the treaties we signed in good faith. The other wing represents the UNDRIP. It requires both wings to lift up and enable indigenous peoples so they may soar. Forty years ago indigenous leaders came together because their treaties were being violated and disrespected. They worked together to develop and seek global commitment to the UNDRIP to ensure that these treaties are respected.”

By supporting Bill C-262, we can provide the assurance that the UNDRIP will finally be enacted into law. However, we must remain vigilant in ensuring expedited action in delivering on those rights. Promises to respect land rights, rights to self-governance, access to safe drinking water, comparable education and services, and language and culture can no longer be considered adequate if delivered eventually.

As the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has said, “The UN Declaration is a powerful assertion by Indigenous peoples that we have survived, that we will survive, and that we insist on fair and just treatment by governments and communities. The implementation of the UN Declaration...could be a world-changing development.”

• (1120)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the unceded and unsundered land of the Algonquin people to speak to Bill C-262, an act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Private Members' Business

I want to first thank my dear friend from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his leadership in bringing forward Bill C-262. When we travelled together across the country for our work on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee, we heard a great deal from many indigenous communities and leaders expressing support for the bill, and, in particular, Canada's acceptance of UNDRIP.

I want to thank and acknowledge our indigenous caucus, our Ministers of Justice, Crown-Indigenous Relations, and Indigenous Services, as well as their parliamentary secretaries.

For me, the starting point of this debate is the mere fact that many of our laws are not in line with, or respectful of, or even acknowledge indigenous peoples. As we concluded our 150th anniversary of Confederation, we had the opportunity to take stock of where we are and what this federation means to us. For many of us, Canada is a work in progress and full of paradoxes. Settlers to this land, including me and my family, have benefited from this land, its natural resources, and its laws. These laws have protected me, and in fact have given me safety and refuge. Millions of others, since the 1600s, share this experience.

Concurrently, and in the simplest of terms, these laws continue to limit the rights of our indigenous brothers and sisters, and in many cases continue to oppress them. In fact, the Indian Act, passed in 1876, remains one of the most regressive, racist, and colonial pieces of legislation in Canada's history, and I would dare say in world history. While many advances have taken place in the area of human rights, the regressive legislation and practices that hold our indigenous peoples back, in virtually every barometer of social development, are unacceptable.

On December 10, 2018, we will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet during the first 35 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, very little progress has taken place relating to indigenous rights in Canada. The Constitution Act, 1982 enshrined section 35 rights for our first nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Asserting these rights over the past 35 years has led to some modest advances through a highly litigious process that has resulted in incremental changes.

Due to the work of so many indigenous leaders from Canada, including Chief Willie Littlechild, our friend from Abitibi—James Bay, and others, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the UN in 2007. Regrettably, the previous government failed to adopt it.

In 2016, our government accepted UNDRIP and, last spring, our Minister of Crown Indigenous Relations, along with many of our colleagues, went to the United Nations in New York on the 10th anniversary of UNDRIP to assert the unconditional support of the Canadian government for the declaration.

These pronouncements have been coupled with the following steps undertaken by our government: one, establishing the working group of ministers on the review of laws and policies and operations practices related to indigenous peoples; two, adopting and publicly releasing the 10 principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples; three, creating three permanent, distinctions-based policy forums with the Assembly of First

Nations, ITK, and the Métis National Council and its governing members; four, adopting new strategies for resolving disputes that prioritize negotiation over litigation; five, pursuing environmental assessment and indigenous languages legislative initiatives; and, six, establishing over 50 recognition of rights and self-determination tables.

These have been important and necessary steps toward reshaping how government engages and partners with indigenous peoples. That being said, our commitment to indigenous peoples will not be measured by individual steps taken but rather by a continuous and persistent effort to advancing reconciliation in a way that is transformative. As such, our government intends to build on these initial steps and continue down a path that will see relations shift based on the recognition of indigenous rights and self-determination.

● (1125)

The implementation of the UN declaration is an important part of this work. Bill C-262 calls for consistency between the standards set out in the UN declaration and federal laws, as well as a national action plan and reporting mechanisms to ensure its implementation. This is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action no. 43, which calls upon our government to implement the UN declaration as a framework for reconciliation. Both call on our government to enact measures to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and to ensure indigenous communities are able to thrive, socially, economically, and culturally. That is what reconciliation means.

As a starting point, our government understands that reconciliation is not possible without recognition. Indeed, recognition must occur before reconciliation can truly begin to manifest itself in the lives of indigenous peoples, and all Canadians, and in their relationships. This is why the fundamental next step is to address the legacy of denial that lies at the heart of federal laws and policies, and to replace it with the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples.

When we speak of recognition and implementation of rights, including historic and modern treaties, we mean what indigenous peoples have always meant by these terms, that rights are inherent, that they are grounded in the reality that indigenous peoples had systems of government and laws, and that they owned and used the lands which make up Canada prior to the arrival of Europeans.

The lack of recognition of rights and the patterns of relations based on denial of these rights have contributed to the unacceptable socio-economic indicators for indigenous peoples that were so starkly outlined by the Minister of Indigenous Services, in January, during the important emergency meeting on first nations, Inuit and Métis nation child and family services among governments, indigenous leaders and experts. These include life expectancy up to 15 years shorter for indigenous peoples than the rest of the population, infant mortality rates that are two to three times higher for first nations and Inuit, overdose deaths in Alberta and B.C. up to three times higher for first nations people, and Inuit tuberculosis rates that are 270 times higher than the rest of the population.

Implementing a framework for the recognition of rights is fundamental to closing the socio-economic gap; alleviating poverty; ending the scourge of youth suicide; building healthier families, communities, and nations; and ensuring that all generations of indigenous children to come will live in ever-increasing conditions of well-being, prosperity, and opportunity.

It is imperative that we, as a country, have a long overdue conversation about the recognition and implementation of indigenous rights, not only because of our constitutional obligation to recognize those rights, but because the social and economic gaps that continue to exist between indigenous and non-indigenous communities are a matter of national shame. Now is the time for action.

Both turning the tide and shifting our laws, policies, and operational practices to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples will require a range of measures, including legislative measures such as those set out in Bill C-262 as well as many more steps to come. This is entirely consistent with article 38 of the UN declaration, which recognizes that implementation requires governments to take a range of appropriate measures, including legislative ones, in consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples to achieve the ends for this declaration.

For this reason, in addition to supporting Bill C-262, our government will continue to work with indigenous peoples to bring forward further legislative and policy shifts that effect a change to relations based on recognition and implementation of rights.

Indigenous peoples and their leaders and communities must necessarily be a part of effecting this shift. It is important to acknowledge that indigenous peoples have long advocated for the recognition of their rights here in Canada and internationally. Our government's commitment to renewing its relationship with indigenous peoples calls on us to hear and act on those calls at last.

We look forward to continuing our mutual co-operation and partnership. As I have stated, the many actions taken thus far do not represent the completion of our commitment but rather the start of an evolving and continued commitment to true reconciliation.

We are in the midst of an opportunity to build on current efforts, gather momentum, and to accelerate progress towards a better, more effective relationship. As the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou noted when Bill C-262 was discussed in this place in December, the work required to achieve objectives like reconciliation and the recognition of rights can only be achieved “if we all work together”.

Private Members' Business

Our government must and will be a leader in these efforts, as well as every first nation, Inuit, and Métis community and organization, and indeed all Canadians, including youth, women, and elders.

We look forward to continuing this important work in collaboration and co-operation with our colleagues, indigenous peoples, and all Canadians.

• (1130)

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for bringing forward this private member's bill, Bill C-262. I would also like to acknowledge the important contribution to the discussion on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Before addressing the private member's bill, I would like to echo the observation made by my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. It is worth repeating today: “Section 35 of our Constitution and Canada's existing laws has in the past, and will in the future, ensure that indigenous rights are protected in Canada.” That is a profound statement.

Today, I want to add my voice to the debate on this important piece of legislation.

Bill C-262 is important to Canada as a whole, and it is vital that we get this right. My hesitation on this stems from the fact that it is a private member's bill and as such will not be subject to the same scrutiny and debate that a government-sponsored bill would be subject to.

I would like to read from the UN website a question and answer that will prove my point. Here is the question: “What is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?” Here is the answer:

The Declaration is a comprehensive statement addressing the rights of indigenous peoples. It was drafted and formally debated for over twenty years prior to being adopted on 29 June 2006 during the inaugural session of the Human Rights Council. The document emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.

It is obvious that the member states recognized that this was an important declaration to be made and debated for over 20 years. Here we are, in a country that is directly affected, and we cannot afford the time to question the minister herself on the legislation, not to mention the experts. As a member of the indigenous and northern affairs committee, I want the opportunity to ask questions and to get straightforward and complete answers to my questions.

Let me give the members an example. In her address to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs stated:

Today, we are addressing Canada's position on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I'm here to announce, on behalf of Canada, that we are now a full supporter of the Declaration without qualification....

By adopting and implementing the Declaration...we are breathing life into Section 35 and recognizing it now as a full box of rights for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Private Members' Business

I represent the riding of Saskatoon—Grasswood in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is home to a vast population of indigenous peoples, both on and off reserve. I want to know from the minister what this full box of rights would look like. I want to know if the indigenous community viewed the box at the same level of fullness as the minister did.

Here is another question. If it took over 20 years for the 193 United Nations member states to debate and finally adopt this declaration, is it not incumbent upon all of us 338 Canadian legislators to fully understand any and all possible outcomes of adopting the legislation that we are being asked to vote on?

Yet another question comes to mind. In her address to the Assembly of First Nations on July 12, 2016, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada called the adoption of UNDRIP into Canadian law “unworkable”.

● (1135)

She went on to say:

...a cut-and-paste approach to making UNDRIP compatible with domestic laws [is] an overly simplistic and untenable method of protecting indigenous rights in Canada.

However, the following year, on July 25, 2017, in my province of Saskatchewan, in the capital city of Regina, the minister addressed the same group and said:

as many of you know, over the years I have attended the AFN AGA [Annual General Assembly] in various capacities: with my father as his daughter, as a treaty commissioner, as an elected councillor of my Indian Act band, as the Regional Chief of British Columbia, and in the last couple of years as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

There is no doubt that the minister is very experienced, very well educated, and a very informed member of cabinet.

She went on to say:

Of course, if proper relations had occurred at the time of Canada's founding, the first 150 years of Canada's history would have been markedly different. So, the challenge now, knowing the past and learning from it, is to make sure that today, for the next 150 years and beyond, we give life to a new and transformed era of Indigenous-Crown relations.

Further on she states:

This is why in February our Prime Minister formed a working group of federal ministers to review laws, policies and operational practices to ensure that the Government of Canada is fulfilling its constitutional obligations and implementing its international human rights commitments, including the United Nations Declaration.

I was very pleased to have been asked to chair this working group. Never before has a federal government created a body of ministers with this unique flexibility and scope of action on a whole-of-government basis.

There we have the question. On July 12, 2016, the adoption of UNDRIP into Canadian law was simply “unworkable” for the minister. Then, a year later, on July 25, 2017, she was very pleased to be asked to chair the working group reviewing the laws, policies, and operational practices to ensure that we are fulfilling our UNDRIP commitments.

What monumental change took place in that year to make this workable? I would like a chance to ask her that. In fact, I am sure all of us in this place would like to ask her that.

When the minister appeared at the indigenous and northern affairs committee meeting on November 30, 2017, in her response to a

question from my colleague, the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, she said:

I think we have been very clear that free, prior, and informed consent is not a veto. It means you have to work very hard at the earliest part of a project to try to work together to find an outcome that is mutually acceptable. That is the way indigenous groups are seeing themselves in the project.

How do we know that? It may be that the current national chief does not see this as veto power, as she suggests. What about the next national chief? Is it our responsibility to have issues such as that debated and clarified before this becomes law?

Finally, in the midst of all these unanswered questions about UNDRIP, we have the dismantling of the very department responsible for indigenous affairs in this country and the so-called creation now of two departments, one to be responsible for indigenous services and another for relations with the aboriginal communities in Canada. I find it very disturbing that the government would go ahead and create this turmoil while supporting this legislation that could have far-reaching ramifications for the future of this country.

I have serious reservations about the many unanswered questions and the prospect that they will continue to be unanswered until it is too late and all Canadians, indigenous or not, are left with what the Liberals think is best for us, with absolutely no regard for input on this issue.

● (1140)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this is my first time to rise this session, I want to say how pleased I am to have the new role as deputy whip. It is an honour to continue my work on behalf of the great people of North Island—Powell River in this place.

In December, I was meant to be here to do my speech with the amazing member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. Sadly, I had to rush home to be with my mother, who had a stroke. I apologize to the member for missing his important speech and thank him for his kindness during a very difficult time for me and my family. As my mother slowly heals, it makes me reflect on how often many of us are here, away from home, and I hope that we all take time to appreciate the people who love us most.

When I was four, I was adopted after two years of my mother and I being part of my father's family. I did not find out I was adopted until I was almost nine. This is important today, because this is how I am able to say that my family is from Stelat'en First Nation, and my aunt is my hereditary chief, Hatix-kuwa, which means “peace within the frame of a house”. I am very honoured to be a part of my family and all the great and courageous work they do.

Private Members' Business

My granny, Minnie Mould, went to residential school from the time she was four until she was 16. The impact on our family has been powerful due to the abuse she suffered there. She has been gone for many years, but I can promise members that this is not a place where she would ever have thought one of her granddaughters would be speaking. There are days when I feel her spirit sigh with relief. She told me many times, “No complaining, we are still here.”

The very reason we are speaking to this bill today is that indigenous people are still here after many attempts to assimilate them. Today, we speak about how important this bill is, Bill C-262, an act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This bill would provide clarity. Across my riding of North Island—Powell River, communities and businesses are asking for clarity. They want to know how to move forward. They continuously ask me about this bill and ask for a secure definition of what nation to nation means.

This bill would move Canada in that direction by providing a legislative framework that would begin to harmonize Canadian laws with the UN declaration. To repeal the Indian Act means that we need a new legislative framework.

On April 12, 2016, the Minister of Justice stated in the House of Commons:

It is not easy to remove the shackles of 140 years of life under the Indian Act....

[T]he Indian Act is not a suitable system of government. It is not consistent with the rights enshrined in our Constitution, the principles as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, or the calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

As Canada moves toward repealing the Indian Act, we require a new framework. In my riding, Tla'amin recently signed a treaty. It was a difficult process with a very close vote that was hard on the community in many ways. However, there was a very clear celebration, where the community members burned the Indian Act because it no longer applies to them. In a supportive movement of reconciliation, the wider community was invited and attended the ceremony.

The reality is that reconciliation is happening on the ground in many communities across Canada. I know of many in my riding. It is well past time that the federal government get on this pathway by passing this bill.

There are concerns. The biggest one I have heard is about the idea of indigenous communities having the power of veto.

Grand Chief Ed John said it best:

The bad thing about the media and those who don't support the declaration is, “How could those Indians have a veto?”

I think there's a misconception of the concept of free, prior, and informed consent. The better interpretation of free, prior, and informed consent.... Consent at the end of the day is a decision that's made after a process, so governments go through a process to come to some decision. First nations' governments are in that same place. First nations' governments will look at information ahead of time. They should be free from any coercion. It should be prior to decisions being made. There should be extensive consideration. It may require an environmental assessment process or some other process that would help inform the decision-making process.

Free, prior, and informed consent essentially, at its core, is about governments making decisions. When the Province of British Columbia, the provinces, the

national government, the territorial governments, or municipal governments are making decisions, that's what they're doing.

• (1145)

This bill is not about giving away power; it is about making sure that everyone is at the table. Currently, in my riding, a very long-term issue has been gaining momentum as several indigenous communities have begun occupying fish farms. This has been a very divisive issue for many years. I want to be clear. There are some indigenous communities that support fish farms and some that do not. Within the communities themselves, there are people working for fish farms and some who are occupying them. The concerned indigenous communities have been asking for a process of consultation. The federal government has not shown up. Just last week, there were discussions between indigenous communities and the provincial government. The federal government was invited, specifically the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, but he did not show up. In fact, two DFO staff showed up, but no one from the minister's office.

My hope is that the government will take seriously the commitment of Bill C-262 and make sure everyone is at the table so the best decisions can be made. In my riding, workers and indigenous communities are filled with uncertainty, and this is not good for anyone. I hope to see the government respect the rights of indigenous leaders so that they have a voice on what happens in their territories and are part of the decision-making process.

Across my riding, the process of a nation-to-nation relationship is in action. A couple of summers ago, I went to Tahsis for a flag-raising ceremony. The communities of Gold River, Tahsis, and Mowachaht/Muchalaht signed an MOU on how to work together. The flag-raising was to add the Mowachaht/Muchalaht flag along with the Canadian, provincial, and town flags. The knowledge that they are all in this together has become a cornerstone of their economic and social decision-making.

These are not the only communities that have signed agreements. Tla'amin and Powell River, K'ómoks and the Town of Comox, the Village of Alert Bay and 'Namgis are but a few of the examples across the riding. They know that together they can work for the betterment of all of their people. Like my granny always said, “We are in this together”.

Last summer, I had the honour to participate in a discussion with a high school, the teachers and care people, in my riding on the issues of reconciliation. Many non-indigenous teachers asked how they can help when they are so worried they will cause harm without intending to, beautifully honest questions from people who really care. What we came to was simply this. We have to be honest about what we know and what we do not know. A safe place must be created for conversation and guidance from elders is a must. This is reconciliation in action.

Private Members' Business

A couple of weeks ago, a young indigenous man aged 19 committed suicide successfully in one of our communities. The impact has been painful, to say the least. We know in too many indigenous communities across Canada, we are losing our young people. Many of these communities are calling for help. This bill would increase the attention on the realities that too many indigenous communities face. These are the ongoing impacts of colonialism and with this bill, we would see a legislative framework that would begin to take into account the realities of intergenerational trauma, severe impoverishment, epidemics of suicide, impairment of mental and physical health, and the profound loss of hope, and they should receive the attention they so richly deserve. We are all in this together and it is time to face the history of Canada, to let go of blame and shame, and finally focus on working on healing. Our children deserve it and they can no longer wait.

Paulo Freire said, “Any situation in which some [individuals] prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate [human beings] from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.” For too long, indigenous communities across the country have been treated like objects that do not deserve the right to engage in the process of decision-making. This bill is a step toward reconciliation, a step in moving from words to action.

I must say that there is just so much that Canada and this place can learn from indigenous communities. In my riding, I have been approached by many people, indigenous and non-indigenous, asking if we could not work together here to change the culture of this place. Would it not be better if rather than yelling at one another, we spoke to one another, listened, and made decisions that were more balanced? I hope this bill leads us in that very direction.

I believe that reconciliation is also about learning from the first peoples of this land. There is much to learn.

• (1150)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP, was adopted by the UN General Assembly more than a decade ago, on September 13, 2007. This declaration enshrines the rights that “constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world.”

Passing and enacting Bill C-262 is a critical step for the government to take in order to fulfill its promise to implement all of the calls for action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The TRC refers to the UN declaration as “the framework for reconciliation”, and the declaration is included in 16 calls for action. Bill C-262 provides a legislative framework for implementing the UN declaration, and would affirm its central significance in the process of national reconciliation efforts. Its implementation would highlight the necessity of harmonizing federal laws so that they are consistent with the UN declaration. It would affirm that the declaration has legal application in Canada.

Bill C-262 calls for a national action plan to be created in collaboration with the federal government and indigenous representatives to set a pathway for matters of implementation. I would argue that, most importantly, it calls for a yearly report on how progress is being made.

At its heart, Bill C-262 would provide the foundation to move the UN declaration from an aspirational document to an actionable one with accountability measures. The importance of that simply cannot be understated. For far too long, successive governments have made aspirational statement after aspirational statement. However, as we know, there has been a long succession of promises made and promises broken by successive governments. We have all heard that the current government will be different, that it will treat indigenous people fairly, that it will stop the discrimination, that it will address the intergenerational impacts of trauma, and that it will restore the important nation-to-nation relationship. Tragically, too many times, these statements have rung hollow and have not been met with action.

As we know, there are numerous examples of systemic discrimination and inaction to address ongoing historical wrongdoings perpetrated against indigenous peoples. To be clear, as of October 31, 2017, there were still 100 long-term drinking water advisories for first nations communities. Just imagine that it is not safe for them to drink their water. There are an additional 47 communities with short-term advisories. A disproportionate number of indigenous people are homeless. We just heard from my colleague, who talked about teen suicide. This was a crisis in this House when we discussed this issue, yet the crisis continues.

Instead of providing funding for these incredibly important initiatives, the government instead did things like spend \$110,000 in court fees fighting against a young first nation girl to block the payment of a \$6,000 orthodontic treatment. It is these actions and inactions that highlight the systemic discrimination that is ongoing against indigenous peoples in Canada, and highlights the importance of passing Bill C-262 and taking further action to follow through on the TRC calls for action.

At the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, the hon. Senator Murray Sinclair, formerly Justice Murray Sinclair, the chair of the TRC, stated his support for Bill C-262. He also provided valuable insight into the systemic racism that indigenous peoples and others in Canada face when he stated:

...systemic racism is the racism that's left over after you get rid of the racists. Once you get rid of the racists within the justice system, for example, you will still have...rules, procedures, guidelines, precedents, and laws that are inherently discriminatory and racist because those laws, policies, procedures, processes, and beliefs—including beliefs that direct individuals on how and when to exercise their discretion—come from a history of the common law, which comes from a different culture, a different way of thinking.

Passing Bill C-262, alongside the UN declaration and the TRC's calls for action, will finally lead to real action being taken to address that leftover racism.

• (1155)

Another supporter of Bill C-262 who appeared at the committee was Dr. Cindy Blackstock. Dr. Blackstock is a fierce and unstoppable champion for the rights of first nations children in Canada. She spoke to the chronic and discriminatory underfunding of first nations child welfare in Canada. She noted that, not 10 years ago, not during the sixties scoop, not during the height of the residential school system, but today, there are more first nations children in care than at any other time in our history.

She further spoke to the chronic and simply unacceptable underfunding of first nations education. She made it quite clear when she said:

For those who say it's too expensive or too complicated, I ask you this: if we are so broke as a nation that the only way we can fund things like arenas or subway systems is through racial discrimination against children, then what are the children losing to? What does this country really stand for?

For those who ask what the adoption of Bill C-262 will look like, Bill C-262 lays the groundwork to fundamentally examine and act on our aspirations to end this systemic discrimination. It is not an end point, but it lays a path to reach one.

Let us get to work and stop asking why we have to do this.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, *meegwetch*.

[Member spoke in Cree]

[Translation]

I wanted to start by expressing my gratitude. I would like to thank all of the members who have spoken about this very important bill, even those who expressed concerns about it. I appreciate their comments. I am looking forward to taking a very close look at this bill in committee because I think some of the questions and concerns people raised are worth discussing.

[English]

I know I only have five minutes, but there are a couple of things that are important to talk about in reply.

It was said that the UN declaration is an aspirational document. I have heard that before and I heard it again today. I want to respond to that. I also heard that the UN declaration is going to create some uncertainty in this country. I want to respond to that as well. Let me remind members that Bill C-262 is the first piece of legislation in the country that explicitly rejects colonialism. If we are going to move on to reconciliation, then we have to reject colonialism. It cannot continue within that framework in this country.

This is what former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said about the declaration:

The Declaration is a visionary step towards addressing the human rights of indigenous peoples...and provides a momentous opportunity for States and indigenous peoples to strengthen their relationships, promote reconciliation and ensure that the past is not repeated.

The other thing I heard in this place today is that Bill C-262 might be incompatible with our Constitution as it stands today. Back in 2008, in response to that very same claim, over 100 experts, law professors, international human rights experts, and scholars said:

The Declaration provides a principled framework that promises a vision of justice and reconciliation. In our considered opinion, it is consistent with the Canadian Constitution and Charter and is profoundly important for fulfilling their promise.

It is important to remind people of that very fact. It is important to remind people that it is not appropriate to try to read provisions of the declaration in isolation. When we talk about prior and informed consent, we have to read those provisions alongside the other provisions. There are 46 provisions in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and we have to combine them.

Government Orders

Paragraph 3 of article 46 of the UN declaration states:

The provisions set forth in this Declaration shall be interpreted in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, respect for human rights, equality, non-discrimination, good governance and good faith.

I think one of the reasons that article was drafted in that way is that we need to balance the rights that are enshrined for indigenous peoples contained in the UN declaration with the rights of others. That is important to remember when considering the UN declaration.

I thank all the members who stood up to speak to the bill. I look forward to the work in committee on the bill.

● (1200)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this 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: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 7, 2018, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1205)

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to speak to Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act in relation to political financing. The Government of Canada promised to set a higher bar on the transparency, accountability, and integrity of public institutions and the democratic process. We also said that we would take steps to ensure that Canada's elections are run more fairly. We promised to encourage more Canadians, in particular, youth and indigenous Canadians, to play a more active role in our democracy.

Government Orders

Canada's Minister of Democratic Institutions has taken this role seriously. Since she received this mandate from the Prime Minister in January, she has been encouraging Canadians to become more involved to expand their civic literacy. This is not just about voting or volunteering for a campaign. Canadians can expand their civic literacy by simply engaging in discussions with their friends and neighbours at coffee shops, online, or through public policy issues that matter to them. Participation can mean volunteering for a charity, joining a community organization, or signing a petition.

Democracy has many wide-open doors for those who want to enter and play a part. We want to make sure all voices are heard. One issue that has come up in the media and in the House relates to federal rules governing the funding of political parties. Political parties of course are fundamental to our system of government. If Canadians have concerns about how the government regulates them, then those concerns must be addressed.

The concerns raised in Parliament relate to private fundraising events. Now, we are proud of Canada's strong reputation in running elections. Our system is recognized as one of the most progressive in the world. Elections Canada, as we know, regularly hosts delegations from countries wanting to learn from our system, but the government recognizes that some Canadians want their government to do more to increase transparency. These Canadians have asked questions about fundraising activities.

We believe that steps are necessary. That is why the government is creating a new level of transparency. We want to empower Canadians, including opposition parties and the media, to take a much closer look at fundraising in Canada. As I mentioned, our current laws are relatively strict. Canadian citizens and permanent residents can contribute a maximum of \$1,550 annually to each registered party. They can donate \$1,550 in total to all leadership contestants in a particular contest. In addition, they can donate a total of \$1,550 to contestants for nomination, candidates, and/or riding associations of each registered party.

These upper limits are among the lowest in the democratic world. In fact, some other democratic countries have no limit, which of course raises serious concerns about money influencing decisions. Here in Canada, contributions are reported to Elections Canada and the name, municipality, province, and postal code of those who contribute more than \$200 are published online.

Bill C-50 builds on that solid foundation of transparency. This legislation would apply to all fundraising activities attended by cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, party leaders, and leadership contestants when a contribution or ticket price of more than \$200 is required of any attendee.

The name and partial address of each attendee, with certain exceptions, would be published online. The exceptions are youth under 18, volunteers, event staff, media and support staff for the minister or party leader in attendance. Parties would be required to report the names and partial addresses of attendees to Elections Canada within 30 days of the event. That information would then become public.

These provisions would apply to all parties with a seat in the House of Commons. Bill C-50 would require parties to advertise

fundraising events at least five days in advance. Canadians would know about a political fundraiser before the event takes place, giving them an opportunity to inquire about attending, if they wish.

Bill C-50 would also give journalists the ability to determine when and where fundraisers are happening. At the same time, political parties would retain the flexibility to set their own rules for providing media access and accreditation. The bill would also introduce new offences in the Canada Elections Act for those who do not respect the rules and require the return of any money collected at the event. These sanctions would apply to political parties, parties' agents and event organizers rather than the senior political leaders invited to the events.

• (1210)

The government proposes a maximum \$1,000 fine on summary conviction for offences introduced under Bill C-50, and if rules are broken, then contributions collected at the events would have to be returned. I should note that we have decided to limit the application of the new framework during the writ period. This is to avoid imposing an unduly heavy burden during elections when campaign organizers and their many volunteers and colleagues are working around the clock to get their message to Canadians. Reports on events that occur during the writ period would only be required following polling day.

It is important for us as we debate this legislation to collectively send a message to Canadians that there is nothing wrong with a legal campaign and its contributions. Political parties need to have access to adequate political funds so that they can get their message to Canadians and engage them in our democratic process. Candidates and their teams must be able to pay for office rent, buy lawn signs, and occasionally order some pizza and pop for their dedicated and tireless volunteers.

Making a contribution is also an important form of democratic expression in Canada. This is a big step that many thousands of Canadians take in order to show emphatically their support for a political party or candidate. The fact is that in every developed democratic country parties are funded either privately, by the public sector, or quite often a combination of both.

We should also acknowledge that there is nothing inherently wrong with someone trying to get their message through to decision-makers. Politicians are solicited in numerous ways: at crowded town halls, gatherings, at meetings in MP offices, and at local skating rinks.

I will conclude by returning to the initial focus of this address, that the government has promised Canadians a new level of openness and transparency. At the same time, the government is determined to protect the charter rights of all citizens to participate in our democracy. I believe the government has found the right balance with Bill C-50.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about parties having to report the attendees at fundraisers within 30 days of the event and notice being provided five days in advance.

Government Orders

I would ask if my colleague agrees that the bill would simply validate and normalize cash for access events, and that by simply providing notice of who was there, we would have made no difference to the reality of fundraising of this kind, which in many people's minds undermines our democracy.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Mr. Speaker, we have a very robust system here in Canada. Our limits are modest, and we do not allow contributions from unions or corporations, but we also recognize that we have a protected right under section 2, I believe, of the charter.

Our government is striving to make sure that we are very open and transparent. Therefore, we are changing the rules of reporting from six to nine months to 30 days. We have actually front-end loaded this by allowing individuals to know who would be attending a fundraiser in advance.

I commend our government for taking these steps and initiatives.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the aspects of the legislation that I am quite proud of is that whether one is the prime minister of Canada, a minister, an opposition leader, such as the leader the New Democratic Party or Conservative Party, there is an obligation to indicate who it is they are meeting with when someone is paying \$200 to attend a fundraiser.

The former ethics commissioner, Mary Dawson, is on the record indicating that this proposed legislation would be a step forward. I wonder if my colleague would provide his thoughts with regard to how this proposed legislation would ensure more transparency and accountability when it comes to electoral reform.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Mr. Speaker, as the member stated, the revisions have been reviewed and received quite positively. In fact, Bill C-50 was studied at the procedure and House affairs committee, and most witnesses responded positively. The acting CEO indicated that the bill would be an effective and measured tool to increase transparency. Both the ethics and lobbying commissioners said that the bill would help them do their investigations.

I, too, am quite proud that we have added these revisions and also tightened up the reporting times so that transparency actually occurs in an expedited manner.

• (1215)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member not see a difference between fundraisers that attract the decision-makers of a government, ministers, parliamentary secretaries, the Prime Minister, and opposition members who are not in a position to give contracts for this or that or provide jobs to people? Is there not a pretty significant difference between that? Are the talking points that the government is using for the bill not a little misleading?

Could the member also tell us why none of the recommendations of the ethics committee on the bill were accepted?

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Mr. Speaker, this is not about talking points; this is about striving to be more accountable to Canadians.

I am sure my colleague would agree that the NDP made mistakes, such as the \$2.7 million that had to be returned for certain offices and the \$1 million that had to be given back to Canada Post. The

previous government made mistakes. The fact is that our government is being open about it and we are striving to do better and be accountable to Canadians.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak about democracy in Canada today and, more specific, about political fundraising, which is an important part and an important reality of the political system in which we operate.

Bill C-50, which I am proud to lend my support to, is designed to enhance the transparency of political financing in Canada. It would do a number of things, but I will focus my remarks on just a few, such as the scope of application of the bill to not just cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister, but to opposition leaders and contenders for the opposition leadership; the necessity to report attendees of fundraisers to Elections Canada; and the need to advertise publicly the fundraising activities involving one of the individuals affected.

However, before I get into that by point analysis, I would like to spend a little time talking about why transparency is an important value in our democracy and in our political financing in particular.

It is a trend around the world where people, rightly or wrongly, believe their governments can be bought. I do not believe that is true in Canada. We have a phenomenally strong electoral system that has a number of institutional safeguards to prevent this kind of phenomenon from taking place.

The fact is that everyone deserves to benefit from the decisions of their government, and not just the wealthiest members of society who are able to buy influence. I would not suggest for a moment that there is a single member of Parliament in the House whose integrity is for sale. However, it is important to build public confidence by demonstrating that our institutions prevent that possibility from ever arising.

We know that a system where only the richest can dictate policy decisions is not the kind of society in which we want to live. Governments have a duty, in my mind, to serve the public interest and not the personal interest of either politicians or their donors.

The perception of politicians peddling influence is also a very important point that we need to make. When members of the public believe, even without grounds to reasonably believe it, when the perception is that politicians will sell themselves and their values to have a donation made to their riding associations so they can stay elected in perpetuity, it undermines faith in the system and is a heck of an inspiration to cause citizens to become disengaged with the work of their government and disengaged with the electoral process more generally.

Government Orders

We cannot ban donations altogether. Realistically, campaigns cost money. Every member of the House knows this. I value, greatly, the small donations that citizens gave to my campaign to put up election signs on my neighbours' yards, and some of the larger donations that maybe went to a communications plan to let the public know about some of the work I planned on doing locally and perhaps our party was campaigning on across the nation.

The fact is that there is real value in this form of civic engagement, and I believe citizens should be able to contribute to political parties or candidates of their choice to help get that message out during a campaign. However, we need safeguards. Gone unchecked, members of society with a capacity to pay have the potential to influence the activity of their elected officials. I do not believe that is fair or just, and it is not the kind of Canada in which I want to live.

Thankfully some of the safeguards we have in place are some of the strongest the world has to offer. We have spending limits for campaigns, a certain value cannot be exceeded, depending on the length of the campaign, which keeps it reasonable. The party or the campaign with the most amount of money does not necessarily have the loudest megaphone.

We have individual donor limits. I believe it is \$1,575 annually. Again, I could not in good faith stand here and say a member of any political party, no matter his or her persuasion, would sell his or her integrity for that figure, or any figure for that matter. I trust my colleagues on all sides of the aisle.

We also, importantly, do not allow corporate or union donations. This is important because we know that the donations coming into campaigns, to candidates and to parties are made by Canadians, and we have a duty to govern for them. We are not pursuing merely corporate interests or unions that can afford to pay. This is about serving people.

Some improvements are needed. Of course, some people are not familiar with the political process, the electoral process and maybe have never donated to a campaign in their lives. I can imagine the thought process they may have when they hear about a campaign fundraiser that maybe costs \$500. That is a lot of money for most of the people who live in my riding. The median income in the riding I represent is about \$21,000.

• (1220)

The idea that some of these people will contribute \$1,500, or even a more modest amount of \$200 is not something they can reasonably afford. They do not want to believe that their neighbours who may have that kind of money lying around are able to walk into a fundraiser with a politician, or perhaps a future politician, and dictate what that person will campaign on in the future.

At the end of the day, what forms the idea in the basis of a campaign cannot be what has been demanded by a donor. There can be no quid pro quo. We cannot have the sense that because people donated to a campaign, they are owed some kind of an obligation. That is not right. We need to ensure that the politics of our country are dictated by what serves the public best, not what the richest donors can afford.

That is why I believe Bill C-50 would add certain important elements to enhance the transparency of our political financing

system. If I look specifically at the need to report attendees to these fundraising events to Elections Canada when the cost of the fundraiser is over \$200, which is the same threshold as today, I know this will let the public know who came to one of the fundraisers of the Prime Minister, or a minister, or leader of the opposition, or a candidate for opposition leadership. If I see 100 donors making maximum donations to a person's campaign and the next day he or she comes out with a new policy designed just to meet the needs of that donor base, I will know something is up. When I go to the ballot box, that will inform my decision-making.

Assuming that Bill C-50 passes, I also note the requirement to report, at least five days in advance, that there will be a fundraising initiative. This gives the public the opportunity to enquire about the nature of the fundraiser and potentially attend if people are so inclined. It prevents the opportunity for the person or party hosting the fundraising event from sequestering the attendees and burying the message to ensure the public never finds out who was there.

Transparency is of extraordinary importance. I would like to preemptively answer a question I heard asked of the last speaker about the need to ensure Bill C-50 would apply to both government and opposition sides of the House. I would only suggest that it would be appropriate to limit the scope of the legislation to the government if I did not believe individual members of Parliament had the ability to make a difference. I reject that notion as strongly as I possibly can.

As someone who is not part of the cabinet, not sitting as Prime Minister, not an opposition leader, or not campaigning to be the leader of a party, I know I still have the opportunity to make a difference. My integrity is worth more than a \$1,500 donation to my riding association. It is not fair for the wealthiest members of my community back home in Nova Scotia to have additional influence on me than my neighbour who might earn \$21,000 a year, like the median person in my riding. I, and I trust every member in the House, am in it for the right reasons. We are here to serve the public, not just the wealthiest members of it.

I am pleased to support Bill C-50. I know it will make one of the strongest political financing systems in Canada even stronger, it will strengthen our democracy, it will enhance public perception of our electoral system more generally, and it will give faith that politicians are here for the right reason, which is to serve the public interest.

• (1225)

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we look at the legislation, we essentially see the Liberals trying to provide cover for the fact that they are taking cash for access. It really boils down to that. It does not change that and it does not stop them from doing it. It just simply allows the Prime Minister and his cabinet to continue to do it. They just have to ensure they put it up on a website somewhere, a few things like that, but it does not prevent it from happening.

Government Orders

I started to think a little about that, as well as the Prime Minister and his pattern of not being accountable. That of course extends to the recent ruling by the commissioner, in which he was found guilty on four occasions, but there really has been no consequence of that. He is refusing to repay that money. I paralleled that back to 2012. At that time, as a member of Parliament, the Prime Minister took inappropriate travel expenses. When he was found to have done that, he decided that maybe he needed to make it right and repay that.

Does the member think it would be more proper for the Prime Minister to repay the money this time as well? It was good in the past, why can it not be good now?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, that question was a bit of a mixed bag and I would question the relevance of two-thirds of it. It started on whether this was an opportunity to legitimize cash for access events and it had a very partisan slant against the Liberal Party. I note that this bill is actually non-partisan in its very nature. By definition, it applies to the government and the opposition parties, no matter who is in government.

On the issue of the Prime Minister's accountability, I cannot help but note that he is currently on a town hall tour, visiting residents, and giving them access to him for free, with no opportunity to stack the room with partisan supporters of one kind or another.

The hon. member would seemingly suggest there should be a higher standard for the Liberal Party than for opposition parties. This should apply to every party in the House with an opportunity for somebody to influence the decisions today or in the near future. It is a perfectly fine approach. I note that the person the member referenced, the former Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, actually suggested this legislation is a good thing because it strengthens our democratic institutions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention. My question relates to the substance of the issue, the motivation for the bill, specifically the fundraising events that suggest the possibility of access to ministers and the Prime Minister in exchange for a substantial amount of money.

I am wondering whether my colleague is okay with that practice, since all Bill C-50 does is formalize the practice and make it more transparent. The bill gives the public more information, but it does not change anything about the fundamental issue, since it allows for the practice to continue.

Basically, I want to know my colleague's thoughts on a political party engaging in cash for access. Does he agree with this practice? My question refers more to the substance, rather than the form, of the bill before us today.

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, before I address the question squarely, we have to ask ourselves if we want to recognize the political reality that campaigns cost money. I suggest that we do. The answer in my mind, then, is not to prevent certain people from raising money and meeting the people who donate to their campaigns, but to ensure there is transparency so that the public understands what is going on.

As I mentioned over the course of my remarks, we should not underestimate the intelligence of the public. If the public sees that there are 100 people making maximum campaign donations that are part of a particular lobby organization and the next day the recipient of the funds from those donors comes out with a new policy that caters to the interests of those people, Canadians will know that was a ploy to get elected and not to serve their interests.

I suggest the right approach is to put all of the information out there and mandate that those serving in government or those campaigning to be the leader of the Government of Canada are subject to rules that ensure Canadians know who their donors are and who was in the room when the donations of \$200 or more were made, so that they can decide for themselves at the ballot box.

• (1230)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak today to Bill C-50.

I am in a unique position given the fact that I am a member of Parliament from Ontario. Having seen what went on with the provincial Liberals, I can speak to the issue of cash for access and how it relates federally given the examples that happened in Ontario.

As I was going about the last election, meeting with residents of my riding, engaging in town halls and all-candidates debates, I remember warning those who would consider voting Liberal of the fact that the same players from Ontario would be involved not only with the Liberal election campaign but also within the Prime Minister's Office, and that certainly has shown itself to be true. The cash for access scheme originated in Ontario. Ontario was ground zero for cash for access.

What does cash for access mean? It means that ministers, the premier, and parliamentary secretaries would sell access to themselves to those stakeholders who were willing to pay up to the maximum amount. Ontario had no maximum amount at that time. I recall some people at small intimate settings were paying in excess of \$5,000. Imagine what a fundraiser that would be. Ministers in Ontario had the opportunity to sit in private settings and sell access to their time for \$5,000, and in some cases, it was more than that. It was a heck of a fundraiser for the Ontario Liberal Party, which on some nights could get upwards of \$50,000 to \$100,000.

Let us fast-forward to after the election. Those same players who came from Queen's Park, Gerald Butts and Katie Telford, who formalized and legitimized the plan in Ontario, came to the Prime Minister's Office and the first thing they did was to concoct the same plan federally, a plan that saw the Prime Minister and ministers of the crown engage in private cash for access fundraisers. The difference was that there was a limit here federally and the limit was \$1,500, a bit more above that.

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In Ontario, they called this “the system”. Ministers would sell access to themselves in most cases to stakeholders and those stakeholders would be able to bend a minister's ear for whatever project, whatever dealings, whatever issue he or she had with the government. The minister would be paid and that money would go directly into a Liberal bank account. The same plan happened here.

This amounts to political extortion. It is about extorting money from those who have business dealings with the government so that those individuals can gain access to ministers and in some cases the Prime Minister.

The issue was really one of hypocrisy on the part of the government and that is why we are in this position right now with Bill C-50. The Liberals are trying to correct a problem that they created. I will remind the House what the Prime Minister told his ministers in their mandate letters about perception, real or otherwise, and about undue influence. Cash for access provides undue influence.

The member for Central Nova said he could not see how \$1,500 could influence a minister of the crown. It is not just the \$1,500 but rather the multiples of \$1,500. We saw examples of that during the height of this cash for access scheme. The height of public awareness of this scheme was when the Prime Minister was at a private event with some stakeholders from the Chinese community. A gentleman by the name of Shenglin Xian, along with the other people there, donated the maximum amount. Mr. Xian had business in front of the government. His business was that he wanted to open a bank. Mr. Xian received approval for the bank and it was opened shortly after this meeting.

• (1235)

It is important to understand that ministers of the crown are very powerful. They control multi-billion dollar budgets. With one fell swoop of a pen, a minister, the Prime Minister, and the government can approve whatever business those people have. Also, the money is going into Liberal bank accounts. It is not going into the coffers of the government. These are people who are paying for access to put money into the Liberal bank accounts.

We have seen examples of this happen with other ministers. The Minister of Justice held a meeting at a Bay Street law firm. There were lots of lawyers there. I do not think they were talking about the Blue Jays, or the Maple Leafs and how they were doing. They were talking government business. In some cases, some of those lawyers who would pay the \$1,500 perhaps had applications for the bench. This is why this is wrong.

What the Liberals are proposing now is to take it out of the shadows, where it was and put it in public, but that legitimizes and formalizes it. Why are they doing that? It is so they can hide behind it, so if there are any further complaints, if anyone else has a problem with cash for access, they can say they changed the rules and that the rules are clear.

In Ontario, there was so much public backlash that they actually banned cash for access. They made it so that no more could ministers or members of the provincial legislature even go to these cash for access fundraisers. Therefore, if the government is truly showing

some virtue on this, it should just ban them altogether and go back to the donation process that exists today.

Of course, the Liberals want to use every advantage they can to try to extort as much money as they can from these stakeholders, because they know from a fundraising standpoint that they lag far behind the Conservatives and our grassroots donors who support our party year in and year out because they agree with the policies, principles, and values of conservatism. The Liberals want to extort people. They want to say, perhaps to the marijuana industry, perhaps to more lawyers, “Give us money, and you can have access to us and bend our ears”. How is that going to apply to middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join them? It will not, because most of the people in my riding cannot afford to go to one of these Liberal fundraisers.

The other interesting part about this, and this is the thing that really concerns me, is that it does not include parliamentary secretaries. The bill says the reporting mechanism will happen for the Prime Minister and for cabinet ministers, but it will not happen for parliamentary secretaries. Why not? That is a fair question. In fact, when I talked to the member for Banff—Airdrie, this was one of the amendments that was put forward. In fact, it was a recommendation of the Ethics Commissioner.

I have heard the argument that the Ethics Commissioner agrees with most parts of this, but this is the one area she does not agree with. Why not include parliamentary secretaries in Bill C-50? One could speculate that perhaps the reason is that, if the Prime Minister cannot do it and cabinet ministers cannot have a cash for access event in private with stakeholders and people who have business in front of the government, they want to send their parliamentary secretaries, because they, through the line, will have the ear of a cabinet minister who will eventually have the ear of the Prime Minister with respect to those people who are involved.

There are significant challenges with Bill C-50. The fact is that the government wants to legitimize and formalize the cash for access scheme so it can use it as a shield later on. If something comes up, the Liberals could then say they changed the rules, everyone knows the rules, and they are applying the rules. If they were going to apply the rules in this case, they certainly should have done it when the Prime Minister wrote his mandate letters to say that the perception, real or otherwise, of undue influence should not happen within his government. They changed that.

There is no reason to believe they are going to follow the rules in Bill C-50. This is hypocrisy as its best. They are formalizing and legalizing what will continue to be political extortion on the part of the government of stakeholders and those having business with the government.

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●(1240)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying how disappointed I am that the opposition members are not supporting this legislation, which I think is a tremendous move towards having greater openness and transparency and which is something they are asking for. I am wondering what is at the root of them not supporting it. Is it that they do not want the opposition to have to disclose the information that is being asked for in Bill C-50?

This is about openness and transparency. It is about ensuring that the website shows what events are going to be held. It is about ensuring that the attendees who have paid over \$200 for events are noted and there is a list so that people know.

I do not understand. Therefore, my direct question to the member is this. Is he not supporting this legislation because the opposition members do not want to provide lists of who attend their fundraisers for over \$200 or more?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we do follow the rules. The Liberals did not follow their own rules. If the hon. member wants to talk about openness and transparency, there is an open and transparent process, which is the donations from grassroots Canadians who support political parties. Openness and transparency does not mean I extort people for \$1,500 to come to a fundraising event that I am at so they can bend my ear, if I am the government, to make a decision that perhaps favours or benefits them.

It is not just the \$1,500; it is the multiples of those \$1,500 and what that represents with respect to influencing government policy that is troublesome on this. What they are doing is formalizing and legitimizing cash for access. If they have a problem with it, why do they not cancel it altogether, like the Ontario Liberals did?

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current Prime Minister has a record of saying one thing and doing another. I am wondering if my hon. friend could comment on how the hundreds of cash for access events hosted by the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers square with the “Open and Accountable Government” document, the standards of conduct by which the Prime Minister and ministers are supposedly bound. It provides, among other things, that “There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access..”.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, it became very clear from the onset that the words the Prime Minister wrote on his mandate letters were not worth the paper they were written on. I say that as an example, because the first thing the members on that side of the House started doing was the same thing that happened in Ontario. They started engaging in cash for access events, and many of them were in the shadows.

If it were not for the media, or in some cases for the people who attended those events, none of this would have become transparent. In spite of all the platitudes and all the words about openness and transparency, the current government and Prime Minister are anything but that. Therefore, I say again that the words the Prime Minister wrote to his cabinet ministers in those mandate letters are in fact not worth the paper they were written on. It is concerning that the Liberals are still legitimizing and formalizing cash for access.

●(1245)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the times leading up to the election in 2015, we witnessed hermetically sealed government events that people went to. Lord knows who they were, what they talked about, and what they left behind in terms of donations to the Conservative Party of Canada. I want to ask my colleague across the way if he believes that the people who attended an event that Mr. Harper held were there to talk about what was happening in Calgary heritage, or if perhaps it was that member's position in government that attracted their attention.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly the Liberals' modus operandi to blame or accuse somebody else without accepting responsibility for their own actions. We see here another example of this accusatory tone from the member opposite.

However, when we have the example of a Chinese millionaire, I assume, attending a private event with the Prime Minister because he has business in front of the government of opening a bank and there are a multitude of donors there, and then all of a sudden that bank gets opened, I think it is a problem. It will continue to be a problem under this proposed legislation. It would not stop the problem; it would just formalize and legitimize the issue.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to on Bill C-50 an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing).

Bill C-50, more particularly, would require certain public notification and reporting in respect of certain political fundraising events. In that regard, Bill C-50 would require that where a cabinet minister or party leader or leadership candidate attends a political fundraising event, and where the ticket price for the event is more than \$200, that public notification would be required and a report would be sent to Elections Canada on the event.

The government has sold this bill as a bill to increase transparency, accountability, and to strengthen Canada's political financing laws. I say that one should not buy into the bill of goods that the government is trying to sell to Canadians. This bill is not about increased transparency. It is not about increased accountability. It is not about strengthening Canada's political financing laws. Rather, what Bill C-50 is about is legitimizing and sanitizing the government and the Liberal Party's sordid cash for access racket. That is what Bill C-50 is about.

Why would the government, by way of legislation, seek to legitimize cash for access? As my colleague, the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie has pointed out, the government has found its hand caught in the cookie jar one too many times. The government has been caught with its hand in the cookie jar, and as much as the Prime Minister has said one thing, he has then done another. We have a Prime Minister who, after all, more or less disavowed cash for access fundraising and then proceeded to engage in cash for access fundraising. He not only engaged in cash for access fundraising but perfected cash for access fundraising.

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To understand the degree to which the Prime Minister broke his word to the Canadian public, one need only look back to the 2015 election, when he told Canadians to elect him and that he would deliver the most open, most transparent, and most accountable government in Canadian history. To try to demonstrate that he meant what he said and said what he meant, the Prime Minister, upon appointing his cabinet, unveiled a document called “Open and Accountable Government”.

“Open and Accountable Government” was the code of conduct, the standards of conduct, by which the Prime Minister said that he, his ministers, and parliamentary secretaries would be held to. “Open and Accountable Government” did deal with sets of standards, standards of conduct, for cabinet ministers, for the Prime Minister, and for parliamentary secretaries, specifically relating to political fundraising.

It is important to speak to and review some of what “Open and Accountable Government” said to understand how blatantly and how flagrantly this Prime Minister has broken his word to the Canadian people. “Open and Accountable Government” says, among other things, “Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest.” However, it gets better. It says, “There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access..”.

● (1250)

Moreover, “Open and Accountable Government” states that department stakeholders, including lobbyists, should not be targeted for the solicitation of political funds. That is what “Open and Accountable Government” says. That is the standard the Prime Minister set for himself and his cabinet, so it begs the question: what did the Prime Minister do following the issuance of that standard? The answer is that the Prime Minister ignored “Open and Accountable Government”.

It was as if “Open and Accountable Government” had never been written. As my friend, the member for Barrie—Innisfil, said, it was not worth the paper it was written on, because almost immediately, the Prime Minister doubled down with cash for access event after cash for access event. Indeed, in 2016, the Liberal Party held more than 100 cash for access events, like one held in May 2016, in Toronto, with none other than Mr. Sanctimony himself, the Prime Minister, who was at the residence of a Chinese billionaire. There were other Chinese billionaires there, each of whom paid \$1,500 to the Liberal Party of Canada. There they had an evening with the Prime Minister, making dumplings and having the ear of the Prime Minister, and, I am sure, spending a wonderful evening with him.

Among those in attendance was none other than the chief investor in the Wealth One Bank of Canada, a bank that was seeking a banking licence in Canada at the time of the cash for access fundraiser. What a sweet deal: \$1,500 to the Liberal Party and an opportunity to spend the evening with the Prime Minister to talk about Wealth One Bank. Sure enough, the licence was approved.

At the very same event, there was a Chinese Communist official. He was not a Canadian citizen, so he could not send the money directly to the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party said not to worry about it. Two weeks later, that same individual wrote a \$200,000

cheque to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. I guess we are supposed to assume that it was a coincidence that he would spend the evening with the Prime Minister and two weeks later decide to write a \$200,000 cheque to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

My friend from Barrie—Innisfil says that we could not make this up. Well, we really could not, because it is just incredible. It speaks to the hypocrisy, to the lack of ethical conduct, on the part of the government.

Here we are today with Bill C-50. What does it do? It requires public notification five days before an event. I say, big deal. It requires reporting to Elections Canada of an event. I do not know if it occurred to the government, but every single political contribution is already reported to Elections Canada, so in terms of substantive improvements to political financing laws in Canada, the bill falls short.

It is nothing more than smoke and mirrors so that the Prime Minister can pretend that he is doing something about political financing, all the while giving himself a blank cheque to engage in the most sordid types of political fundraising activities. This is a cynical bill, and Canadians deserve more than a cynical bill from a cynical and ethically challenged government.

● (1255)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can absolutely say that this is not a cynical bill. This is a bill that is making a substantial difference. It is unfortunate to hear from my colleague across the way on this topic in such a cynical manner, because to be perfectly honest, fundraising is an activity that all political parties undertake.

I want to make one correction. We know that no foreigner can make a contribution. It is against the law. That is something all political parties uphold.

Second is that parties would actually report who attended an event, when it took place, and where it took place. This is important, because this is information Canadians have not had before.

Bill C-50 aims to make fundraising events more open and transparent. All I hear from the opposition members is that they do not believe in more openness or transparency. We know for a fact that the Leader of the Opposition was holding fundraising events in secret this summer and refused to provide details.

Does my hon. colleague not believe that more openness and transparency about fundraising is a good thing? That is exactly what the bill aims to do.

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Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I think we have absolutely no lessons to learn from the government, because the consistent record of the government is to say one thing and do another. It is the Liberals who issued “Open and Accountable Government”, and it is they who almost immediately flagrantly violated their own ethical standards.

I remember standing in the House, day in and day out, in April of 2016, asking the Minister of Justice about the pay-to-play fundraiser at Torys LLP in Toronto, an event that was attended by lawyers and lobbyists, an event that was advertised as an opportunity for attendees to engage with the minister on matters that pertained directly to her role as Minister of Justice. That is called pay to play. That is called giving preferential access. That is called giving the perception of a conflict of interest. It is right in “Open and Accountable Government”, and instead of taking responsibility for it, the minister would not stand in her place to defend herself, leaving it to the then government House leader.

The minister was given forewarning about the fact that she was breaching the standard the Prime Minister had set, and she went anyway. She thumbed her nose, and that is what the Prime Minister has done. He has thumbed his nose, because he believes that he is above the rules, that they do not apply to him. They apply to everyone else, but he and his ministers—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member was accused of cynicism. I think one can do better. I have called this the bait and switch act; it looks like the Liberals are going after cash for access, but no, they are going to go for transparency, and now we can all know that there is cash for access. I have also called it the lobbyists despair act. Why would we now have to hire a fancy lobbying firm in Ottawa, when one can go right to the minister and the Prime Minister and ask about that job for one's brother-in-law or that contract for one's firm?

I would like to ask my hon. colleague whether he would agree with me that the government's claim that somehow it is exactly the same for government members, who actually give contracts, and opposition members, who do not, is, in fact, a joke.

● (1300)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I would agree. It is an absolute joke for the government to try to conflate the power vested in ministers with that of a leader of an opposition party. It is simply a very different context and a very different set of circumstances.

I see that the member for Beaches—East York is in the House, which reminds me, in terms of how the government operates, that he had a fundraiser with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, the point man on marijuana. Lobbyists for the marijuana industry showed up. One of them was quoted in *The Globe and Mail* as saying that she really would have preferred to sit down with him, but if she had to pay a few hundred dollars to be there, that is what she would have to do.

That is how the Liberal Party operates. It is a real shame.

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind hon. members that they should stay away from referring to either the absence or presence of members in the chamber.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, I note that the parliamentary secretary and I agreed on ground rules for the fundraiser I held. We agreed that we would not talk about cannabis, despite a mutual interest in discussing it. Also, just so the record is clear, the cost of that event was \$150, or \$20 for monthly supporters, which might make it the cheapest cash for access in the history of Canadian politics. I also note that the individual who was quoted in the *Globe* bought a ticket under a different name, and we refunded the money as soon as we found out who she was.

Bill C-50 would improve our political financing rules, which are already some of the strongest in the world. Our stable democracy, including our open and fair elections, in many ways depends on these rules, enforced as they are by a truly independent watchdog in Elections Canada. Of course, while the rules that underpin our elections are fair, our electoral system more generally remains less fair than it could or should be. Under first past the post, there will always be a significant gap between election outcomes and voter intentions.

I did not think it fair for the Harper administration to hold 100% of the power in government, including complete control in this House, with less than 40% of ballot box support. I do not think it is any fairer for us, as Liberals, to do the same. As our lives have moved online, we have seen communities of people from different geographies coalesce around different issues and common experiences, yet our electoral system largely ignores this reality and these communities.

I recognize that this government does not intend to revisit this issue, but I want to lend my voice in support of current efforts in British Columbia. I hope that BC shows us a way forward, bringing the same leadership to our country on electoral reform they have brought on carbon pricing.

In contrast to the sweeping change of electoral reform, Bill C-50 is a series of tweaks, thankfully in the right direction. We already have political financing rules to be proud of here in Canada. No one can buy an election here. We ban corporate and union donations. We cap annual personal donations at \$1,550, with a set escalator of \$25 a year, and we have strict spending limits. In a traditional writ period, the expenditure limit for local candidates is around \$100,000.

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I played baseball in Oxford for a year while completing my master in laws. I was a pitcher, and our catcher was from Mississippi. He had volunteered on the Obama campaign on the west coast, perhaps because it was lonely in Mississippi. We talked about our mutual interest in politics and about the idea of elected office. When I explained the hard cap on riding spending, he could not stop laughing. He joked that the same amount of our spending limit is one bad radio spot for them.

As a member of the board of young MPs for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I helped organize a conference of young MPs here in Ottawa this past November. We were joined by 120 MPs from over 50 countries. In between sessions, we compared notes on political financing rules. If our rules were emulated around the world, the ideal of democracy would be significantly strengthened in practice.

A fair and participatory democracy depends on the rough equality of the strength of our voices in the political process. As Ronald Dworkin has put it, in calling for a more ambitious conception of democracy, it is “one that understands democracy as a partnership in collective self-government in which all citizens are given the opportunity to be active and equal partners”. As our Supreme Court has put it, “The advancement of equality and fairness in elections ultimately encourages public confidence in the electoral system.”

We need only look south of the border to see what can take place absent such rules. Unfortunately, we are unlikely to see positive and lasting change in our American ally until Citizens United is revisited. Again, in the words of Dworkin:

The most effective way to prevent money from dominating politics, and to prevent powerful corporations, unions, and other groups from receiving favors for contributions, is to lessen politicians' need for money, and the most effective way to do that is to limit what politicians may spend.

Given the importance of our strict political financing rules, it is necessary to revisit them on occasion, with a view to strengthening them further. Such is the case with Bill C-50. Bill C-50 rightly addresses public concerns about large donors receiving preferential access.

The bill would improve transparency. For political fundraising events at over \$200 a ticket, Bill C-50 would require the attendee list of the event to be disclosed publicly. It would ensure that fundraising events would no longer be held informally or privately, where a minister or leader is concerned, as Bill C-50 would require that all such events be posted publicly in advance of the event's scheduled date. This is as it should be. It would not be a major change, but Bill C-50 would make a set of strong rules even stronger.

Having listened to the debate here in the House, and having read the testimony at committee, I am struck by how lucky we are to live in Canada. In Iran, thousands of protesters have recently taken to the streets. Women have been arrested for defying a law that requires them to wear headscarves. I stand with all defenders of democracy around the world, including in Iran, who exercise the basic human right of free speech in the name of democracy.

● (1305)

The right of political participation is, as Jeremy Waldron notes, the “right of rights”. We should defend such participation at every

opportunity and equally defend demands for such participation where it is currently absent.

I just received an email this morning from a constituent, who has been involved with the elections in Kenya. He writes, “a senior political leader in the Kenyan opposition...was arrested last Friday after administering the presidential oath of office to the opposition leader...Later in the day, a court ordered that [he] be released on bail. To date, the Kenyan government has failed to do so. This morning, it defied a court order that he be brought to court. As a consequence, the Inspector General of Police has been found in contempt and ordered to produce him tomorrow.” This is outrageous, and the Kenyan government should act expeditiously to respect the rule of law and the separation of powers.

Again, we must stand firmly in support of these ideals and in support of activists around the world who demand a voice in the political process, the right to vote, and other core rights and freedoms.

Here we are debating, among other things, the difference between a \$100 or \$200 ticket price threshold for public disclosure of attendee lists. It is not a trivial debate by any means, but it is a luxury of living in Canada.

Of course, we should not turn down an opportunity to improve our rules simply because the rules, and the enforcement of the rules, are worse elsewhere. Therefore, I will add my own suggestion for improving political financing for our government to consider. We should cancel all political tax credits and direct all such funds through restoring the per-vote subsidy.

The Department of Finance estimates that the total tax expenditure for political tax credits is \$30 million per year. As we remind our supporters every December and in every over-the-top email blitz, political tax credits are incredibly generous, exceedingly and unnecessarily more generous than the credits available for charitable donations. Meanwhile, the federal cost of restoring the per-vote subsidy to its pre-phase out level, adjusted for inflation, is estimated at \$39.2 million as of 2017, according to a Library of Parliament analysis conducted at the request of my office.

The simplest solution would be to restore the per-vote subsidy in an amount equal to that saved by the cancellation of the political tax credit. Our balance sheet remains the same, but political financing becomes fairer. While it is not electoral reform, it would, in its own way, make every vote count.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found the comments from the member for Beaches—East York concerning the per-vote subsidy and the tax credits available for political donations versus charitable donations interesting. I found it particularly interesting since there was a private member's bill before this place from the member for Provencher which would have brought charitable donations up to the level of political donations. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party voted against it.

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I would ask the member whether his party supports the return of the per-vote subsidy.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, first, the Parliamentary Budget Office conducted an analysis, which was pretty clear that the cost of that private member's bill would have been quite large. The answer is not necessarily to increase charitable donations to where our political tax credits are, but to reduce the exceedingly generous nature of political tax credits. However, I did support that bill at second reading so it would be studied further at committee.

Second, I certainly support the per-vote subsidy. However, I do not speak for the government, as the member may know. Sometimes I do, but on this occasion, it is something the government should seriously consider. However, I cannot say that the government plans to do so at this time.

● (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague for his thoughts on what I believe is a very progressive part of the legislation. For the first time, not only ministers and the Prime Minister would have to provide details of those who attend fundraisers, but opposition leaders of other political entities, the leader of the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, would also be obligated to be transparent with respect to those who attend their fundraisers. These individuals have an incredible amount of influence politically, and Canadians have a right to know who meets with them, those who ultimately want to become Prime Minister some day.

Could he provide some of his thoughts on the issue?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I agree that leaders should be subject to these rules. It is not only the power that leaders have, and there is no question they have power. Obviously there is a difference between a leader and a minister or a prime minister where taxpayer funds are allocated. However, these leaders may come into power in the future in all likelihood. We will not be in government forever. It would be the leader of the Conservative Party or perhaps the leader of the New Democratic Party down the road. Therefore, it is very important that leaders be subject to these rules, regardless of their party. However, it is also about the culture. It is important for leaders to abide by these rules, because if they do sit on this side of the House one day, they would have instilled in themselves and in their office a culture of transparency.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to address Bill C-50 by articulating what I believe is its central purpose, which is not to remedy an absence in the law that has resulted in unlawful behaviour. Rather, it is to deal with an issue that was never unlawful; it was something that did not pass the sniff test and was not considered acceptable by Canadians.

Therefore, the goal of the bill is to put in some new and completely insignificant reporting requirements about who attends cash for access or pay-to-play fundraisers. It puts some minimal limitations on where they can be held, and has a few other little bells and whistles of that sort. It does so for the purpose of saying that the government has done something to address what the Canadian public regards as an ethical problem even though, strictly speaking, it is not a legal problem.

The goal here is to normalize or legitimize a practice that Canadians have said is not normal and not legitimate, which is holding fundraising dinners at which individuals pay up to \$1,500 a pop to meet someone as eminent as the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance, people who have a direct impact on issues of immediate importance to their enterprises. Sometimes we will see multiple people from the same company buying tickets, effectively grouping together, as a way of maximizing the potential interests that the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance would have in talking to them. In doing so, the government is saying that this practice, once it reports on it, will become legitimate, or at least it hopes Canadians will regard it as legitimate.

I want to make the suggestion that Canadians' rejection of this practice as illegitimate is well-founded. It is quite deep. I certainly hope the legislation will not overcome the concerns Canadians have.

Let me read a bit from an article by *The Hill Times* a few months ago. It talks about a particular event held at a prominent law firm in Toronto where the justice minister was present. The attendance fee was over \$1,000 a ticket. *The Hill Times* wrote, "So [the] Justice Minister...wasn't breaking any rule by being the guest of honour at the pricey fundraiser organized by a Bay Street law firm. It just smells really bad and violates the spirit of the government's own code of conduct."

Canadians think it is illegal, they are surprised to learn it is not illegal, and now, with this process of requiring some reporting, the government can say that it is explicitly legal. We heard it in the minister's response about those sneaky opposition leaders out there who were having their own fundraisers, with the same sort of things occurring. The minister who raised this earlier apparently believes or wants us to believe that leaders of the opposition or of third parties are capable of delivering favours and that people would buy tickets based upon that. Of course that is nonsense. It is a diversion from the fundamental ethical problem, which is that ministers can deliver favours. I am not saying that the ministers have delivered favours. How would I know? However, clearly, some of the people who have been buying tickets believe it is a possibility, and the Canadian public emphatically believes it is a possibility.

Maybe the Canadian public is all wrong and stupid. That is certainly a prominent theme in Liberal policy, or policy adjustments with the current government. I mean the Canadian public was all wrong about electoral reform, for example. Let me tell people what those stupid, poorly-thought-out Canadians think.

I will quote again. *The Globe and Mail* states:

A Nanos public-opinion survey, conducted for *The Globe and Mail* from Nov. 26 to 30 [of 2016] shows that 62 per cent of Canadians disapprove of the Liberal Party's practice of charging people \$1,500 a ticket to meet in private with...[the Prime Minister] and senior cabinet ministers who oversee major spending or policy-making decisions.

● (1315)

Maybe 60% of Canadians are wrong again, but maybe there is the possibility that people are not wrong, that they are upset, and that this exercise of pulling the wool over their eyes is inappropriate, illegitimate in itself.

Government Orders

Why does this fail the sniff test? Why do Canadians think this is not the right way to do fundraising? The answer to that, I think, is illustrated by a number of examples I can offer of specific Liberal fundraisers. These were the source of the ethical conundrum.

Chinese billionaires, and when I say Chinese, I mean someone who is a citizen of the People's Republic of China, not a citizen of Canada, attended Liberal fundraisers even though they were not allowed to donate. They were not Canadian citizens. One such individual, Zhang Bin, who is also a Communist Party apparatchik, attended a May 19, 2016 event, at which a cabinet minister was present. We were told that Mr. Zhang and a business partner, just to sweeten the deal, donated \$200,000 to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, and donated \$50,000 to build a statute of the current Prime Minister's father.

Another example was on November 7, 2016, in B.C. B.C. multimillionaire Miaofei Pan hosted a fundraiser at his West Vancouver mansion. This was going on at the same time the federal government was in the process of reviewing the \$1 billion bid by China's Anbang Insurance Group to purchase one of British Columbia's largest retirement home nursing care chains, which it did.

The government's behaviour also fails to live up to the highfalutin rhetoric in the mandate letters to all ministers, which say:

To be worthy of Canadians' trust, we must always act with integrity. This is not merely a matter of adopting the right rules, or of ensuring technical compliance with those rules. As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

The mandate letters are publicly available and this can be read in every letter.

Clearly, having these fundraisers does not achieve that target. The Liberals are completely failing to achieve their targets, so they are trying misdirect, saying they have a new set of rules that make it all okay. I do not know, maybe this will work; maybe it will not work. The question is why the Liberals are trying it in the first place.

The answer is that this is the backbone of Liberal fundraising. Attendance figures suggest that the party brings in somewhere between \$50,000 and \$120,000 per event when the Prime Minister or the Minister of Finance is in attendance. The Liberal Party needs these events to keep its fundraising up. It has not developed successively a mechanism for going after a large number of smaller donations or of getting this size of donation in the absence of this kind of event.

That is a problem for the Liberal Party, I grant that. However, may I suggest for the Liberal Party that developing a grassroots appeal will not be done by holding this kind of event and then trying to cover it up. On the contrary, a populist appeal necessarily involves trying to reach out at the grassroots level. The Liberals are doing better than they did in the past, in all fairness, but that is where they should be concentrating. They should not be concentrating on trying to epitomize pay-for-play or cash for access, something Canadians have spoken against so very strongly.

• (1320)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am saddened that the hon. member is no longer

the critic for democratic institutions. I have tremendous respect for him. I know the colleague who replaces him has big shoes to fill but I am sure will do a good job.

If these measures are so insignificant, why is the leader of the member's party refusing to disclose where, when and who attends fundraisers he has? If they are so insignificant, why are Conservatives not willing to abide by these measures in the interim?

The opposition is speaking a lot about why these are not important, yet they are not willing to participate in these measures. Openness and transparency with regard to fundraising is actually significant, otherwise the opposition would not be so remiss to participate in what we have proposed.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, first, I thank the minister for her kind words. I am confident that my colleague who has taken over the roll will perform as well as and possibly better than I did. Some might say that is an easy bar to clear.

I will respond to the substantive question this way. I do remember when that story came out about a fundraising dinner for the Leader of the Opposition. I heard about this before anybody else did, and the reason I did is I received a call from Marie-Danielle Smith of the *National Post*. She wanted to ask about a fundraising dinner, not one that my leader was at, but a fundraising dinner that I held in violation of this new, not yet in effect rule, at which Giant Tiger executives all gave donations of \$1,500 each. As members may know, my family runs Giant Tiger. I am now the vice-chair of Giant Tiger and that is the reason I am no longer the critic on this file.

If members had been there, they would have seen my head explode. I was furious. I told her that there is no way she figured this out on her own, that Liberal opposition research was digging around and had noticed that a bunch of cheques came through on the same day and concluded it must be the result of a fundraising dinner. I told her she was being fed this story so she could put it out there and create a make-believe scandal. I pointed out the obvious, that surely she did not think I had to hold a dinner to encourage people from a company that my family owns to contribute.

If the Liberals want to say that having MPs' business contacts give money to them is a scandal, then they should say that. It would have a major impact on a whole group of people on the government side. Getting their research department to try to feed stories to reporters to create make-believe scandals in order to draw attention away from their own government's scandalous behaviour is abominable, but that is the way the Liberal government acts more and more and more.

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• (1325)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I heard correctly. Did I just hear my hon. colleague say that it is obvious that business people in a certain business are giving to his party? That is precisely what bringing greater transparency and accountability to political fundraising is all about. I would like the member to either correct himself or explain how he is legitimizing exactly what we are here to oppose.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, the idea that people do not go to people they know, people who are their friends, people they have done business with and who have a high regard for them to seek donations, would be one that would exclude anybody who has a business background from either making a donation or receiving a donation.

As for the suggestion that multiple members of the same board of directors will give money, the member need only look at any number of companies, Apotex, for example, where multiple board members have repeatedly made donations to the Liberals. One of the examples I cited earlier was multiple directors of a company making donations to the Liberal Party. Maybe that is a terrible thing, but if it is, it is a terrible thing in which the Liberals are full participants.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act in relation to political financing. This bill proposes to amend the Canada Elections Act to bring unprecedented openness and transparency to federal political fundraising. The legislation is the latest step the Government of Canada is taking to improve upon transparency, accountability, and integrity in our public institutions and toward strengthening the democratic process. I would like to thank the minister and her parliamentary secretary for their work.

In 2017, Canadians celebrated the 35th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter is a model for democracies around the world. Section 3 of the charter guarantees every citizen the right to vote and to run in elections. This fundamental democratic right guaranteed to all Canadians is central, obviously, to our democracy. When candidates for a federally elected office engage in raising funds to run a campaign and when donors contribute, it is critical to ensure that the processes are open, transparent, and accountable. The integrity of our political system depends on being vigilant and on continuous improvement in recognition of the fact that the public trust is earned and re-earned every day.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms also enshrines the freedoms of association and expression. Section 2 of the charter has been interpreted to include the right of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to make a donation to a political party and to participate in fundraising activities, subject to reasonable limits. Political parties are a vital part of our democratic system. They unite and mobilize people from different regions and with a variety of different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences to volunteer, champion policies, have new ideas, and foster and engage in public debate.

Voting in an election for a candidate is one of the ways we play an active role in our society. Volunteering for a political party or campaign is another way. Certainly, making a financial contribution to a political campaign is a way to play a direct role in the

democratic process. Upholding and protecting the integrity of the political campaign contribution process is our collective responsibility as members of Parliament. We must continue to ensure that Canadians are free to contribute to political parties and candidates.

Canada is known around the world for the rigour of its political financing regime, and this comes from our constant attention. Donations from corporations and unions are prohibited under existing legislation and there are strict limits on the contributions an individual can make. Canadian citizens and permanent residents can contribute a maximum of \$1,575 annually to each registered party. They can donate \$1,575, in total, to all leadership contestants in a particular contest, and they can donate a total of \$1,575 to contestants for nomination, candidates, and/or riding associations of each registered party. Contributions are reported to Elections Canada, and the names, municipalities, provinces, and postal codes of those who contribute more than \$200 are published.

Bill C-50 builds on the existing rules. When a fundraising event requires someone to contribute or pay a ticket price totalling more than \$200, the name and partial address of each attendee, with certain exceptions, would be published. The exceptions are young people under 18, volunteers, event staff, media, someone assisting a person with a disability, and support staff for a minister or party leader in attendance.

Canadians take political fundraising seriously. There are significant consequences for disobeying the law, and that is why currently the Canada Elections Act provides tough sanctions for those who break the rules. Though Canadians can be proud of our already strict regulations for political financing, we recognize that they have the right to know even more when it comes to political fundraising events. Bill C-50 would provide Canadians with more information about political fundraising events in order to continue to enhance trust and confidence in our democratic institutions.

If passed, Bill C-50 would allow Canadians to learn when a political fundraiser that has a ticket price or requires a contribution of \$200 or more is happening and who attended. This legislation would apply to all fundraising activities attended by cabinet ministers, including the prime minister, party leaders, and leadership contestants who meet the criteria. It would also apply to appreciation events for donors to a political party or contestant. This legislation would only apply to parties with a seat in the House of Commons. It would require parties to advertise fundraising events at least five days in advance. Canadians would know about a political fundraiser before the event takes place, giving them an opportunity to participate and even observe.

Government Orders

•(1330)

Bill C-50 gives journalists the ability to determine when and where fundraisers are happening. At the same time, political parties would retain the flexibility to set their own rules for providing media access and accreditation. Parties would be required to report the names and partial addresses of attendees to Elections Canada within 30 days of the event. That information would then become public.

The bill would also introduce new offences in the Canada Elections Act for those who do not respect the rules, and require the return of any money collected at the event. These sanctions would apply to political parties and event organizers rather than the senior political leaders invited to the event. We propose a maximum \$1,000 fine on summary conviction for offences introduced under Bill C-50.

This new level of transparency recognizes that the public trust is always being built, and delivers on the government's promise to bring greater transparency to Canada's political financing system and thus strengthen our democratic institutions. We are also taking action to increase voter participation and enhance the integrity of elections through Bill C-33. The government is partnered with the Communications Security Establishment to protect Canada's democracy from cyber-threats.

While we know that Canadians have every reason to be proud of our democracy, which together we build every day, we recognize there is always room for improvement. Shining a light on political fundraising activities builds upon our already strong and robust system for political financing in Canada.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill C-50, parliamentary secretaries are excluded from the legislation. I would like to ask the hon. member if she would go to a cash for access event if she was invited.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting the member should raise that point because parliamentary secretaries are also members of the government. The rules strike me as being eminently fair, and the community is also very ready for that.

I am entirely transparent. Before I entered federal politics, I ran for 12 years at the local level. My fundraising rules at the local level were always published. Everyone who contributed was always known. That is the very basis of an open government in which people can have confidence.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is to be commended for her record of transparency prior to running for the Liberal Party to be a member of this chamber. I would like to ask her how she reconciles her understanding of conflict of interest and need for transparency with a party which, until caught, systemically ran a program of secret fundraisers using search engine protocols to bury these types of events. I would also like her to answer the question that my friend from Barrie—Innisfil asked previously, which was whether parliamentary secretaries should attend or will attend cash for access fundraisers.

•(1335)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the terminology that my hon. colleague is using. For any event that we attend, if the tickets are \$200 more, every single person who attended would be known. Certainly this government is already

applying the rules that we propose under Bill C-50, and we look forward to the support of each and every member of Parliament.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague across the way what her thoughts are on the question of the unethical conflict of interest that goes on at these cash for access events. First is the transparency. They are two very different things. I would argue that conflict of interest is the biggest problem, and the bill only tries to solve a smaller problem and does nothing for the elephant in the room. I wonder if she could comment on that.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, the intent of the bill is to move in a step-by-step way, continually toward greater transparency and accountability. The way that should work in a democracy is that we all hold one another accountable. Whether someone is a volunteer, a donor, or a candidate, it does not matter; we are all citizens of Canada and we are all responsible for the integrity of the system.

I would like to note what the acting Chief Electoral Officer said in October 2017:

In this regard, I note that the Bill offers a calibrated approach. Not all parties will be subject to the new requirements, and that is a good thing. Similarly, the rules will not apply to all fundraising activities, but only those for which a minimum amount is charged to attend and where key decision-makers will be present.

It occurs to me that is something every member of Parliament can agree to.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the official opposition members have paradoxically exercised themselves with great vigour to decry the elements of transparency and openness proposed in Bill C-50, while they themselves are practising a closed style and opacity. I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could share any first-hand experience that she has with just how open and transparent our Prime Minister truly is.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. Today, the Prime Minister's open town halls are open invitations to all Canadians to bring all points of view to him. I have never experienced something as open as this and it is a stark contrast to what we experienced with the previous government.

That is why Bill C-50 is part of also increasing participation, also increasing access, also being available to journalists and questions. I cannot count the number of times with the previous government that I was so let down because of not being able to ask, as a public office holder myself, the former prime minister a question about things that matter so much to Canadians.

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Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the previous speaker said, something I will repeat, elections are central to our democracy. Through them, the people of Canada give us here in the House of Commons the huge privilege and responsibility of representing them. If people feel elections are not fair, are biased in any way, it erodes the confidence they have in us and in all the work we do here.

This bill is about political financing. It arose in response to the cash for access fundraisers that Liberal cabinet ministers were organizing. There are a lot of things wrong about these events. First and foremost is the conflict of interest: lawyers paying to lobby the Minister of Justice or bankers paying to lobby the Minister of Finance. They are paying the Liberal Party. It would be bad enough if one had to pay a government user fee to gain access to cabinet ministers to recoup the cost of their salaries or whatever, but this money went directly to the Liberal Party. Finally, is the secrecy. Events were usually private. The public did not even know about them so could not attend them if they had wanted to or were wealthy enough. As well, we did not find out who donated until the year-end reports.

This bill would only fix the last problem. It entirely misses the point on the most serious aspect of cash for access. If we asked a reasonable person on the street about what they find troubling about the cash for access problem, they would not single out the lack of transparency. They would not say that if they only knew the names of the people involved they would feel okay, or that if only they had been invited it would be okay. No, they would say that the problem was the conflict of interest in asking people to pay big bucks to the Liberal Party if they wanted access to cabinet ministers.

We know lobbying happens every day on Parliament Hill without money changing hands. I was talking to one of my Liberal colleagues the other day, and he was saying how busy he was in his office with lobbyists. That is great. He is working hard and that is his job. However, cash for access is a different kettle of fish, and this bill should have put an end to it. Instead, it actually legitimizes cash for access, with a dollop of transparency.

Because of that added transparency, that extra step, the NDP will reluctantly support this bill, but will keep reminding the Liberals that the conflict of interest aspect of these events has to be dealt with. The Liberals say they are fighting inequality in our society, but cash for access entrenches inequality. It gives more power to the powerful. No wonder many Canadians are cynical about politics and politicians. If anything increases cynicism in politics, it is when politicians break promises.

People are smart. They know that governing is difficult and sometimes one cannot fulfill every little promise made during the election. However, when someone breaks a big juicy promise, a promise that got them elected, people feel completely betrayed.

Last weekend, a constituent emailed me about an issue, so I called her back and we talked about that issue. At the end of the conversation, she said how happy she was to hear directly from her MP. She said that she had lost confidence in politicians after the last election. She said that during the campaign, she and her husband had engaged their children in discussing party platforms and issues, and figuring out which were most important to them.

In the end, they actually let their children decide who they were going to vote for. In the end, they decided electoral reform was one of the most important issues. They did not want Canada to elect another Parliament where a party with 38% or 39% of the vote held 100% of the power. They were deeply disappointed in the Conservative government for taking us down a path that two-thirds of the country disagreed with. They were excited to see that three of the other parties made electoral reform a central plank in their party platforms. They were happy to hear those leaders, including the present Prime Minister, repeat time and time again that this would be the last election run under first past the post.

That is what I saw at the all-candidates forums during the election. The Liberal candidate stood beside me to repeat the mantra that this would be the last election run under first past the post, that the government would ask Canadians and experts what the best new system would be, and they would implement that. The audience would stand up and cheer. Those people are not so happy now. The woman I talked to was devastated. She told me her children were so disappointed with the Liberals for going back on this promise that they might not vote in the next election when they are old enough. This betrayal is going to breed cynicism across Canada.

● (1340)

All of us here knock on doors throughout our ridings. Some people are happy to see us. Some people do not agree with our party. However, the big disappointment for me when I began door-knocking was the number of people who told me that they do not vote. They told me to not even try to tell them to vote or why they should vote. That changed in the last campaign. Most people were engaged in issues and were going to vote. I think they were energized by the feeling of change sweeping across the country and the chance they had to make a difference.

Three of the parties had pledged to change the electoral system so that every vote would count and strategic voting would be a thing of the past. One could vote for one's favourite candidate and party and know that one would make a difference in the final result. Unfortunately, they elected the only party that would break that promise.

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It started out well. The minister asked MPs to hold town halls to talk to Canadians about electoral reform to find out what they thought. NDP MPs answered that call. We held multiple town halls and asked people their opinions at the end of the meetings. We wrote down the numbers on the kind of system they wanted. We sent out questionnaires to every household in our ridings and tallied those numbers, and 80% of those responses were in favour of proportional representation.

Liberal MPs held town halls as well, but few, if any, asked people what system they favoured. NDP MPs started going to some of those meetings to find out if our results had been biased, and asked the crowd at the Liberal town halls for a show of hands on which system they would like. About 80% of those people wanted proportional representation as well.

The electoral reform committee met through the summer asking experts from across the country and around the world what the best system for Canada might be. Almost 90% of those experts said that proportional representation would be the best system.

The Prime Minister said that he broke his promise because he could not find a strong demand from Canadians for change and thought that changing would be bad for Canada. He is ignoring those experts. He did not ask Canadians. Instead, the government sent out a laughable survey that asked ridiculously biased questions around the margins of electoral reform. There was no question asking, “Do you want change?” or “Do you want seats in the House of Commons to reflect the proportion of a vote?”

Despite the silly questions, the survey did find that 70% of respondents wanted a government where several parties agreed before a decision is made. Almost two-thirds agreed that it is better for several parties to govern together, even if it might take longer for government to get things done, as the question said.

Canadians want political parties to work together in Parliament. Despite the way that last question was asked, things will actually get done faster if that happens. Just look at the snail's pace of the current government's actions, brought on by its uncooperative attitude with the opposition that has brought the system to periodic halts.

Canadians want a fair electoral system that produces results that accurately reflect the faces of this country. Canadians want more women representing them in the House. All of this could be achieved with a new electoral system that uses some form of proportional representation.

We must work constantly to maintain a healthy democracy in Canada and we must fight everything that breeds cynicism about our work here in this place. Many Canadians feel they have no voice, that their votes do not count, and that they do not have an equal opportunity to voice their concerns to the government. Real electoral change would do that.

Finding out sooner which lawyer paid \$1,500 to the Liberal Party to get access to the Minister of Justice does not help much. Finding out in advance that there is an event on Bay Street where one could meet the Minister of Finance with an admission fee of only \$1,500 does not help. We need strong laws banning unethical conflicts of interest and we need true electoral reform to keep our democracy strong.

● (1345)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I liked the first part of the member's remarks, especially, where he went through a number of the problems with the bill. I will ask the member the same question I asked the member for Victoria on Friday.

Given how poor the bill is and how little it would do to really address any of its stated purposes, and the fact that it is really a bill designed to give cover to the practice of cash for access, why lend it any credibility at all, even by holding your nose and voting for it?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, I was in the House for that question on Friday, so I can only repeat what my colleague from Victoria said. We do not want to be seen to be against openness and transparency. That is what the government will say if we vote against the bill. We like openness and transparency. This is a tiny step forward in that way. However, we are fighting to get the real problem, the elephant in the room, this problem of unethical conflict of interest, back on the table. We could not make amendments to that at committee because it would be adding to the scope of the bill.

The bill was very restrictive when it was brought in, so we want to keep fighting for that. We like the openness and transparency part, but it is a very minor part of the problem. The big problem is conflict of interest, and we have to do something about that.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that my colleague is acknowledging, at least in some part, that this is a step toward openness and transparency. As a member of the procedure and House affairs committee that had the opportunity to discuss this and listen to witnesses, I am very proud and happy about this legislation. It is a big step we are taking with respect to openness and transparency.

Two of the things I would like to focus on and ask the member about are the websites of political parties, having to advertise or make known to everyone that the events are taking place five days ahead of time. That is a fantastic step. People have awareness ahead of time. We are open as to what fundraisers we are having and which cabinet ministers are attending, or whether the Prime Minister is attending. The member mentioned it as a little step, but I think it is significant. People, including the media, want to know.

The second thing is about reporting the attendees within 30 days after the event. Again, this is a step toward openness and transparency in ensuring that every person who attended a fundraiser is going to be listed so that the Canadian public knows.

Would my colleague not agree that these are two very significant and positive steps?

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●(1350)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my previous comments, I think they are positive steps, but tiny positive steps. The Prime Minister has never come to any one of my fundraisers, so my fundraisers are very different things. It is very important to make that distinction with fundraisers where there is a federal minister who is regulating a part of our Canadian system. Who is attending those fundraisers is important. We find out who donates to the Liberal Party at the end of the year anyway; this just moves that up.

It is very different when \$1,500 is charged for a fundraiser with the Prime Minister or a cabinet minister than it is with say, one of my fundraisers. If I charge \$100, people complain. I am not worth it. We have to make that decision, and this legislation moves us in a very small way towards that.

To follow on what I said to the previous question, it does risk forgetting about the big question around the unethical conflict of interest. That has to be fixed, and should have been fixed with this legislation. We should have made it illegal for cabinet ministers to take money to be lobbied by any group that they deal with directly.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we recognize the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge and resume debate, I will let him know that we will have to interrupt him before his 10 minutes are up in order to start with statements by members. We will give him the usual signal, and that will be about one to two minutes before the hour. Of course, he will have his remaining time when the House gets back to the debate on the question.

The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating Bill C-50. This is a bill that some of my Conservatives colleagues, and I believe the member for Barrie—Innisfil, may have called yet another *Seinfeld* bill, a bill about nothing.

This is a bill that does not do much other than, from the government's side, try to give some type of legitimacy to their practice of exchanging cash for access. The steps toward transparency, given the existing law, are very minor in nature and do nothing to address what the previous speaker characterized as the elephant in the room, which is the exchange of cash for access.

For the benefit of those who have not followed the debate or are not aware of some of the background, it is necessary to understand the background to grasp how almost meaningless this bill is. The current laws on election finance already limit financial contributions to those from individuals only, and they limit them to just over \$1,500 per person. They expressly ban donations from corporations and from unions. They ban anonymous contributions of over \$20, and they require public disclosure of any contribution over \$200.

All of these transparency pieces that we hear from the government members in debate on this bill, which they congratulate themselves for, exist in the current law. We will just be changing the dates, making reporting happen a little sooner than otherwise would happen. Already, anybody who contributes \$200 or more to a political party is subject to disclosure. This transparency piece that the government members speak of already exists. Everyone is already going to disclose if they give over \$200 to a political party.

These rules all came into place early in the previous Parliament. The previous Parliament had a mess of ethical scandal to clean up when it came into government, and the new and current electoral fundraising laws are a part of that.

In the previous Parliament under the rules, cash for access was not an issue. It was understood by members of the previous government that their prime minister, Stephen Harper, would not tolerate it. I have spoken to my colleagues on this side who were ministers in the previous government, and they are absolutely appalled by the cash for access system that the Liberal Party and its government have, because they know it is wrong. The ministers in the previous government knew they would be cut off at the ankles if they tried to shake down their stakeholders and lobbyists for money by doing cash-for-access fundraising. It was a practice that was not done under the current law, and only began when the Liberal government took office.

This bill purports to be a solution to a problem that only exists for one party, the Liberal Party of Canada. This bill is unworthy of support because it is designed to give cover for a practice that will then be carried on. Liberals will no doubt later congratulate themselves on passing this bill and then claim that there is nothing wrong with cash for access; they changed the date with which the reporting has to happen and compelled themselves to start holding their events more publicly, and to not, for example, use search engine protocols to bury results when people look for Liberal fundraisers.

As has been remarked on in some of the previous speeches, the Liberals ran on a grand platform and promised a number of things, including electoral reform. Some members in the country ran on a pro-pipeline agenda, and others were anti-pipeline, promising different things in different parts of the country. They promised limited deficits and a balanced budget within two years, after running a maximum \$10-billion deficit. Liberals promised access to information reform.

●(1355)

Liberals also boldly declared, with the Prime Minister himself promising to lead, that they would have the most open and transparent government in Canadian history. That is now the punchline of a bad joke in the wake of his own conduct, the findings of him having been in conflict of interest and violating four sections of the code on his vacation, as well as the whole cash for access system, which took form very quickly after Liberals came into office.

Statements by Members

It was through the media that Canadians came to understand the scope and breadth of cash for access fundraising that was taking place. We heard about episodes that the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston spoke of earlier, when he talked about how Chinese nationals, who are not allowed under the existing law to contribute to political parties, were meeting privately, in private homes, to lobby the government and the Prime Minister directly. We have heard about the Minister of Justice having a cozy fundraising event at a Bay Street law firm with other lawyers and perhaps future judicial applicants. We have heard about the finance minister and his cash for access fundraising, and the industry minister. This is widespread.

This was a central part of the Liberals' fundraising apparatus that only came to a halt, sort of, when it came to light through media reports beginning in the late spring of 2016. Today we have this bill before us, and I am sure the Liberals will congratulate themselves for having dealt with this criticism, but it leaves the elephant in the room. Cash for access fundraising is wrong, and this bill would not make it right.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge will have three minutes to complete his remarks following question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

WORLD CANCER DAY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate World Cancer Day. All of us have a friend or family member who has been affected by cancer, especially in my home riding in Cape Breton.

Today, I would like to honour a very special constituent of mine, Erin Richard, who is fighting breast cancer but also standing up for those affected. Erin was diagnosed last August with stage 4 triple-negative breast cancer. Erin had to leave her job to undergo chemotherapy, radiation, lymph node removal surgery, and mastectomy. In the midst of all these procedures, Erin is standing up for all cancer patients to advocate for changes to the EI sick legislation. She recently submitted a petition to this Parliament with hundreds of signatures.

I challenge all members in this House to get regular cancer screening, make healthy lifestyle choices, quit smoking if they do, learn about the warning signs, and educate and support others. Together, with courageous people like Erin, we can make a difference.

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SEXUAL ABUSE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our society has yet to grasp how extensive and far-reaching child sexual abuse is. One in three girls and one in five boys are sexually abused in Canada. That is millions of Canadians who have

experienced or are currently experiencing this destruction of their well-being, their health, and their lives.

We must not allow this to be the status quo. To turn the tide in Canada against sexual abuse, we have to address the rape culture that fosters and enables it. We have to combat violent and degrading online sexual material. We have to learn to recognize the signs of sexual abuse, and have the courage to speak up, call 911, and stop the abusers.

I am encouraged that tonight MPs from all parties will co-host an event at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building at 6:30 p.m. to equip all of us to stop predators and protect children from sexual abuse. However, we cannot be satisfied with tonight's event. We must stand with the #MeToo movement and do everything we can to make the invisible visible.

* * *

SRI LANKA

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we mark the 70th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence, I rise to highlight the long and checkered history of the island. For so long, Tamils on this island faced an abysmal human rights situation. They were excluded from the nation-building process and rendered second-class citizens from its inception. The government mandated discrimination and denied employment, education, citizenship, and fundamental rights on the basis of being Tamil.

The UN estimates that approximately 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed during the last months of the 26-year armed conflict. In addition, 18,000 to 20,000 men, women, and children went missing, and Tamil-owned land continues to be in the hands of the Sri Lankan military.

I stand with our Tamil Canadian community to call on the current government in Sri Lanka to honour its commitment to fully implement UN Resolution 30/1 and ensure a process of accountability that will have the trust and confidence of its victims.

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B.C. TUITION WAIVER PROGRAM

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, weeks after forming government, B.C. Premier John Horgan came to Nanaimo to keep the election promise that the province would waive tuition fees for children who have been in foster care.

RCMP security detail at the back of the press conference wiped away tears as he talked about how he himself had been unable to get to Trent University without the help and support of his family. He asked whether any parents kick their kids to the curb when they turn 18. They do not. He said that the B.C. government is the responsible parent for children who have been in foster care, and that it would help them get to college or university.

Statements by Members

Then Premier Horgan passed the microphone to Ruby Barclay, a young woman from Nanaimo who had gone through Vancouver Island's tuition waiver program. Vancouver Island was the first to offer this. She is now the spokeswoman for this fantastic way to address the epidemic of children in care and give them a better start. It is a good investment.

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud alumnus to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Dalhousie University. Dalhousie educates more Nova Scotians than any other Nova Scotian university, yet over half of its students come from elsewhere, with its student body representing over 110 countries.

When Dalhousie was established in Halifax on February 6, 1818, it was the only non-denominational school in Atlantic Canada. These founding values of diversity and inclusion still serve as a guiding force.

Today, Dalhousie is the only Atlantic Canadian member of Canada's U15, our country's most powerful research universities. Dalhousie's faculty members have won Canada's top science prize three out of the last four years.

Further, Dalhousie is a global leader in advancing our understanding of our oceans to better protect them for future generations. In 2016, our government supported this work by awarding Dalhousie \$94 million to launch the Ocean Frontier Institute.

The list of distinctions is long. At the dawn of its third century, I invite all Canadians to congratulate Dalhousie University on its remarkable contributions to Canada and the world.

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● (1405)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many members of the House talk about the sacred obligation we have to veterans, and I think we would all agree that we have that. Those words were first used by Sir Robert Borden before the fight at Vimy.

Our biggest obligation to our veterans is to be truthful with them. If they are injured physically or mentally from service to Canada, they look to their government to provide service and support to them and their families.

Last week, the Prime Minister of Canada said that an injured veteran was asking for too much. It was shameful. Why is that? It is because in the last election the Prime Minister, along with the member for Orléans, the now defence minister, and other veterans in that caucus, made a promise to return to the Pension Act and lifetime pensions for our ill and injured veterans. They have broken that promise. No matter how they try to spin it, they have broken it. They have broken the sacred obligation to our veterans.

[*Translation*]**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK**

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the start of the 28th National Suicide Prevention Week, which goes from February 4 to 10, 2018. "Talking about suicide saves lives" is the theme of this essential awareness campaign.

Today I want to acknowledge the work of Lynda Poirier, Director General of the Quebec City Suicide Prevention Centre, and her entire team. They are an invaluable resource for our community. Founded in 1978, the Quebec City Suicide Prevention Centre is marking its 40th anniversary. It is the first centre of its kind in Canada. I want to commend all the volunteers and employees who have worked all these years on combatting the taboos around suicide and mental health problems.

People commit suicide not because they want to die but because they want to stop suffering. However, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It should never be the solution.

During this important week let us appreciate the importance of talking about suicide and talking to each other. Let us all realize that suffering is part of being human and that being vulnerable is a sign of strength not of weakness.

To all those who are suffering, know that there is help out there: 1-866-277-3553.

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[*English*]**CANADIAN SWIMMER'S ACHIEVEMENT**

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to honour my friend and Oakville resident Madhu Nagaraja, who recently became the first Canadian to successfully swim across the Strait of Magellan. Madhu completed the swim on November 29, becoming only the 23rd person in the world to complete the 3.9-kilometre swim through the strait famed for its strong winds, high waves, and frigid waters.

Madhu attempted the same swim in 2015 but was unsuccessful. Rather than feel defeated, Madhu gathered his team around him and tried again. He often says that it is not about the swimming; it is about building a strong team. An experienced open-water swimmer who has crossed the English Channel and Lake Ontario, Madhu said that he wanted to attempt the swim across the strait again in honour of Canada's 150th birthday.

I want to say, congratulations to Madhu. We are all so very proud.

* * *

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are imposing an ideological values test on the Canada summer jobs program that would result in many faith-based charities being denied funding. In short, what we see is an alarming attack on religious freedoms in this country.

Statements by Members

Hundreds of summer camps run by religious organizations across Canada will be denied funding, putting an end to unique opportunities for many children and summer jobs for thousands of young people. Many food banks and services to those who are poor or housing-insecure will also lose their funding. Several faith-based charities in my riding of Lethbridge that have done a remarkable job caring for the needs of refugees will also be denied.

Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects a long list of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, and freedom of belief. To compel organizations to agree to a government-dictated value statement not only infringes on their charter rights but also stands in direct opposition to democracy.

Today, on behalf of people of all faiths across this country, I am calling on the Liberal government to back down from its changes and respect our charter rights.

* * *

● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is International Development Week.

The year 2017 was a milestone for Canadian international development. After a year of consultations attended by more than 15,000 people in 65 countries, we launched our new feminist international assistance policy, which forms a substantial shift for Canada's international assistance.

We did it because focusing our assistance on the full empowerment of women and girls is the most effective way to make a difference in the world. It is the most effective way to reduce poverty and create a world that is more inclusive, more peaceful, and more prosperous. The primary objective of this policy is to contribute to international efforts to eradicate extreme poverty around the world.

This week is the perfect time to celebrate Canada's contribution to this positive change. Please follow #IDW2018.

I hope everyone has a great International Development Week.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no one is immune.

The mental health statistics for those working in agriculture are alarming. Calls for help and suicides are twice as high among farmers.

I would like to talk about my own experience. In 40 years, I have had to face many crises. In 1981, hail destroyed my crops. My herds have been affected by embryonic death, poisoning due to a feed supplier's mistake, and many other problems.

However, I have to admit that the most difficult situation I had to endure was my separation from my wife, which devastated me. I needed help. I could not cope on my own. I called Au coeur des

familles agricoles, which got me back on my feet. I was convinced that the agricultural community needed this service, and later I even became its president.

I am just one example of the thousands of farmers who, to this day, need help. That is why, during National Suicide Prevention Week, I want to highlight the specific needs of farmers.

* * *

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February 4 to 10, 2018 is the 28th National Suicide Prevention Week in Quebec. This year's theme is "talking about suicide saves lives". It is crucial that we talk about suicide for the good of our family and friends, vulnerable people, and all those who remain silent in the face of distress, particularly when we know that the risk of suicide is three times higher among men in Quebec.

It is important for people to be aware of the resources available, including the 1-800-277-3553 help line. Let us all visit the website of the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide at commentparlerdusucide.com.

In closing, I would like to commend the Chaudière-Appalaches Integrated Health and Social Services Centre, or CISSS, for its excellent initiative. In co-operation with the Fédération de l'Union des producteurs agricoles de Chaudière-Appalaches, it has posted two videos on its Facebook page that show how to detect psychological distress among farmers. Together, let us talk about suicide and save lives.

* * *

[*English*]

YUKON

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to acknowledge Yukon Days, an annual opportunity for Yukon's premier and ministers, as well as Yukon chiefs, to come to Ottawa and meet with their federal counterparts, build relationships, and advance important issues for our territory.

I also want to note that February 14 will mark an important anniversary. In 1973, a delegation of Yukon first nations chiefs presented Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau with the historic document "Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow". This was one of the first land claims accepted for negotiation in Canada, and it became the basis for negotiating the modern treaty, the umbrella final agreement, signed in 1993, followed by the 11 Yukon first nations land claim and self-government agreements in place today.

I invite all my fellow members of Parliament to come to the Château Laurier tonight at 5 p.m. for a great Yukon bash, and welcome the Yukon delegation.

*Oral Questions***DAVE BARRETT**

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the late Dave Barrett, the first NDP premier of British Columbia, a former member of Parliament, and an impassioned advocate for social justice. Dave brought truly enduring change to our province. No future right-wing government in B.C. dared to undo his legacy: public automobile insurance, the agricultural land reserve, higher minimum wage, and enhanced pensions for the elderly.

When I first met Dave, I was amazed at his energy and his wicked sense of humour. He truly made politics fun. Dave was a happy warrior. He riveted crowds with his eloquence and crusaded for social justice with a mixture of passion and charm. I bet that of all former B.C. premiers, Dave is the one British Columbian who would most like to have joined for a beer.

On behalf of the federal NDP, I offer our condolences to Shirley and their three children. I thank Dave for his memorable wit, inspirational oratory, and passion for public life, and for reminding us to have fun while working hard for lasting change.

* * *

• (1415)

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in this House as the new member for Battlefords—Lloydminster. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family, my friends, and the many volunteers whose dedicated support and encouragement brought me here today.

I would also like to thank the constituents of Battlefords—Lloydminster for putting their trust in me to be an effective voice for our communities. I am proud to represent a riding that cherishes and promotes Canadian values, including freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of belief, all of which are fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights.

The government has a responsibility to protect these rights for all Canadians, yet the Liberal government is holding taxpayer funds hostage from those Canadians who do not share its beliefs. Asking applicants to the Canada summer jobs program to disavow their personal beliefs is completely unacceptable. I call on the government to put aside party politics and to remove the Liberal values test from the Canada summer jobs application.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WORLD CANCER DAY

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Cancer Day.

Like all Canadians, every member of the House knows at least one person who was diagnosed with cancer. This year's theme, "We can. I can", encourages us to take action in the fight against cancer in Canada and throughout the world.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, we all know the devastation that a cancer diagnosis can have on family and friends. This is why I am proud that our government supports organizations like the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer with close to \$50 million annually and more than \$1.6 billion invested over the last decade. I firmly believe that we can reduce cancer rates, improve treatments, and create better outcomes for communities across the country by supporting research, working with all of our partners, and living a healthier lifestyle.

As with all great challenges, by working together and through dedication, we can and will beat cancer.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner's report was released over a month ago. We have been asking the Prime Minister questions in the House for a week, and he still refuses to do the right thing and repay Canadians for his illegal trip.

Will the Prime Minister put an end to this farce and repay the \$200,000 he illegally took from taxpayers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after the commissioner released her report, I immediately and publicly took responsibility. In the future, I will follow all of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's advice regarding the Aga Khan and regarding my personal travels. I am glad to take full responsibility with regard to the findings in the commissioner's report.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is still refusing to face the consequences. When the Ethics Commissioner's report came out, the Prime Minister acted the part of a man who regretted what had happened. He even apologized. Now he is acting the part of a man who is shirking his responsibilities. Despite taxpayers' demands, he is stubbornly refusing to do the sensible thing and pay back the \$200,000.

Will he finally act the part of a responsible person and pay back the cost of his illegal travel?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner's report included a number of recommendations, such as putting a screen in place with respect to my interactions with the Aga Khan and working with the commissioner's office to officially clear all my personal and family trips with the commissioner ahead of time. I am following all of the recommendations made by the Office of the Ethics Commissioner.

Oral Questions

•(1420)

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, someone with good judgment does not need to be found guilty by the Ethics Commissioner to understand that accepting gifts from someone who does business with the government is wrong. For over a year he tried to dodge and hide the cost of his illegal travel. He promised a higher standard of accountability but he has failed to reach even his own minimum.

When will he repay taxpayers for the extra costs associated with his illegal trip?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, folks watching question period, both here and in the gallery for question period, know there is an awful lot of back and forth that happens on a partisan basis. It happens on the basis of personal attacks. However, what Canadians at home and watching can know and be confident about is that there is a place that goes beyond partisanship and looks objectively at the behaviour of people in the House, makes determinations, and gives paths forward. That is exactly what happened with the Ethics Commissioner. We were happy to follow all her recommendations.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner came to the objective conclusion that the Prime Minister broke the law. The Ethics Commissioner came to the conclusion that he should have known better, and Canadians have come to the conclusion that he should repay the money he charged for his illegal trips.

If he accepts the findings of the report, will he accept responsibility, do the right thing, make amends, and pay the money back?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, it is one thing for the opposition to fall into mudslinging and personal attacks. It is another thing for Canadians to be able to have confidence in the work that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner does. She made findings that we fully accept, and she made recommendations that we are fully following. That is what Canadians expect in an issue like this, and that takes us above the kinds of partisan attacks that we see all too often in this place.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only a Liberal would think that an opposition party pointing to an objective finding by an Ethics Commissioner that the Prime Minister broke the law is mudslinging. Only a Liberal would think that would be some kind of unfair, partisan attack.

What Canadians understand is that when the Prime Minister breaks the law and imposes extra costs on taxpayers, he should do the right thing and pay the money back. Will he?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I fully accepted the responsibility of the behaviour and of what the commissioner proposed. We followed her advice.

However, as I pointed out a number of times, as has been the case with previous prime ministers, there are significant costs assumed by the Prime Minister's travel in any circumstance, wherever he goes across the country or around the world.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I remind members that even if they do not like what is said on one side, their side will get its chance. Even if it is the last question of the day, they will get their chance tomorrow. Let us be a little patient, and that includes all members.

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what should we do when a Canadian mining company uses tax schemes to avoid paying almost \$700 million in taxes here in Canada? Common sense would dictate that we at least investigate this company. Instead, the government will be lending it more than \$1 billion for its foreign activities. A company that uses an address in a tax haven to avoid paying taxes here should at least be ineligible for grants and loans.

Does the Prime Minister agree with this principle and, if he does, will he cancel this loan?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, EDC is a crown corporation that operates at arm's length from the government. EDC supports Canadian exporters in order to create quality jobs, support the middle class, and grow the economy. The confidentiality provisions of the Income Tax Act prevent us from commenting on this particular situation. However, we support the base erosion and profit shifting project that addresses aggressive international tax avoidance strategies used by some multinational companies.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they should take responsibility for this action. This economy simply is not working for everyday Canadians. Reports now indicate that a mining company received a loan from the government for \$1 billion, and that is after this company apparently avoided paying nearly \$700 million in Canadian taxes.

That is just not fair. Canadians are tired of one set of rules for them and another set of rules for the wealthy and well-connected. When will the Prime Minister stop this game of letting the wealthy get away without paying their fair share?

•(1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from lowering taxes on the middle class to raising them on the wealthiest 1% to aggressively going after tax avoidance and evasion, this government is working very hard to make sure that our tax system is fair.

We recognize that EDC is a crown corporation that operates independently from the government, but we are committed to the base erosion and profit-shifting project, which addresses the aggressive international tax avoidance strategies used by some multinational companies.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve a straight answer. It is as simple as that.

Speaking of letting the wealthy off the hook, the government seems more than happy to let web giants continue to make huge profits without contributing to the Canadian economy. While the rest of the world is trying to make these companies pay, the Liberals are doing the opposite. They are making deals with Netflix and other companies, and offering massive tax breaks.

Canadians pay their taxes and expect companies to do the same. When will the Liberals start making web giants pay their fair share?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is proposing to raise taxes on the middle class, which is something we promised we would not do and have not done. We explicitly promised in the 2015 election campaign that we would not be raising taxes on Netflix. People may remember Stephen Harper's attack ads on that. They were false. We actually moved forward in demonstrating that we were not going to raise taxes on consumers, who pay enough for their Internet at home.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is it fair that Netflix, Facebook, and other web giants have to pay neither sales nor income tax whereas Canadian companies in the same sector do? Around the world, other countries are trying to make sure that these web giants pay their fair share. Australia and the European Union are excellent examples. After all, it is those giants that are going to monopolize the advertising market and suck the lifeblood out of our print media. They are also responsible for the challenges facing print media. Instead of reining in the web giants and ensuring a level playing field for everyone, the Liberals want to make this preferential treatment official.

When will the Liberals show some backbone and level the playing field?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not going to raise taxes on Canadians. That is what the NDP is asking us to do. We recognize that the media environment and television viewing and production are changing rapidly. That is why we reached out and got Netflix to make historic investments in our content creators here in Quebec and Canada, to help them succeed in this changing universe. We have a great deal of confidence in our creators; the approach we have chosen is a testament to that.

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on page 20 of the objective and non-partisan Ethics Commissioner's report, we learned that while he was taking this illegal vacation, the Prime Minister received an additional gift from the Aga Khan in December 2016.

Could the Prime Minister explain the nature of the gift he received?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has clearly said and as has been said numerous times in this place, immediately after—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I get the feeling the members did not hear what I said earlier. Each side will get its chance, and the members should wait patiently and listen to the answers, as well as the questions, not just one but both.

Order, please. The hon. government House leader has the floor.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I was trying to say, immediately after the report had been tabled, the Prime Minister accepted responsibility and accepted the findings.

It is interesting, because it was the opposition that was asking for the commissioner to investigate. Now that the commissioner has investigated and the commissioner has tabled the report, the Conservatives, just like they did when they were in government, refuse to accept the findings.

We on this side respect the work of the office. We respect the work she did. We accept the findings. We will continue to work with her office.

The Speaker: I am going to have to ask the hon. member for Banff—Airdrie to remember what I said a moment ago, and keep it in mind.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will just point out that it is shameful that the Prime Minister cannot answer these questions for himself when it comes to his conduct.

Perhaps the Prime Minister could explain to the House leader who can then inform the House why he failed to report that gift from the Aga Khan, as he was required to do by law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I respect officers of Parliament, as do all members of the government. We will continue to do that good work.

Immediately after the report was tabled, the Prime Minister accepted responsibility, accepted the findings. We know the commissioner did important work to investigate, as the opposition demanded. For weeks, for months, for a year even, the Conservatives demanded the report be tabled. Now that it has been tabled, they refuse to accept the conclusions of it.

We thank the commissioner for the work.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, the Prime Minister claimed “no veteran will be forced to fight their own government for the support and compensation that they have earned.” The Prime Minister has broken that promise. Last week he said that veterans “are asking for more than we are able to give.”

The Prime Minister has managed to find money for convicted terrorists. He has managed to find billions of dollars for infrastructure banks funded by wealthy investors. He has managed to find a way to bill the taxpayers for the cost of his illegal trip.

When will the Prime Minister apologize for his insulting and demeaning comments to our veterans, and apologize for breaking his promise?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the well-being of veterans and their families. We promised to deliver a pension for life, and we are delivering on that promise.

It is designed to help veterans live a full and productive life post-service. It is monthly. It is a payment for life to recognize pain and suffering. It is a payment that is tax free. It streamlines six existing income-related benefits into a single benefit, payable at 90% of a veteran's pre-release salary.

The Conservatives had 10 years to make changes that veterans were asking for, and they did nothing. They did nothing but ignore the voices of veterans.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that question was for the Prime Minister to answer for his insulting comments. Why is it that every time he makes a mistake or says something stupid, he has to leave it to other ministers to defend his—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Members should understand the distinction between when someone says something about someone's words as opposed to that person. There is a distinction to be made.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, he told wounded Canadian heroes that the Liberals did not have enough money to keep the Liberal promise, yet he found millions for an Asian infrastructure bank to build projects in other countries. He found \$10.5 million for a convicted terrorist. When his friends at Bombardier ask for a bailout, he says “Yes.”

Why does the Prime Minister say “no” to Canada's veterans?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I relish every opportunity I can get to stand in the House and compare this government's record over two and a half years to our veterans to the 10 years that the other side had.

Under our pension for life option, let us take a young corporal who served for six years before becoming severely injured, with mental and physical injuries. He or she would receive nearly \$6,000 in financial support each month, partly in recognition of pain and

suffering and partly in income replacement. However, a pension for life is about so much more than just money. It is about respect. It is also about receiving up to \$40,000 in financial assistance. I could go on.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Durham knows about not interrupting and I would ask him not to interrupt.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told veterans that he has no money for them, but he has no trouble finding more than \$1 million to renovate a minister's office. He has no trouble finding more than \$8 million for a temporary skating rink in front of the Parliament buildings. He has no trouble finding more than \$200,000 to pay for an illegal vacation, which the former ethics commissioner said was a blatant violation of the Conflict of Interest Act.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and repay the \$215,000 he took out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister took responsibility as soon as the former commissioner's report was tabled. He accepted the findings and committed to having the commissioner clear his personal or family vacation plans in the future.

The former commissioner recognized that these costs were incurred as part of the role of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will continue to work with the commissioner to clear future vacation plans.

● (1435)

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was found guilty of violating four sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. That is not nothing. It is a first in Canada.

If the Prime Minister is so aware of what he did, then he should pay the consequences of his actions and repay the \$215,000 he took out of the pockets of honest, hard-working Canadians. If the Prime Minister needs more convincing, I took a poll this weekend and 94% of those who responded felt that the Prime Minister should pay them back.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, the Prime Minister accepts responsibility and the findings of the former commissioner's report, a report that the opposition asked for. Now that the report has been tabled, the opposition is refusing to accept its recommendations and findings. On this side of the house, we respect the work of the former commissioner and we accept her findings.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now in their third year in office, the Liberals have finally given notice that they will bring forward legislation for the assessment and approval of major energy projects. They promised to immediately review Canada's environment assessment processes and introduce new, fair processes, ensure decisions would be based on science, facts, evidence, and serve the public's interests.

After approving major energy projects using Harper's gutted assessment process, will these laws actually strengthen the rights of communities and indigenous peoples to have a voice in decision-making?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to rebuilding trust in our environmental assessment processes. We understand that the environment and the economy go together.

The previous government gutted the environmental assessment process, gutted the Navigable Waters Protection Act, gutted the Fisheries Act, and as a result, it lost the trust of the public and could not get projects through. Projects stalled and there was polarization.

We understand that we have an opportunity to bring people together and that in the 21st century the environment and the economy go together. That is the only way we will move forward and get major projects going—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was in for a rough ride in Nanaimo on Friday. People are not happy, and I can understand why. They did not just get a raw deal, they got a crude one, a pipeline deal that was approved under the old Harper system. Now the Liberals are waking up and talking about overhauling the environmental assessment process, but it is a little late for that.

Why were the Liberals asleep at the switch for two years? Is that how long it took them to get this deed done?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to heartily congratulate the opposition member on his new role as environment critic. I am looking forward to working with him to protect the environment and grow our economy.

[*English*]

We know that the environment and the economy go together. We know we need to get our resources to market in a sustainable way. The previous government gutted environmental assessments and, as a result, no projects went ahead.

The NDP does not understand that we need to get our resources to market in a sustainable way. We will do what Canadians expect, which is protect—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the report from the former ethics commissioner, both of the Prime Minister's family vacations were solicited by the Prime Minister himself through email exchanges with the Aga Khan's family. This is a blatant conflict of interest. The Prime Minister and his family asked for a benefit from individuals who had dealings with the Government of Canada.

When will the Prime Minister pay back this illegal expense?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous commissioner, both in her report and in her testimony at committee, answered many questions related to her report. We accept her findings and we respect her work.

On this side of the House, we respect the work of all officers of Parliament. Unlike the opposition, we take the recommendations of all senior officials seriously and we work with them to ensure that we follow their recommendations.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is very good at spending other people's money, taking illegal vacations sought by his own family at the expense of Canadian taxpayers, without a shred of remorse. According to the former ethics commissioner's report, the only thing that the Prime Minister finds exceptional is himself.

When will the Prime Minister do the right thing and repay the \$215,000 he took from Canadian taxpayers for his illegal trip?

• (1440)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, the Prime Minister took responsibility and accepted the recommendations as soon as the report was tabled. The former commissioner found that these costs were incurred as part of the Prime Minister's duties.

Oral Questions

The member must not be hearing my answer because he continues to ask the same question. We have answered this question. We are here to work for Canadians and to respond to the challenges they are facing.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister requested and took a trip from someone who had business with the government, a clear conflict of interest, and the Ethics Commissioner has confirmed he broke the law.

We teach our children that if they take something that does not belong to them, they give it back. The Prime Minister seems to think there is one set of rules for him and another for everyone else.

Will the Prime Minister take responsibility for his illegal actions and pay the Canadian taxpayers back?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again remind the House and Canadians that immediately following the report being submitted, the Prime Minister accepted responsibility and he accepted the findings. I have answered that question on numerous occasions.

While the Conservatives will continue to focus on the Prime Minister and this government, this government and the Prime Minister will continue to focus on Canadians. That is exactly why the Prime Minister has been available at public town halls across the country. That is exactly why we are listening and engaging with Canadians. Canadians have created 422,000 jobs in 2017, jobs for Canadians by Canadians. Our plan is working, and that is exactly why the Conservatives do not want to talk about the economy.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister broke the law. In doing so, Canadian taxpayers paid more than \$200,000 for his illegal behaviour. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister recently told a veteran in Edmonton that he was fighting veterans in court because they were asking for too much.

The Prime Minister has no problem spending money, but only money on himself and his friends. The taxpayers should not be on the hook for the \$200,000 the Prime Minister used for his illegal holiday. When will he pay it back?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question on numerous occasions, but I welcome the opportunity to answer it once again.

The Prime Minister has accepted responsibility and he has accepted the findings. More so, the Prime Minister has taken the recommendations, including putting a screen in place. The Prime Minister will continue to work with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to ensure that future family vacations and personal vacations are cleared ahead of time. The former commissioner also acknowledged that these costs were incurred as part of the role of the Prime Minister, which was the case for former prime ministers as well.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture has repeatedly stood in the House to proclaim that his government supports supply management, but the Liberals are signing a deal that will threaten this very system and will put thousands of Canadian farms and families at risk.

If the Canada-EU free trade agreement created a breach, the CPTPP threatens to blow wide open our supply-managed sectors to foreign market access.

Let us stop this charade. When will the government stop making false promises to Canadian farmers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this trade agreement will create significant opportunities for farmers across the country. We are aware of how important the supply management system is, and we are committed to holding consultations on the impact of this agreement on supply managed industries and on the best way to move forward. We started talking to those industries right away, and I was part of those conversations. We will hold additional consultations in the future.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is so secretive when it comes to trade negotiations that Canadians are forced to learn about them through media leaks.

Now the government is saying it will sign a new deal next month with 10 other countries without releasing the text. The CPTPP might just take the cake as the most secretive trade negotiation under the Liberal government.

Enough with the excuses. When will Canadians get to see what is in the deal, or will we read about it in leaks to the media before implementing legislation is rammed through this Parliament?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): It is very simple, Mr. Speaker. The text will be made available as soon as possible. We will publish it.

Let me remind the House of what happened. The member is on the trade committee. She knows that we have consulted with thousands of Canadians. However, let us focus on what is in the deal. Small and medium-sized businesses across this country will have access to one of the largest markets, 500 million people, 14% of the world's economy.

Thanks to the Prime Minister we stood up for Canadians. We have a better deal for the auto sector. We have a better deal for the cultural sector.

We will continue with our ambitious trade agenda.

Oral Questions

●(1445)

[Translation]

NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, northern communities are at the forefront of dealing with the negative impacts of climate change. We know that clean, reliable, and efficient energy sources supporting sustainability are crucial to mitigating these effects for northerners.

Could the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs update the House on how our government is supporting local efforts to confront these challenges?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for King—Vaughan for her hard work and excellent question.

Budget 2017 committed more than \$53 million to the northern REACHE program to support renewable energy and energy efficient community-driven projects.

Last month in Iqaluit we announced support from this fund for innovative projects to heat Iqaluit's aquatic centre using waste heat from the power system. This is an excellent example of how community-led innovation can help to tackle climate change while addressing the needs of northerners.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is there anyone in Canada who does not understand the difference between people who want to immigrate to Canada and Islamic terrorists who want to kill Canadians? I did not think so, but I was wrong. At a public town hall, the Prime Minister compared Islamic terrorists returning to Canada to European immigrants. That is completely ridiculous.

Does the Prime Minister understand that the refugees who fled Europe during the Second World War are not ISIS terrorists?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is proud of our record with respect to refugees. We have redoubled the number of resettled refugees that we accept on a yearly basis. We have almost quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees that the previous government had, because we realize the important outcomes that privately sponsored refugees have in terms of making a contribution and restarting their lives in Canada.

We are proud of the fact that we have resettled over 1,000 Yazidi women and children who are in need of protection, and that is an improvement over the three Yazidi refugees that the previous government brought in, in its entire term.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship did not understand my question at all. Let us move on to another question.

The Prime Minister does not see any difference between immigrants and Islamic traitors, and his Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is not being completely honest with Canadians. He told us that he was using all the tools at his disposal to protect Canadians from the ISIS fighters who have returned to Canada, but the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has indicated that there are currently no peace bonds in effect.

Why are the Prime Minister and his government are so complacent when it comes to dealing with ISIS fighters who are returning to Canada?

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no bigger priority for this government than to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. Despite the overheated rhetoric on the other side, we make sure every single day that those individuals who are extremists are brought to justice. Wherever possible we use the tools that we have, such as revocation of passports, laying criminal charges where sufficient evidence exists, surveillance, no-fly lists, a broad array of measures, to secure the safety of Canadians.

I can assure the member opposite and all Canadians that everything is being done.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's comparison of returning ISIS fighters to refugees from countries like Greece and Italy is an insult to these Canadians. It is also insulting to Syrian refugees who have fled their homes because of ISIS and ISIS fighters, who the Prime Minister has now welcomed back to Canada with open arms. Canadians are worried about ISIS fighters coming to this country and the threat that they pose.

When will the Prime Minister stop rewarding and defending terrorists who, by the way, are not refugees, and when will he put the safety of Canadians first?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, without question, every day we ensure that we have the tools at our disposal to keep Canadians safe. Any assertion that we are not doing everything in our power to hold extremists at bay is absurd. The Prime Minister has been preeminently clear in all of his statements. We will not accept extremism in any of its forms. We will do everything we can do root out extremism, both abroad and domestically, and all of its causes, and we have the tools to do that both domestically and abroad.

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were reminded last week that the Prime Minister offers ridiculous answers to serious questions as often in his town halls as here in the House. In one outrageous response to a citizen concerned about his plan to reintegrate ISIS terrorists returning to Canada, the PM compared these returning terrorists to refugees from post-World War II Europe and Vietnamese boat people.

Where did the Prime Minister acquire his warped view of history, and when will he apologize to legitimate refugees for comparing them to terrorists?

Mr. Mark Holland (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is ridiculous is both the question and the way it is characterizing the facts.

I find it absolutely ridiculous that the party opposite, during its term, when we are talking about the safety and security of Canadians, cut \$530 million from the RCMP, \$390 million from the Canada Border Services Agency, \$69 million from CSIS, \$42 million from the Communications Security Establishment, and \$171 million from the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority.

While they cut, we are working on getting the job done.

* * *

CANADA POST

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week at a town hall in Winnipeg, the Prime Minister was asked to respond to the serious climate of bullying, harassment, and intimidation of workers at Canada Post. The reality is that for months the current government has ignored petitions, letters, and horror stories regarding the toxic work environment and has done very little to specifically address this situation.

Can the Prime Minister tell us exactly what action he will take to end this systemic abuse of postal workers?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, harassment and bullying of any kind are unacceptable, period. My office has reached out to the individual from Winnipeg who raised these concerns. Canada Post has policies in place to address issues of harassment, and we will make sure that this policy is being followed.

Our government ran on a commitment to take action on workplace harassment in federally regulated workplaces. That is why all parties worked to get Bill C-65 to committee, which would create a more robust regime that would better address harassment and violence in the workplace, including at Canada Post.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has been aware of the toxic climate at Canada Post for months now. Employees who are victims of harassment, bullying, and psychological distress on a daily basis deserve better than empty promises. They deserve a plan to put an end to this unacceptable culture. The government can make sure that the new order at Canada Post includes a workers' rights vision befitting an industry leader.

In Winnipeg, the Prime Minister promised a worker he would take action on this. What is his action plan?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, harassment and bullying of any kind are unacceptable, period. My office has reached out to the individual from Winnipeg who raised these concerns. Our government ran on a commitment to take action on workplace harassment in federally regulated workplaces.

That is why all parties worked to get Bill C-75 to committee, which would create a more robust regime that would better address harassment and violence in the workplace, including at Canada Post.

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[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been over a year since the Liberals approved the Trans Mountain expansion because it is safe, in the national interest, will create 15,000 jobs, and will add billions to Canada's economy. It has been four years since the application started. The consultations and environmental, safety, and economic assessments are the most stringent in the world, but roadblocks and delays put the \$7.4 billion project at risk. Canada needs the Prime Minister and the minister to step in and act on their approval.

Instead of just repeating the same lines, what exactly will the natural resources minister do to ensure this pipeline gets built?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing we will do is agree with the hon. member that the pipeline was approved because it is in the national interest. It is in the national interest because of the thousands of jobs it will create, not only in British Columbia and Alberta but throughout the country. At the same time, we announced a \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan that will lead the world. At the same time, we are consulting in a meaningful way with indigenous communities. Partnerships, stewardship, jobs: that is what this government is doing.

Oral Questions

• (1455)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, the minister actually made excuses for the B.C. NDP, saying they're just talking to people and asking "hypothetical questions". The reality is that the B.C. NDP campaigned to kill this pipeline. Their plan is a delay tactic. Their proposal to limit the volume is a direct threat. These hurdles are not good-faith measures to gain new information or new facts. This is not about a squabble between two provinces. It is about the best interests of all of Canada.

When will the minister stop making excuses and fight back against the B.C. NDP's plan to kill this pipeline?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not making excuses for anybody. We are promoting Canada's interests. We have done that not only in the approval of the Trans Mountain expansion. How about the approval of the Enbridge Line 3? How about support for KXL? How about the \$1.5 billion oceans protection plan?

This is a balanced set of ideas and values that talk about the economy and the environment at the same time, something that neither of the other parties are prepared or capable of doing.

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CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over a year ago, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman was suspended. His home and office were raided, without any explanation, and to date no charges have been laid. The Prime Minister has been interfering with this case by publicly speculating about the outcome of the investigation. Last week, he declared again that this case would end up in court. This is blatant political interference.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that his careless comments are tainting an active investigation into one of Canada's highest-ranking members of the Canadian Armed Forces?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that this is currently under investigation, as stated from the get-go. However, we support the chief of the defence staff's decision on this matter and we will not be commenting further.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 4 is World Cancer Day. A lot of Canadians from across the country live with or know someone who is battling cancer. Let us reflect on what we can all do together. In fact, cancer continues to be the leading cause of death in Canada, with almost half of all Canadians developing it in their lifetime. This year's theme is "We can. I can." It is focusing on how everyone can do their part to reduce the global burden of cancer.

Can the Minister of Health please inform the House of what action our government is taking to support families, friends, and our communities dealing with cancer?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend and colleague from

Scarborough Centre for her hard work on this matter. We all know the devastation that a diagnosis can have on a family and a friend, which is why our government continues to support programs such as kid food nation and run to quit. We also recognize the importance of funding research, which brings us to breakthroughs. We can also make a true difference.

Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, last year alone, in 2015-16, our government committed \$156 million toward cancer-related research. We will continue to support families who are dealing with this devastating illness.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after months of pressure and a disastrous committee appearance on the part of his minister, the Prime Minister relented and has reversed his decision to remove female genital mutilation as an intolerable practice in Canada's citizenship guide, but more needs to be done.

What concrete action will the Prime Minister take to prevent practitioners of FGM from entering Canada and to prevent Canadian girls from being taken abroad to have FGM performed on them?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have consistently and repeatedly said in the past, there can be no doubt that our government condemns FGM. It is an abhorrent practice, and it is against the laws of Canada.

With respect to the FGM reference in the citizenship guide, the claim that it has been taken out of the guide is entirely misleading as the guide is still under development. The current citizenship guide is outdated and must be revised to better reflect Canada's true diversity, history, and laws. The new guide will refer to Canada's laws against all forms of gender-based violence, including FGM. This feedback and the current work stems from listening to experts, the stakeholder community, and community representatives, because we want to make—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

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[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brousseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I respect the spirit of the Prime Minister's words last week, but there needs to be concrete action to change the culture here on the Hill.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister's plan to elect more women is limited to the Liberal Party. It is also voluntary and mathematically impossible. My friend from Burnaby South proposed concrete measures to have more women elected in all parties, measures that have proven successful around the world.

Will the Prime Minister commit to working with all the parties in the House to ensure that we develop a plan to elect more women in 2019?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for her question.

As I said last week, it is extremely important for everyone in the House to show leadership and encourage women to run for office. Clearly, there is room for far more women in the House.

I would like to point out that during the last seven by-elections won by the government four of the winning candidates were women. On this side, we are working on recruiting women and ensuring their success here. I encourage my colleagues—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the outstanding creators in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle. They deserve assistance to present their works professionally, and our government has made historic investments in arts and culture.

Our government recently made an important announcement about the Centre d'exposition de Mont-Laurier.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House what is being done to help this important centre continue its work in my riding?

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for Laurentides—Labelle for his question and his excellent work.

Our government is proud of its nearly \$600,000 investment to relocate the Centre d'exposition de Mont-Laurier. This investment will enable the centre to further diversify its programming and improve the quality of its educational activities. This is yet another investment our government has made in our creators as part of the creative Canada program.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, where is the Minister of Agriculture? Chaos, favouritism, amateurism, ignorance are the terms being heard in connection with the latest dairy industry funding program.

According to Radio-Canada, almost 700 producers have been excluded, not to mention those who did not have time to access the program because it closed very early and was poorly thought out.

Will the Minister of Agriculture again cave in to the Minister of International Trade, who gave 50% of the quota for European

cheeses to distributors rather than cheese makers, or will he make the program fair by giving all dairy producers access to it?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are investing in Canada's dairy sector in order to innovate and modernize it. Our program provides \$250 million for dairy producers and \$100 million for dairy processors and will result in more innovative farms. The program supports investment in equipment and infrastructure and makes the dairy sector more competitive, innovative, and productive.

Almost \$25 million has already been approved for farmers across Canada. Three-quarters of the applicants should be receiving their funding in this period, and a waiting list will be created for the others. The second round of applications will open—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

* * *

MARIJUANA

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, many Liberals are excited about the legalization of pot, but the government keeps repeating that it is doing this to crack down on organized crime.

However, according to the RCMP, that is not likely to happen. The RCMP commissioner said that he does not expect the bill to squeeze out criminals, and the assistant commissioner for federal policing criminal operations said that it would be naive to think that such would be the case.

Why are the Liberals in such a hurry? Is it just so that their friends can get a piece of the pie?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Protecting the health and safety of Canadians is our top priority. The current approach to cannabis is not working. It has allowed criminals to profit from cannabis and it has not kept marijuana out of the hands of our children. The cannabis bill will create a strict legal framework to control the production, distribution, sale, and possession of cannabis in Canada.

● (1505)

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are so many Liberals involved in the sale of cannabis that even Lucie Charlebois, the Liberal minister responsible for the file in Quebec, has said that the federal Liberals who are investing in pot should take a good hard look at themselves.

It is pretty bad when the Quebec Liberal Party is lecturing the Liberal Party of Canada about ethics.

When will this government take its responsibilities seriously and work in the interests of Canadians rather than in the interests of its cronies?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are very clear. Many of these licenses were approved by the previous Conservative government. Over 30 licenses were granted by the previous health minister, Ms. Ambrose.

Routine Proceedings

Health Canada continues to administer a very clear, fair, and rigorous approval system to protect the health and safety of all medical marijuana users and ensure that those applying to become producers get the necessary authorization.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, there have been a lot of claims made, even here today in the House, about the jobs that would be created by Kinder Morgan, but there is no evidence to back up those claims. There is no evidence because the National Energy Board refused to hear the evidence of Unifor. The largest union in the oil sands, Unifor went before the NEB to point out that building Kinder Morgan will cost Canadian jobs. The NEB refused to hear that evidence. Could the Prime Minister tell us on what independent study is he basing the claim that Kinder Morgan creates more jobs than it kills?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the environment and the economy, we know the two things go together. That is central to the national interest. In regard to energy and pipelines, there are three elements that need to work together. First, we need to get our resources to markets overseas safely and securely. Second, we put forward a historic, world-class oceans protection plan to protect our coasts. Third, we put forward a real plan to reduce carbon emissions and meet our Paris targets.

We cannot get any of the three without getting all three. That is what this government understands.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Ranj Pillai, Deputy Premier, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, Minister of Economic Development, and Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I also wish to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Jeanie Dendys, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Minister responsible for the Women's Directorate, Minister responsible for the Yukon Workers Compensation Health and Safety Board.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1510)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both

official languages, the 50th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 50th report later this day.

* * *

SUPPORTING NEW PARENTS ACT

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-394, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (parenting tax credit).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to introduce my private member's bill, the supporting new parents act.

[English]

Welcoming a new addition to the family is one of the greatest joys that any parent can experience. For many Canadians it is also a time of great anxiety. When parents take advantage of EI, maternity, or parental leave, they forgo over 40% of their salary. They take a huge pay cut to spend those critical first few months at home and provide that care for their child. Conservatives believe that when parents make that sacrifice, they should not then have to pay taxes on the benefits that they receive. The bill would provide a tax credit that would offset any taxes owing on their maternity and parental leave.

This also addresses a situation that many parents who receive a top-up from their employer experience. When they file their taxes, they often have to pay extra taxes because the EI system does not withhold enough on their benefits. Many new parents, in addition to the new costs of providing for their children, also then have to pay that. The bill would alleviate that.

[Translation]

I hope all members of Parliament will support this important piece of legislation for Canadian families.

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

* * *

[English]

OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-395, An Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act.

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to table in the House of Commons my private member's bill, the opportunity for workers with disabilities act. Unfortunately, across this country there is an inadvertent phenomenon which, as a result of our tax and benefits system, punishes some of our most inspiring workers when they endeavour to leave social assistance and enter the workforce. The combination of benefit clawbacks and taxation can often lead to marginal effective tax rates above 100%; that is, a person loses more than a dollar for every dollar the person earns. It is called the welfare wall and it keeps many of our otherwise hard-working people trapped in poverty and out of work.

Conservatives and all Canadians believe that hard work should be rewarded and not punished. The bill would inculcate one simple principle that all governments must follow, that workers with disabilities must always be allowed to earn more in wages than they lose in clawbacks and taxes.

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

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[*Translation*]

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY ACT

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-396, An Act to amend the Department of Industry Act (financial assistance).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in my role as shadow minister for innovation, science and economic development, I have reviewed the files of corporations that have received financial assistance from the government. It has come to my attention that billions of dollars are being distributed every year by the government in subsidies and repayment contributions.

Many of these loans have not been paid back and nor do we know the status of the repayments. For 45% of the loans granted through the Minister of Industry's technology partnerships Canada program, we do not know if they have been paid back even though these loans were granted several years ago. The bill will enhance transparency in order to shed light on these loans.

I am against subsidizing businesses, but when they receive repayable loans, Canadian taxpayers should know if those loans have been repaid or not. This bill is very simple. It calls on the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development to publish information on the repayment of these loans. I hope that we will have the unanimous support of the House since this bill is absolutely not partisan.

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

* * *

•(1515)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 50th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member 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)

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce a petition that was signed by signatories aged 10 to 83. The petition is from youth petitioners and those who care deeply about youth, who call upon the House of Commons to take meaningful steps to support the future of young Canadians and fulfill Canada's obligations under the Paris Agreement.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituents from Winnipeg Centre concerning water on first nations communities.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to ensure that all first nations communities and reserves in Canada have access to clean water; that there be new investments in water and waste water infrastructure on first nations reserves and that it be accompanied by regulations, sufficient funds for capital, operation, and maintenance, costs for community and household systems, and mechanisms to track progress; as well as the establishment of an independent first nations water commission with the authority to monitor and evaluate water policy and outcomes that affect first nations water quality in communities.

I hope to soon hear a response from the government concerning this very important issue for not only Canadians but first nations people having access to clean drinking water, which is a human right.

FIREARMS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition that is important to my constituents but also to all peoplekind.

This petition calls on the House of Commons to immediately reverse the 10-round magazine reclassification enforced by the RCMP and to remove the power of the RCMP to arbitrarily make classification decisions on firearms.

Government Orders

My constituents believe that when it comes to firearms classification, it is important for there to be predictability, certainty, and regulations based on legitimate public safety issues. They are concerned that arbitrary reclassification decisions can be made which change the classification of what was previously allowed property.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Does the House agree?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing), as reported (with amendments) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: Prior to question period, the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge was very gracious about being interrupted for question period, and he now has three minutes remaining in his speech.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we certainly would not want to hold up question period, so I was happy to yield at that time.

With the three minutes I have left just to pick up, I spoke of the background and the history on this bill and the issue purported by the Liberals to solve. Being that of a problem with fundraising that the Liberal party is the only one with the problem.

Mr Speaker, we know that cash for access and the calls to eliminate and calls to question and be concerned about the conflict of interest inherent in cash for access fundraising were the reason for this bill. The Liberals had to do something. They had to be seen as doing something about a practice that only the Liberal Party party takes part in, so they tabled the bill we are now debating.

As I said before question period, Bill C-50 is not necessary. The government could at any point simply choose not to shake down its own lobbyists and stakeholders for money for the party. It could simply choose to not allow that of members of its own cabinet, who have the power to dispense contracts, to hire people into the public sector, to make judicial appointments, to put out cash to subsidize businesses. A minister of the crown has these powers. Members of the opposition do not have these powers. Leaders of opposition parties do not have these powers. Government backbenchers do not have these powers. A minister of the crown has these powers.

It is the swinging back that we have heard, and I am sure we will hear more in a minute or so, that this is something about anything other than cash for access fundraising. It is just silly.

I will conclude by reiterating that I do not intend to support this legislation. To do so would be to lend credibility to a government that is merely seeking cover for a practice that Canadians find odious, that nobody besides members of the opposite party think is okay. I am not going to allow them to use the passage of this legislation to say they have somehow sanitized and legitimized the practice of cash for access.

● (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to give a quote from a published news report last year: “Conservative leader [the leader of the Conservative Party], whose party attacked the Liberal government for months for holding cash for access fundraisers, says he won’t post details of his own private fundraising events.” This was at one particular private fundraising event with real estate and business executives in the Toronto area. The Conservatives initially denied that the event even took place, but, when found out, they said their leader was not going to publish that information. Later on in the story, he said, “I’ll continue to follow every single law that Elections Canada has on these types of issues..”.

This legislation would compel the leader of the official opposition, who would like to be prime minister some day, to demonstrate transparency, to show that Canadians have the right to understand who is attending the Conservative leader’s fundraisers.

Is the real reason that the Conservatives are going to vote against this legislation because they do not believe their leader should have to share that information with Canadians?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the disingenuity of that member knows no bounds.

Under existing law, the names of those who contribute \$200 or more are published. We already know that. The existing law requires transparency on fundraising. This legislation is completely unnecessary when it comes to revealing the identities of those who contribute over \$200 to a political party.

By his own admission, the present Prime Minister is a ceremonial prime minister. He does not do the job of executive office; his office does it for him. It has the power over contracts, of appointments, the power to dispense patronage, and the power to dispense subsidies. Those are the powers of a prime minister, and that is why they need to be held to a higher standard, without cash for—

● (1525)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. gentleman from Calgary if he shares my concern that Canadians might be tricked by the government’s bill. They might think that having “transparency” is somehow the same as getting rid of the odious practice of cash for access, “pay-to-play”, as some of his colleagues have called it. They might be confused by the government calling out, as one of the members just did, the opposition leader, and acquainting his or her access to that of the Prime Minister or a cabinet minister, or others, whom I think we would agree have slightly different roles to play. I wonder if he shares my fear.

Government Orders

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I do share some of those concerns, although the bigger concern I have is that by buying into their statement that this is some grand transparency bill and by voting for it, we would lend legitimacy to it. My hon. friend, in our exchange on Friday, said that he did not want to be seen as voting against apple pie. However, if someone orders apple pie and the server brings them a baloney sandwich and calls it apple pie, they send it back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask my colleague to try to read a Liberal's mind and figure out the real motivation behind this bill. I apologize in advance if he is unable to do so.

Does my colleague believe that, at the end of the day, the Liberals figured that Canadians were upset about events such as those granting privileged access to ministers and the Prime Minister and decided to do something about it? They like those events so much that the only thing they could think of was to advertise them just a little more.

Does my colleague believe that that was the Liberals' train of thought? Instead of ending the practice, they simply decided to make it a little more transparent.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I assume they do not simply end the practice because they are addicted to the money that they raise. It is a successful practice.

Second, they do not get conflict of interest. We have seen this from the Prime Minister. He has breached the act in four places, and they act like nothing is wrong with that. They make a mockery of their statements on open and transparent government that insists all members govern themselves to a standard that is beyond reproach, and yet cling to talking points. The member may recall, for months they said no laws were broken, that they technically were not doing anything wrong.

I do not know what to say. I would not presume to try to assume the mentality or try to understand how they come to these conclusions. However, make no mistake, the bill is just cover for cash for access.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a really interesting bill. It is a really interesting topic.

I am often asked by colleagues around the world what makes the Canadian system different from electoral systems such as the one in the U.S. One of the great things about Canada's electoral system is that we actually do not have the same sort of strain or pressure on us from corporate interests or wealthy donors as we see in the U.S. I certainly would not want to be in the same position as some of our legislative colleagues in the U.S., given that they spend a lot of their time fundraising. I think that is ridiculous. I like to be able to use my time to actually legislate rather than spend all my time figuring out which donor I have to acquiesce to in order to take certain positions on bills or votes, as we see in other legislative systems.

The fact that we have caps on how much people can spend in an election is very important. The individual cap level is a wonderful way to level the playing field to get people to enter politics, such as under-represented groups such as women, as one example. Also, it is

important to note that we do not have the corporate influence in the same way we see in other countries.

The Minister of Democratic Institutions, who is new in her role, had the opportunity to table a bill on electoral financing reform. She could have tabled anything she wanted. She could have tabled something that could materially impact Canadian democracy, allow under-represented groups to enter, or further level the playing field, but she completely failed.

The reason I will not support this bill is that it does not address what I think is the biggest concern in political financing in Canada, and that is the major loophole that allows wealthy individuals, corporations, unions, and foreign influences to influence the outcome of our elections. The minister has done nothing to stop that.

This should concern not just my party or the Liberals. Everyone here should be concerned about this loophole the Minister of Democratic Institutions has done nothing to address, which is the loophole that allows corporate interests and foreign groups to register as third parties in Canada. They can essentially take money from anywhere, without any reporting standards, and influence the electoral outcome.

It is very difficult to do research on this, but in preparation for this speech, I did.

For political party electoral district associations, individual donations are capped at approximately \$1,500 per year, corporate donations are banned, and there are strict spending limits, and even stricter reporting requirements. The system levels the playing field for traditionally under-represented groups, such as women. I also believe that it gives our electoral system integrity. It also prevents access and influence on the political system from being in the hands of the wealthy, corporate interests, and special interest groups. It is important, because it also limits the scope and ability of special interest groups to directly impact elections through spending. However, there is a significant loophole in this process.

In Canada, an individual corporation or group can register as a third party for election advertising purposes and then make expenses to "promote or oppose the election of one or more candidates". As opposed to the law for financing political parties or candidates, corporations can spend money on elections via this route. Corporations can therefore influence candidates. Also, there are no limits on the donations a group can receive from an individual. Individuals can, therefore, in effect, exceed their political spending limits and influence the outcome of elections.

Government Orders

Further, a third party has to register with Elections Canada only once an election is called, which makes it difficult to track the activities of a group with regard to its influence on our electoral process. Also, it only has to report donations that come in during the six-month period prior to an election being called, which means that in many cases, the public has no way of knowing where its money came from. In addition, there is no requirement to state which candidate a third party promoted or opposed, making it difficult for the public to know if members of Parliament are compliant with ethics guidelines on conflict of interest.

• (1530)

This is the part that is difficult to research. I manually tabulated all of this. In the 2015 federal election, over \$6 million was spent by third parties on election advertising. To put the significance of that amount into perspective, the entire election spending, per Elections Canada, for the Green Party of Canada was approximately \$3.9 million. Moreover, for individuals listed as contributors to third-party election advertising spending, many also contributed to federal political parties or local electoral district associations.

I would like to present an example from the riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. There was an individual in that riding named Michelle Good. If we pull up her donor profile from Elections Canada, this individual donated significantly to the federal Liberal Party. However, she also donated significantly to the New Democratic Party. We can look at that. For example, I am looking at one instance when this individual, on September 6, 2015, donated \$400 to the New Democratic Party.

Here is the interesting thing. There is also a third party, registered under a Michelle Frances Good, that spent \$2,363.29 to advertise in Kamloops during the election period. This is just me looking at what I can find online. However, I would surmise that it is the same Michelle Good who contributed to the Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo federal NDP riding association and then registered as a third party and spent \$2,300 to purchase advertising under this third-party group. How does that happen? I thought we were only supposed to be able to pay \$1,500 a person to participate in the federal electoral process.

I bet that I could find people registered as their names and find their donations, and sure enough, there they were. That \$2300 is a lot of money. Someone who does not have access to that level of funding does not have the access this person has to influence the outcome of an election. When we start thinking about \$2,300, \$3,000, or \$4,000, while that does not seem like a lot, it actually is a lot in the context of the overall spending in that particular district.

What if I had said that the Koch brothers had registered as a third party. That would get the attention of a lot of people here. The reality is that because trade unions and environmental NGOs have taken care of this loophole, the Minister of Democratic Institutions has completely ignored it.

I will say one thing. Once people realize that this loophole exists, all gloves are off. If the Liberals do not address this problem, what I worry about is that everyone here is going to say that we all have to use PACs to get elected. All of a sudden, that uniquely Canadian “I can focus on my legislation instead of fundraising” goes away.

The minister came in with a fresh, new hope-and-change mandate from the Prime Minister. If the Liberals know that this happens and did not even look at it or touch it, then mark my words: after the next election, this place is going to be looking at this and saying that I had a point.

I would hope that my colleagues would all be in agreement and put aside partisanship and say that we do not want PACs in Canada. The example I gave should not happen. Closing this loophole should be in this legislation. Reporting donations for these third parties needs to happen. Reporting the purpose of electoral advertising needs to happen. Prohibiting donations from entities other than individuals needs to happen. We need to prohibit individuals from using third-party registration status to circumvent the cap on individual donations.

• (1535)

Why is that not in this legislation? It is a glaring loophole that will have a huge impact on our democratic system. It already has with that \$6 million. We do not even know where it came from or what it was used for. How can we tolerate that? That is the antithesis of democracy, and it is not in the bill.

The bill is a waste of time. It is not going to change the behaviour of the Liberals. What I am talking about would, and I have no idea why it is not in there.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the timing of the introduction of Bill C-50 was interesting in that it fell right as the Liberals were breaking their promise on electoral reform. It is the bait and switch of a party that was looking to get out from underneath the burden of having promised something and then blatantly betraying that promise.

One would wonder where this came from. The bill was born from the allegations, which I think were quite correct, that the Prime Minister and many of his cabinet ministers were finding themselves in an obvious, to everyone else, conflict of interest. We had the justice minister meeting with high-priced Bay Street lawyers, fundraising. We had the finance minister meeting with members of the financial industry, who have interests in his department. These were not just meetings. They were fundraising events. They were \$1,500- and \$1,200-a-person fundraising events.

If we all remember the Prime Minister's own much-vaunted mandate letters to his cabinet, which applied to him as well, not only could his cabinet ministers not find themselves in a conflict of interest, they could not even place themselves in the appearance of a conflict of interest. It is somewhat ironic now, because the author of those mandate letters broke our conflict of interest rules.

Bill C-50 does what the law already prescribes, which is that we have to make things public, but it does not do anything about cash for access, nor the appearance of or an actual conflict of interest. Is there any hope in the legislation that future fundraising events by the government would not create the same dynamic, the same scenario of ministers being lobbied and donated to by people who have self-serving interests?

Government Orders

● (1540)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I actually thought of my colleague last week, when, in a town hall meeting, the Prime Minister said, in response to a question on whether he would ever entertain questions on democratic reform or change the voting system, he said yes, as long as it was not proportional representation and a ranked ballot system. As long as it is him as a dictator defining what Canada's democracy looks like, he is good with it. It is that tone that would probably answer my colleague's question as to why the bill was introduced.

What is going to happen with this? Honestly, I think the system is going to get worse, because we have not addressed this glaring, huge loophole in our political financing system. Six million dollars entered the Canadian system, which I am sure any of my American colleagues would say they have to fundraise in five minutes, but that is a lot of money in the Canadian political context. Now that people are aware of it, it is only going to get worse. The bill should have dealt with that loophole. This is going to have a huge impact on the next election, and not for the better.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to understand exactly what the bill is proposing to do. In essence, it would provide more transparency and more accountability. No matter how the Conservatives, and at times, the NDP work together to try to critique a piece of legislation, that is the essence of what it would do. Whether it is the Prime Minister, a cabinet minister, or a leader of a political party, if people attended an event where they paid in excess of \$200 to be in the presence of those individuals, there would be a responsibility to report those names to Elections Canada in a timely fashion. There would be more transparency and more accountability. Even the former ethics commissioner, Mary Dawson, said that this would be a step forward.

All of what the member wants to see in future legislation is wonderful. I wish her well in getting it. However, with respect to this specific bill, would she not agree that it is a positive step forward?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, the bill would, frankly, put lipstick on the Liberal's cash for access pig. The bill would do nothing to change the fact that if the Prime Minister wanted to charge \$1,500 for access to him, he could still talk about government business with these people. There would be no significant change.

My problem with the bill is actually encapsulated best in a quote from my colleague opposite. This was after he was asked about the cash for access scandal when it first broke. He said, "When one is following the laws, there cannot be a conflict of interest."

Frankly, it is about judgment. People in Canada cannot afford to pay \$1,500 to have access to top legislators. That is not right, and the bill would still allow it. It would allow the Liberals to keep their fundraising model. It would also allow the Liberals to keep their loophole open while at the same time saying, "Hope and change. Democracy is alive in Canada. Everything is wonderful." It is actually such a waste of time. Why are we even debating the bill? It does not do anything. All it does is allow the Liberals to keep on with their bad behaviour, and Canadians are tired of it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if we want to get to the real intentions behind government legislation, it never hurts to consider where it is coming from: its background, its history, and the circumstances surrounding it.

As my great-grandmother would say, "the more things change, the more they stay the same". The government was caught red-handed holding private events offering privileged access to the Prime Minister. Now, it thinks it can make these events more palatable by advertising them to major lobbies with the means to pay \$1,500 to discuss their agendas, but advertising them does not make them any less private. The Prime Minister met with Chinese-Canadian billionaires, for instance, and all of a sudden he got a total of \$70,000, in \$1,500 increments, for his riding of Papineau, even though the reception was held 5,000 kilometres away in Vancouver.

The government thinks that advertising these events will make them fairer and more palatable, but the morally reprehensible part is that one can pay to get privileged access to the Prime Minister and his cabinet. Citizens, voters, and the 61% of voters who did not vote for the current government, will surely view this so-called change with greater cynicism after hearing today's debate. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

What will cause even more cynicism—and I see my colleague who sat on the committee with me—is that a year ago, on February 1, 2017, the committee tabled a report that it would have liked to see become a bill. Instead, that report was scrapped. I am talking about the report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform regarding the complete overhaul of the Canada Elections Act that was supposed to take place. The government spent millions of dollars to consult voters across the country, and we thought that the outcome was that Canadians wanted more fairness when it comes to electoral representation and election financing.

Jean-Pierre Kingsley, former chief electoral officer, appeared before the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. In response to one of my questions, he responded without hesitation that, in the interest of fairness, the per-vote subsidy need to be restored. We are very open to that, regardless of the amount. We know that former prime minister Jean Chrétien set up a public funding system under which the parties received \$2 per vote. I imagine that he wanted to leave a legacy other than the sponsorship scandal that characterized the Liberals' time in office. Jean-Pierre Kingsley indicated that, in the interest of fairness, that system should be restored as soon as possible.

Why? It is a shame that Bill C-50 does not make any mention of that.

● (1545)

Bill C-50 is just a superficial attempt to make up for getting caught holding cash for access fundraisers. Now everyone has to advertise their little \$1,500 fundraising soirées.

Government Orders

Mr. Kingsley said that electoral fairness is part and parcel of living in a democratic society. Even a party that does not have 20 or 60 MPs should have the right to a fair hearing in the democratic debate between elections and from the get-go in an election.

Taxpayers do not have \$1,500 to donate to political parties. I would like to know what the average donation to the Liberals and the Conservatives is. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Why is that? When the current governing party was in opposition, it said it would restore fair financing to take big-ticket financing out of the hands of lobby groups. When people meet a prime minister at an exclusive get-together, they are not there for his good looks or his campaign platform.

They are there for a specific purpose, and that purpose is what people are up in arms about. I think \$1.75 per ballot would make every voter's democratic participation more meaningful. That is what democratic reform was all about. The whole idea behind changing the electoral system came from the fact that most of the witnesses told us the existing system is not fair and does not promote diversity of representation in the House of Commons. The current system is set up for a bipartisan House, one with two big parties. That is the plain truth. We think every vote should count.

The government broke its promise. It was a year ago to the day, last Thursday, February 1. We marked the occasion, but a broken promise is nothing to celebrate. The government broke its promise and decided to keep the same system, but it is not reinstating the per-vote subsidy. That would have allowed voters to meaningfully vote for any of the parties, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, or the Green Party, regardless of how likely that party was to win in the riding. That is the issue, and that is what has voters frustrated. They feel like their vote does not count. Historically, it is always the same party that wins in their ridings. There was also concern about voter turnout.

I know that my vote is not totally wasted, even though this government broke its promise to change the voting system. The minimum of fairness that we can ask of such a system is that it ensure that my vote for the Green Party allows it to continue participating in the democratic debate between elections and that it be allocated, in a fair manner, enough money to have its voice heard in an election. That is a democracy worthy of the name. This is about having a legitimate democracy, rather than seeing alternating governments cater to the interests of people seeking access to it in order to influence its decision-making and then thrust upon us bills that benefit those people. That is what is being debated today.

My colleague from Terrebonne introduced a bill. We would be pleased to see the government include its provisions in Bill C-50, restore the per-vote subsidy, and lower the contribution limit to at least \$500. I invite all my colleagues to think about this possibility.

• (1550)

[English]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to focus on two initiatives the bill is supportive of in an effort to increase openness and transparency. That is what our government has promised, and that is what our government will deliver in the bill.

The first is with reference to political party websites. At least five days prior to events attended by ministers or the Prime Minister, the party's website would need to make it known to people. This would give open notice that these events would be taking place. Also, the report of the attendees to Elections Canada would need to be made within 30 days so everyone would be aware of who was at the event, if the event was more than \$200.

In my view, this will provide Canadians with openness and transparency about who attends these fundraisers. This is a very important initiative from our government. I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say with respect to these two initiatives in particular.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, we oppose this bill not because of what is in the bill, but rather because of what is not in the bill. We will not support it.

The government claims to want to change the democratic institutions, but it is breaking its promise. Since they were caught with their pants down, as my grandfather would say, they suddenly decided to make some cosmetic changes to improve financing. Does this problem become ethically acceptable if the access to the Prime Minister is legalized? This is the fundamental issue here.

We have nothing against advertising something. In fact, I advertised my most recent fundraising event in the papers. Tickets to the event cost \$125, which is an amount people may be able to pay, with a tax rebate. It was not \$1,500. The Bloc Québécois does not see anything worthwhile in this bill, which is why we will vote against this supposed improvement to the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks. I am wondering whether he thinks that expectations were high. Given what the Liberals said during the last election campaign, most Canadians had very high expectations regarding electoral reform and our democratic institutions in general. However, things are done very differently here in Ottawa.

What does my colleague think about the government's record on this issue to date and does he think that the government will be able to do better with regard to democratic institutions between now and 2019? The Liberal Party's only legacy over its four and a half years in office will be Bill C-50.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, it would take me a good 20 minutes to answer that question. I would give the government a zero out of 10 for how well it has done so far. I hope that the government will get its act together and show a little less contempt for the 60% of voters who did not vote Liberal.

Government Orders

On the issue of committee work, the first thing this so-called democratic government should do is allow all duly elected MPs to participate. Just because we do not have 12 members and are not part of an official caucus does not mean that we do not have anything to say in committee. Nevertheless, we are automatically excluded.

This government wanted to change the procedure at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, but it excluded us from the debate. It did not change the procedure regarding respect for duly elected members, including members of the Green Party and the Bloc Québécois, for example. It is as though that party has a monopoly on deciding what kind of parliamentary democracy we have in the House. In the whole Westminster system, in the entire Commonwealth, this is the only Parliament that operates in this way. It is appalling. It is also part of its agenda. It is unacceptable. If parliamentarians are not allowed to speak, if they are not allowed to vote in committee, where the real action takes place, how are they supposed to represent their constituents?

I had to ask another party to loan me these short 10 minutes I have today so that I could have my say in a debate that will last hours. There are other times, however, when I am not so lucky; when the government uses closure, we cannot speak at all.

• (1600)

[English]

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-50. I am deeply concerned with this bill and by the unethical behaviour that is demonstrated by the current government, opposite to me.

The piece of legislation before the House is in fact a poor attempt to appease Canadians after the Liberals were caught and called out for holding numerous so-called town hall meetings, or meet and greets, with the Prime Minister or other members of the cabinet.

These were parties where individuals who wanted to attend were expected to pay upward of \$1,500 or more in order to get through the door. These parties were held with elite people, like the finance minister, the Prime Minister, the justice minister, and the list goes on.

I can just imagine the price chart at the door when people walk in: \$1,200 for 30 seconds with the Prime Minister; \$1,500 for 60 seconds with the Prime Minister. Maybe a group of 10 people who are each willing to pitch in \$1,500 would get a whopping two minutes of the Prime Minister's time all to themselves. The selfies are complimentary, of course.

Apparently this is the Liberals' way of consulting in an open, accessible, and transparent manner. These are the types of buzzwords they like to use all the time to describe the work they do. However, I stand here today to use my voice on behalf of millions of Canadians who believe otherwise, Canadians who are actually frustrated with the elitism and the hypocrisy that is demonstrated day in and day out by the current government.

The Liberal government has said that it tabled this legislation in order to make its cash for access events more transparent. What the Liberals fail to understand is that these fundraisers in their very essence are unethical. Changing the rules that surround them does not change the fact that they are altogether wrong.

This legislation does nothing to condemn the use of power and manipulation to draw money out of people for the sake of privileged access. This legislation simply seeks to ensure that the Canadian public is made aware of such elite activities.

Bill C-50 simply proposes that all fundraising events that are attended by ministers, party leaders, or leadership candidates are advertised at least five days in advance. In effect, the Liberals are mandating to themselves that they must advertise their events. That is an interesting measure of accountability. It also requires political parties to report to Elections Canada the names of those who attend. However, anyone who donates over \$200 already has to have their name made known.

All in all, this bill does nothing to ensure that ministers and the Prime Minister are accessible to all Canadians equally, which is, in essence, a key component of a democratic system. The Liberals are still granting themselves permission to hold cash for access events that cater to the elite and prevent common Canadians from having a voice.

Justin Trudeau claims that he is listening to everyone, that he is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I would just remind the hon. member to refer to members in the House either by their title or perhaps their riding name.

The hon. member for Lethbridge.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, I apologize.

Mr. Trudeau claims that he is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Rachael Harder: Prime Minister Trudeau—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: We can certainly use “the Prime Minister”. That is fine. Members do refer to the former Prime Minister Trudeau; that has been inflected in speeches from time to time and provided that a particular clarification is in the midst of the speech, that works. However, certainly for the current Prime Minister, it is either the title or the riding name.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims he is listening to all Canadians and that ultimately he makes decisions based on what is best for Canada as a whole. In fact, what we see is actually very specific attention being given to individuals who have cash in their pockets and are willing to pay for his listening ear. It is not too far of a stretch of the imagination to assume then that the Prime Minister is in fact giving these individuals very key attention and giving their causes and concerns more legitimacy than perhaps the average Canadian who cannot pay for the same access to the Prime Minister. Of course, the Prime Minister and his cabinet will deny that this is the case, but Canadians can put two and two together.

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There are lobbyists purchasing extremely overpriced tickets in order to gain access to our government leaders, and I doubt any of them are attending just for the selfie. Furthermore, when lobbyists attend these elite events, they are not required to report it, nor is there any way of monitoring their activity. In all seriousness, it can be assumed that anyone paying such steep prices to attend these events has a certain expectation as to the influence that they are being granted. If their only motivation is in fact just to contribute to the financial well-being of their preferred political party, then why would they not simply do this from the comfort of their own home like everyone else?

Speaking of everyone else, let us talk a little about the average Canadian who is unfairly discriminated against by the allowance of cash for access fundraising. Single moms, small business owners, low-income families, and seniors would all stand to benefit from having a bit of time with the Prime Minister or any one of those on the front bench here. Unfortunately, very few of these Canadians can afford the going rate for a ticket to these elite events and thus are forced to wait outside while those who can pay enjoy their special access.

Within my constituency of Lethbridge, I have the privilege of hosting a youth advisory board. This consists of eight very intelligent, highly engaged young people from my riding. They meet with me monthly in order to share their views on federal pieces of legislation and key events that are taking place in our country and in the world. The aim of this initiative is to empower these young Canadians to use their voices to speak out and to advocate for the issues that matter most to them. It is my goal to impress upon them that no matter their age or background, they have an equal voice in our democratic system.

It is because of the implications for these youth and for all young Canadians that I am especially disappointed with the Liberals on their approach to cash for access fundraising. How can I tell my constituents that they have a voice and an opportunity to impact the decisions of the federal government when the Liberals have actually chosen to take equality out of the equation simply to earn cash for their political initiatives?

Political fundraising in and of itself is a democratic concept. It is allowed. It allows citizens to support their ideological beliefs by contributing to the political party that best represents their values, but cash for access events do not respect democracy and uphold the standard that has been set out in our country. It is wrong to have people pay to be listened to. These events consist of people buying access to government officials who have the power to make influential decisions on matters of policy and funding, and this is profoundly undemocratic.

The bill has been brought forward to appease rightly outraged Canadians. The Liberals got caught, so now they are trying to smooth things over. Their motivation is not to protect Canada's democracy. Their motivation is to offer a lacklustre response to getting caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

Changing the so-called transparency rules, as the hon. member across the way mentioned, that surround this practice does not make it any more acceptable. If legislation were passed tomorrow that made voter fraud legal, members would still take issue with rigging

an election, and not because all of a sudden something illegal was now legal, but because of our shared belief that it is morally and ethically wrong. Similarly, even if we change the rules around specifics having to do with political fundraising, it does not change the basic moral fabric of the issue at hand. We cannot legalize our way into moral safety no matter how strong the majority government at hand is.

In the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Democratic Institutions he wrote, "Sunshine is the best disinfectant to concerns about our political process". It is a nice ideal is it not? I wish it were true.

• (1605)

The Prime Minister believes that increasing transparency around these events is the solution. As long as he advertises to the constituency that he is putting his hand in the cookie jar, it should not be a problem, right? Wrong. The events and their underlying principles are the issue, not simply the secrecy around them.

Sunshine does not all of a sudden make unethical behaviour ethical. Being forced to pay money in order to speak with an influential government official is wrong. It is wrong if it is done at a private event or a public one. It is wrong whether those in attendance pay \$200 or \$1,550. It is wrong whether it is advertised two weeks in advance or not advertised at all. It is simply unethical and undemocratic, and therefore, wrong.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's intervention and see her passion for the need to be transparent. That is what this entire place is built upon. That is what our democratic institutions are built upon, the concept of being transparent and open. That is exactly what the bill does. It puts into the rules that we currently have a level of transparency with respect to the events and how they are handled, how they are advertised, with respect to providing a report of the attendees. That is what we are seeking to accomplish here.

The irony is that the Leader of the Opposition will not even disclose who was at his fundraising events during his leadership campaign. In fact, in the spring it was not until *The Globe and Mail* was able to bring it out that there had been a fundraiser for real estate and business executives. It was later on that it was discovered that this event actually did happen.

How can the member stand in the House and purport so much need for transparency when her own leader will not provide that information? Will she encourage her leader to provide that information so that the House can scrutinize it in the same way that we are allowing others to scrutinize our activities?

• (1610)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, there is a very significant and glaring difference here and let me point it out. That side of the House is in government and this side of the House is in opposition. That side of the House makes decisions that govern Canada. This side of the House asks questions of the government members and the decisions they are making in order to hold them accountable.

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The government side puts policies in place and creates legislation. That legislation can facilitate the well-being of individuals, groups, and lobbyists across this country. That side has the power to do that. This side does not have that ability. We ask the questions; they give the answers. They make the mistakes; we hold them accountable. That is how this works.

That side is the one to which people are going to pay thousands of dollars to bend its members' ears in order to influence the policy they are making, the legislation they are putting in place. That is undemocratic. That is unethical. That lacks morality.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, based on what my colleague just said, one would assume that she is completely against the concept of cash in exchange for access to ministers, for example. Considering the answer she just gave, it would seem that she opposes the entire concept.

I wonder if she can explain why these fundraisers granting privileged access to people were allowed even before the Liberals were elected.

Why are the Conservatives suddenly now saying that they completely oppose this practice when they could have simply banned it a long time ago?

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the legislation before the House has one purpose and one purpose only. It is meant to be used as a guise for the Liberals to cover up a problem they have. No one else in the House has this problem, just them, just that side over there. Therefore, they have created the bill in order to get away with this problem. The Liberals thought that if they made it transparent, if they used words like “open” and “honest”, and said, “Look at us, we're doing such a good job, Canada. Pat us on the back for putting our hand in the cookie jar”, they would surely get away with this.

Canadians have seen past that. They have watched the Prime Minister make one unethical decision after another, steal one tax dollar after another, thousands of tax dollars after other thousands of dollars, hundreds of thousands of tax dollars after hundreds of thousands have already been taken. That is what the Prime Minister is up to. He has been caught and now he is trying to get away with his unethical behaviour by putting legislation in place that says that the government is open, that it is transparent, that it is so good. No, they are not good. Canadians can see past it and now the Liberals are being called out on their unethical behaviour and illegitimate legislation.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his welcome. It is interesting to see that in the House, because the exchanges that were taking place during my speech—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We have resumed debate.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Beloil—Chambly has been recognized and now has the floor.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, this is timely, because the heckling we are hearing between the Liberals and Conservatives only serves to reinforce the point I wanted to make.

In the previous Parliament, the Conservative government only generated more cynicism and changed our elections legislation, making it harder for Canadians to vote.

Now the Liberal government is fuelling cynicism with superficial changes that ultimately will do nothing to correct a serious perception problem that the Liberals themselves created. Everyone who has been watching today's debates heard the Liberals say that the leader of the official opposition was just as bad and that he did the same thing. The Conservatives, for their part, said that what they did was less serious because at least when their ministers attended fundraisers, they met people whose areas of business were not directly related to the department.

I have been an MP for almost seven years now, and I am starting to get pretty sick of giving speeches about all the issues that breed cynicism. Others have talked about this today. As my colleague from British Columbia mentioned this morning, when we go door to door and talk to people, that is what is on people's minds. They say they are not interested, they do not want to donate money to political parties, and they do not want to take out memberships. Worse still, some say they do not even want to vote because of the cynical mood fuelled by stories in the news and legislative half-measures. We will support the changes anyway because one step in the right direction is better than nothing, but everyone needs to understand where this is coming from.

Bill C-50 is a first step. Unfortunately, although I have a lot of respect for the minister, it will probably be the only step. The Liberal government is unlikely to leave behind anything else that qualifies as a legacy of democratic reform.

I have to wonder if it is mere coincidence that this bill was introduced right after the Prime Minister broke his lofty electoral reform promise, right after the dismal failure on that front. This is a big problem for our political system as a whole, not just party financing.

We recognize that some of the changes have made things more difficult. My Bloc Québécois colleague and others spoke earlier about the per-subsidy vote, which is money allocated for each vote received by a party or a candidate.

The member for Beaches—East York spoke about similar issues. He even went so far as to speak about making changes to tax credits for donations. I am raising all these issues to point out that it is possible to be open-minded in this type of debate and to find ways to improve political financing.

We can study all the important changes made in Quebec following revelations about the corruption that occurred over several years, as well as all the changes in political financing and the lowering of contribution limits.

These are all legitimate ideas and we could have a healthy debate about how to provide the financing needed, for better or for worse, to run an election campaign. It takes money to print brochures, inform voters about our positions and important issues, obtain telecommunications equipment for campaign offices, communicate with voters, hear their concerns, and share our positions. We recognize that this is the reality, whether we like it or not.

In that sense, it is very important to find a way to work together in a non-partisan manner to fix this system or at least create a system that instills confidence in Canadians. There are many reasons why that is currently not the case. Sometimes it is because of changes that have nothing to do with political donations as such, but have more to do with the electoral system itself and how it works. I am talking about Bill C-23 from the last Parliament, which had to do with electoral reform, or deform, as people jokingly used to refer to it. That is the type of thing that fuels cynicism and makes all of this that much more challenging.

• (1620)

However, we also have to consider the optics of a minister receiving the maximum donation allowed by law to attend an event with people who have a direct stake in his or her portfolio. What we need to understand is that ministers and regular MPs wield a very different level of power. I agree with the Conservatives on that. I would add that we keep reminding the Liberal government of that fact with each new conflict of interest scandal. Everyone knows that party leaders aspire to be Prime Minister one day and that members of the official opposition or another opposition party could easily end up in cabinet with decision-making power within two or three years. Nonetheless, ministers have the power to make extremely important decisions, hire people, award contracts, spend money, and so on. As such, their ear is much more valuable to have than that of a regular MP.

This does not mean that all members of the House are not prepared to follow the conflict of interest rules—political financing rules, specifically. However, when the government denies that things are different when it comes to ministers and claims in the House that everyone should be on a level playing field, it is insulting the intelligence of those who want to participate in this debate and make real change, so that we can have a political financing system that allows us, among other things, to run political campaigns. People want to see candidates on the ground, which costs money, whether we like it or not, but people also want to have confidence in the financing system.

This morning, the member for Beaches—East York talked about how things work south of the border, and he is right. In other countries, such as the United States, money plays such a dominant role in politics that it has become a problem. For example, my campaign spending cap for my riding would buy about one ad for a U.S. Senate hopeful. We have to acknowledge that our system does have merit. Seeing how bad things are elsewhere makes us feel better about how we do things here, but that does not mean we can rest on our laurels.

Whenever a journalist digs up another scandal, we can pretty much count on the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Minister of Democratic Institutions to say that our

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system is a good one, spending is in check, and there are strict caps on how much an individual can donate. That is not enough, though. We cannot compare ourselves to the worst of the bunch, places like the United States, where a Supreme Court ruling made the who and how much of election spending a free-for-all. Corporations, unions, anybody can spend as much as they want. Even so, alarming situations that are bad for democracies elsewhere are no excuse for us to be content with the status quo here.

In closing, as I said earlier, there are too many situations in the House that remind me of the cynicism I have seen among too many voters as I have gone door to door as an MP for almost seven years now, and I know that my colleagues have seen the same thing. If we really want to make Canadians less cynical and put an end to political financing scandals, we need to engage in a real debate. The government needs to do more than introduce a bill that is merely a smokescreen designed to hide its broken promises on electoral reform and to try to make people forget about the scandals it has been caught up in. Let us stop pointing fingers and arguing over which political party was worse than the other when in office. Let us seriously consider this reform and the measures that we could change or even those that we could bring back, in the case of public financing.

There are all kinds of interesting questions. Of course, the NDP's main goal when it comes to bringing in true electoral reform is the implementation of a mixed member proportional system. There are also many other issues that need to be seriously considered. That is not at all what we are seeing from this government, and it is not what we saw from the previous government, either.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question really builds off of my question for the previous member where in her response she stated that she saw a different level of accountability between one side of the House and the other. This bill attempts to extend that accountability to leaders of the opposition parties as well. Her rationale was that the member does not have the influence the members on this side have. If it is up to us, he will never have that influence she talks about. Nonetheless, there is always the possibility that one day he would have that influence.

Therefore, I am wondering if the member could provide his insight as to whether or not he thinks it is a good idea to extend these provisions so that they do include the leaders of the opposing parties among the others indicated in the bill.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my colleague was too busy heckling the previous speaker to have heard what I said in my speech.

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I specifically mentioned that I recognized that we all have an obligation in this place as candidates and certainly as members of Parliament to have the strictest laws and rules in place to ensure that we are not finding ourselves in positions of conflict of interest, or “cash for access”, which is the term that is used. We cannot pretend there is not a difference between an opposition MP, regardless of whether he or she may one day be in cabinet or even in the Prime Minister's seat, and the immediacy of a minister who within weeks or months of having participated in said fundraiser will have the power to give out contracts, to hire people, to spend money, to make all kinds of regulatory and political decisions that are completely different from any decision that I may make after an election two years' down the road, in the event that there is an NDP government and I should be so honoured as to be part of that cabinet.

The point is to acknowledge that when one is in government there is a constant and immediate power that exists.

To my colleague's question, I recognize that extending that to party leaders and others who are in slightly more influential positions than a simple opposition critic is understandable. We are not going to disagree on that point. However, this notion that the government keeps putting forward, as it has with every conflict of interest issue that has marred it since it has been in power, that somehow we are all equal in this place and that it does not recognize the power it holds, is quite disconcerting for me.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would beg to differ with my colleague from across the way. Leaders of opposition parties carry a great deal of weight. They do hirings. These are individuals who want to become prime ministers. If we go to a leaders' debate or anything of that nature in the future, are the NDP and the Conservatives jointly arguing that Canadians do not need to be concerned, that they do not have to worry about who is paying \$250 to be able to meet with the leader of their political party? Why would they want to hide that information?

What this legislation does is ensure there is transparency for the Prime Minister, ministers, and leaders of political parties. Those are individuals who have a great deal of influence today and who want to become prime ministers. Why would they not support that level of transparency? This is something I believe Canadians would want to see.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, if the member thinks so little of the power that he has in cabinet, we would certainly like to do the job for him. Basically, he is saying that opposition MPs stand on the same footing. He is not wrong in the sense that we meet with stakeholders. However, when the Minister of Justice attends a fundraiser at \$1,500 a head with people who are in the law profession who are directly engaged as stakeholders with the issues that she has legal, regulatory, political, and financial power over within days, weeks, months, and years of that fundraiser taking place, to not understand that notion, as opposed to me as the public safety critic meeting with stakeholders who are concerned about the government's policies and what direction we should be going in, is absolutely crazy to me.

Let us be clear. To simply divulge even the fact that these cash for access things are taking place is at best a cosmetic change. We will support the baby steps. However, at the end of the day, the public

already knows that these things are happening anyway. If the Liberals are really serious about fixing it, then they should be doing more and that is not what we are seeing here.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Sherbrooke, Taxation; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Health; the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope, Ethics.

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many years ago during the 2006 election, one of the most important issues of the day was accountability and transparency. The Liberal government at the time had been implicated in the most severe case of political corruption in modern Canadian history. People may remember this as the sponsorship scandal. I know I remember.

For years, Liberals linked advertising firms with government contracts, kept high-profile Liberal organizers on the payroll, and generously financed the Liberal Party of Canada, all in return for little or no work, as was later found in the investigation. This operation can be best characterized as a machine, which infected and controlled agencies across the government. The purpose of this machine was to place the resources of the government at the disposal of the Liberal Party of Canada.

After years of Liberal corruption and independent investigations, Canadians had enough. In 2006, they elected a Conservative government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper to get to the bottom of things and root out the corruption. We introduced the Federal Accountability Act, an act that dismantled the machine built to abuse taxpayer funds and power for the benefit of the Liberal Party. It also helped ensure that future governments, including a Conservative government, would never again abuse the apparatus of government for the benefit of their political party.

This accountability act created measures to protect Canada from political corruption. We created the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying, and others to ensure all future governments were held to account. I find it quite rich to listen to the speeches of my Liberal colleagues who claim they respect the officers of Parliament and Conservatives do not, when it was in fact our previous Conservative government that created these officers of Parliament to clean up the Liberal mess.

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Not only did Conservatives implement accountability by creating these new officers, we created stiff new political financing rules that limited political donations to individuals, banned corporate and union donations, and capped those donations at just over \$1,000. In fact, if Conservatives had not implemented these tough new rules, the Liberal Party would still be holding cash for access fundraisers for thousands of dollars, and Canadians would not even have the right to know about it.

This brings me to the fundamental point of this debate. On one hand we have the Conservatives' record of holding government to account, even when it is not in the best interest of our own party, and on the other hand we have the Liberals, with Bill C-50, always trying to find ways to avoid playing by the rule and spirit of the law. In fact, this entire bill would be completely unnecessary if Liberals started acting in the way Canadians expect of their representatives.

No sooner had the Liberal Party regained its former place of power than it set about reconstructing that infamous machine. The machine used to leverage taxpayer funds and power for the benefit of the Liberal Party at the expense of the Canadian people. Ministers began holding fundraisers, a perfectly acceptable and necessary activity for politicians. However, these were no ordinary fundraisers, held in church basements or Legion halls across the land. No, these were exclusive fundraisers for the ultra-wealthy to pay the Liberal Party for exclusive access to decision-makers.

Did these ministers break the law? No, but they showed their true colours. They showed that once given power, they will always leverage every angle for the benefit of their own party at the expense of the interests of Canadians. That is exactly why people elected Conservatives in 2006. Conservatives see the opportunity to abuse power and make laws to prevent that abuse. The Liberals, on the other hand, see an opportunity to abuse the spirit of the law, and rather than take real action to eliminate that abuse, they will go to any lengths to justify it. That is simply not acceptable and Canadians deserve better.

Bill C-50 is a joke. It is a public relations stunt designed to fool the Canadian people into believing that the Liberal Party has changed. Conservatives know better and Canadians are not fooled.

• (1635)

Let us take into account what this bill intends to implement. All fundraisers with tickets of \$200 or over must be advertised prominently on the party's website, together with a list of those in attendance and how much they are required to pay. This provision is simply unenforceable and goes to the heart of my argument for why this legislation is a public relations exercise designed to make it appear that the Liberals are doing something about cash for access, while giving them a free hand to continue with these tainted fundraisers.

Take, for example, the fact that any political party could host an exclusive fundraiser, a fundraiser for which no funds may be required for people to attend, but one where the expectation and obligation to donate may be very strong. For instance, an exclusive invitation to a group of wealthy business people or lawyers doing work with the Government of Canada would not require the Liberals to disclose the details of the event, including the participants or how much they are required to pay as long as it is less than \$200, but at

the event it could be easily made known that the Liberal Party would appreciate those in attendance supporting the party through financial donations: wink, wink; nudge, nudge.

The sad fact is that neither the Federal Accountability Act nor Bill C-50 can prevent parties from engaging in this kind of behaviour. No amount of laws, short of having a member of the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner at every political fundraiser, can prevent these activities. The best solution for preventing future abuses of political power for financial gain is for politicians to take a stand and refuse to tolerate cash for access. The public has placed its trust in us, and in turn, expect nothing but the highest standards of personal and professional accountability and for us to make decisions that are in the best interests of the people. I believe Canadians deserve better and I know, as members of Parliament, we can do better.

In fact, there was a time not so long ago that the Prime Minister promised Canadians better. He stated in his "Open and Accountable Government" document, "Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must avoid conflict of interest, the appearance of conflict of interest and situations that have the potential to involve conflicts of interest." It further stated, "Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government."

This is the standard that Canadians want from their representatives, and I am ashamed that the Prime Minister has paid lip service to this and broken yet another promise to Canadians. No longer do we have a government that places priority on ethics when it comes to political financing. We have a government that places priority on the illusion of ethics, and that is exactly what Bill C-50 intends to create: the illusion that the Liberal Party of Canada has changed in any way from the days of bagmen soliciting funds from those in business with government.

It is time to stop the illusion and give Canadians what they really deserve: accountable government.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague started by harkening back to 2006. I too can remember 2006. In 2006, we had just signed the Kelowna accord, which would have led to a much better relationship with indigenous Canadians across this country. In 2006, we still had the Kyoto accord, which would have led to greater environmental standards in this country and tackling climate change around the world. In 2006, we had just signed early learning and child care agreements with the provinces. In 2006, we had a government that was focused on economic growth in this country.

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Finally, we have that again after 10 dark years under the Conservative government. In addition to having all those things and a government that is focused on the economy, we have a government that is focused on fundraising in transparent and methodical ways that allow communities to understand the process that political parties undergo to receive funds in order to fight campaigns.

It is absolutely ridiculous to me to listen to the Conservatives talk about transparency and not support this bill. Why will they not support it?

• (1640)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, it is eminently clear to me that the Liberal Party would like to do anything else than talk about its ethical violations or its cash for access fundraisers. My party does not dangle out its members and say, “For \$1,500, you can access these top decision-makers.” That is not what the Conservative Party stands for, not now, not in 2006, and not ever.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask a question of my colleague who has not been in the House for a long time. I would like to know what he thinks the government's real intentions are on this issue.

The Liberals decided to make a very small change to the system in order to make it more transparent because the political financing system consists of organizing cash for access events. However, the government decided to continue to give people access to government members in exchange for substantial donations to the Liberal Party.

Was it impossible for the government to even consider completely doing away with this system of political financing because it is working so well for senior members of the Liberal Party and bringing in so much money for the party?

[English]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I thank the only member of the House who is younger than I am for that question, and I am proud to serve with him.

It is very clear that Liberals are desperate to hold these cash for access fundraisers, especially considering that the Conservative Party of Canada, yet again, destroyed them in fundraising this year and we are not even the governing party. We do not need to dangle out our ministers and sell cash for access; we have Canadians who believe in this party and this party's principles. We do not need to engage in this sort of cash for access: pay me something and we will give something. We do not need to engage in that sort of activity.

Bill C-50 is a public relations exercise. The government was caught with these cash for access fundraisers, but it cannot get off of this, so it needs to have the bill to make it appear like it is doing something about it. Canadians are not fooled.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's comments, although I do not want to hear more about his referral to age.

Could my hon. colleague comment on what is going on currently whereby the Prime Minister has breached and broken four parts of the Conflict of Interest Act, said sorry, but refused to make right the wrong that he has done?

When we think about ethics and honourable behaviour in this place, could my hon. colleague talk about how the Prime Minister is disrespecting Canada and Canadian taxpayer dollars by what he has done?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, it goes to show that some things do not change. We have a party in government that will use all apparatuses of government, whether it be personal jets or meal allowances, or the power of ministers to fundraise and cover costs for personal pleasure. Canadians expect better of their government, and they expect better of their Prime Minister. There was over \$200,000 spent on security and jet costs, which is perfectly understandable, but we had \$32,000 on a government jet and over \$1,700 on booze and meals. The Prime Minister needs to pay this money back. It was an illegal vacation. He needs to pay the money back.

• (1645)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to rise and speak and contribute to debate in this place on behalf of the people of Portage—Lisgar.

It seems that too often these days I feel I am standing, whether in question period or during debate, and we are talking about ethical lapses that the current government is showing. I find it disappointing. I think that Canadians are disappointed. However, it seems that more frequently we are talking about some of these conflicts of interest and ethical lapses. Sadly, with Bill C-50, there is no exception to this pattern.

We hear the Liberals portraying themselves as being cloaked in virtue as they discuss the bill on political financing. What Liberals and especially the Prime Minister are very good at is talking a good game. Saying all the right things is the Prime Minister's forte. Doing the right thing, not so much. The Prime Minister, on so many issues around ethics, says one thing with his words and a completely different thing with his actions. Bill C-50 is no different, and the backstory to the proposed legislation is even more telling.

The House will recall how the Liberals were creating for themselves a big ethical crater, because literally the moment they got into government, they began setting up and holding their cash for access fundraisers. Members will remember the Minister of Justice being the guest of honour at a fundraiser held at a Bay Street law firm in Toronto, which was targeting members of the legal community, the very people she was making decisions for and about, including appointing to the bench. She was selling access to herself to these individuals. It was absolutely shocking. Members may also remember the parliamentary secretary, the MP who was the Liberal point man on legalizing pot, as the main attraction who was then lobbied by marijuana advocates and investors at a fundraiser.

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Members will remember the Prime Minister himself travelling the land and appearing at more \$1,500 fundraisers than any of us can count. These were not just one-offs; there was not just one fundraiser that he went to. The Prime Minister, as we all know, has gone to more fundraisers, and \$1,500-a-head fundraisers, than any of us can count. Of course, there was the ultimate cash for access trade-off, where the Prime Minister and his wife called and asked the Aga Khan if they could use his private island for free while, at the same time, he was asking them for public money. Wow, a free island holiday for access to the Prime Minister, and a personal benefit to the Prime Minister. However, I will get to that one a little later.

The Prime Minister has done more cash for access events than any of us care to count, but we all remember the one that came to light where the Prime Minister sold access to himself when he met a wealthy tycoon who was the principal investor in a bank that was seeking federal approval to begin operations. That was a bad idea. He was at another one of these events when the Prime Minister met a Chinese billionaire who also was asking for some government favours. Lo and behold, just weeks later, he made a quarter of a million dollar donation for a statue of the Prime Minister's father, and a donation to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. It is "You give me this. I'll give you that. You give me cash. I'll give you access. You give me cash. You have my ear."

On another occasion, a Quebec businessman in the vaping industry bought a ticket to speak to the Prime Minister about Bill S-5. In fact, the gentleman told *Global News*, "I saw an open door and I walked through it – and I'll walk through every open door I see.... I took \$250 out of my own pocket to accomplish what I needed to accomplish..". He got access to the Prime Minister.

What is the problem with Bill C-50? In a nutshell, it would formalize and try to legitimize these cash for access fundraisers. As I said, it attempts to confer a veneer of legitimacy upon them. What Bill C-50 would not do is make these fundraisers legally ethical. They are unethical. Changing the rules to allow deep-pocket individuals to meet the Prime Minister to bend his ear on government business is still wrong.

• (1650)

If the Prime Minister would like to shut down his cash for access fundraisers for the Liberal Party, he would stop doing them. He could tell his cabinet the same thing, to stop doing these fundraisers. He could maybe follow his own guidelines.

Let me read from the Prime Minister's own "Open and Accountable Government" document. He told his ministers, under "Fundraising and Dealing with Lobbyists: Best Practices for Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, the following: "Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government." Wow, everything I just described moments ago is contrary to what this "Open and Accountable Government" code does.

This does not require legislation; it needs conviction and integrity. It needs men and women and a government that is authentic and genuine and does not just say the right words but does the right

thing. That is not what the Liberals and the Prime Minister seem to do.

Why could the Prime Minister not have said he would follow the rules like everyone else? Why could the Prime Minister not have just said this: "I put this out. It makes sense. I have asked my ministers to follow these guidelines. We're going to follow them." Obviously, it is because the Prime Minister thinks that rules do not apply to him. We have seen this over and over with the Prime Minister. He thinks there is one set of rules for one group of people and another set of rules for him.

That brings me to another point, and it is with regard to a provision in Bill C-50 that I want to highlight for the House. Clause 2 in the bill would, among other things, enact a new section, 384.4, of the Canada Elections Act. I am going to summarize briefly what this would do.

Section 384.4 would basically put into legislation that if a registered party received a contribution that does not comply with the act, that party would have 30 days to either return that contribution to the donor or pay it to the Receiver General of Canada. The principle behind this is that in the event of a breach of the fundraising rules, the message is clear and the law is clear that the money must be paid back. That is in the bill we are currently discussing. If a party receives money that it is not entitled to, that party cannot just apologize and then smile. It has to pay that money back. That is not a revolutionary idea. Although we have some concerns with Bill C-50, this provision makes sense.

This is not revolutionary. If people are caught taking something that does not belong to them, they give it back, pay it back; they make restitution. We teach our children that when they take something that does not belong to them, they have to make amends, and that includes saying sorry. More importantly, and maybe the toughest part of saying sorry, is actually making it right.

These are rules and lessons that we as parents, as society, and certainly as leaders in this place should be adhering to. However, we are seeing a stunningly hypocritical exception to this principle, and that is with the Prime Minister.

When the former Ethics Commissioner handed down her report which determined that the Prime Minister had violated the Conflict of Interest Act, the House will recall that what he did cost taxpayers over \$200,000. If the Prime Minister is truly sorry and wants to be transparent, if he truly wants to put action behind his words, then he needs to right the wrong he has committed. He needs to pay back the taxpayer. He also should look seriously at making the wrong right. He should make the wrong right by paying back the value of that holiday. That is one of the principles of making restitution. If somebody takes a painting that does not belong to that individual, then he or she has to give that painting back or pay back the value of that painting.

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It is one thing to talk about legislation like this, but the Liberals are still having their cash for access events. This legislation would do nothing to stop it. We have good rules in place. All we need are men and women of integrity and honour to follow those rules and then show leadership. When they have done something wrong, stop doing it and make it right. That is what we are asking the Prime Minister to do. I would think that all Liberals would agree, as would everyone in the House. We are asking the Prime Minister to not only be sorry but to make right the wrong that he has done.

I expect that the Liberals will not be asking me questions about that, but I would ask them to think about that. In their own meetings with the Prime Minister, ask him to do the right thing: make this right.

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. As of right now, the Liberal Party already practises everything in the bill.

By actually adopting this and making it law, it will only become applicable, the openness and transparency, to two more individuals in the House. They are the leader of the Conservative Party and the leader of the NDP. Why would the member be against having that openness and transparency for her leader and the leader of the NDP, unless they have something to hide?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, that is my exact point. We identified the problem a year and a half ago, that there were cash for access events going on that were wrong. Instead of Liberals of correcting it, they said, “Gee, what can we do? Oh, I know, let’s advertise and invite the media. Let’s put that into legislation, and then we will support it.” That is absolutely ridiculous.

When we were in government, and when we are in government again, we did not do cash for access events. In fact, we did the opposite. I remember what our former prime minister, Stephen Harper, told his ministers. He said that we were to stay away from lobbyists, the people in the our portfolios, and not go to fundraisers. Instead, the Liberals did fundraisers. Now they want to make a law that validates what they do.

That is not a good question.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on that point.

I look back at the summer. As people are aware, it was a horrific wildfire season in B.C.. Communities were devastated. The Prime Minister went up there, did a photo op, and, from my understanding, then went down to Vancouver and did a cash for access fundraiser.

I want to contrast that with our leader. He came up, did a community event, and did a fundraiser for the food bank to help people who were wildfire victims. That shows the difference between those two men and their sense of ethics. For one, it is cash for access for his party. For the other, it is to try to make things a little better for the people who were so devastated by the wildfire.

Could my colleague talk a little more about how this is a simple fact of ethics and doing the right thing?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we know about our leader, the leader of the Conservative Party, is that he really understands the struggles that everyday Canadians go through.

Our leader was raised in a very humble, average Canadian family. There is no family fortune. There is no millionaire’s stockpile of money somewhere for him. One of the things this has done for him is that he understands what it means for Canadians to have to pay the mortgage, make a car payment, and maybe save some money for their kids. When he is thinking about what he can do to help Canadians, he wants to help with those kinds of things, whether it is putting more money in their pockets or helping with worthy fundraisers, like for the victims of the forest fires.

That is one of the challenges with the current Prime Minister. He really is not like a lot of average Canadians. He was born into a lot, and that is not a bad thing, but he does not seem to understand what the average Canadian goes through. It would appear that he feels very entitled to all of this money and all of this cash for access. Recently, he quite blatantly referred to himself as “The Prime Minister”. He likes to refer to himself in the third person.

He needs to realize that even though he is the Prime Minister, Canadians are concerned about his ethics and his lack of understanding. We saw his response to veterans recently. He needs to get back in touch with Canadians. I am so grateful our leader is doing that, because that is where he comes from.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my parents were both teachers. I certainly paid my way through law school and eight years of education.

I held a fundraiser, and the parliamentary secretary to the minister of justice at the time came. We made an agreement that we would not talk about cannabis. It was of interest to both of us and it was of interest to some in the audience, but we were not going to talk about it.

The ticket price was \$150. It was \$20 for monthly donors. Of the list of 80 people who came, I knew 78 people. The two people who I did not know bought tickets under a different name. When we found out who they were, we gave their money back.

Does the hon. member think that is inappropriate?

• (1700)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, that is very responsible. If the Prime Minister and the Liberals would govern themselves to that kind of detail, that would show a real desire to not have a type of cash for access.

I recall when we would do the same thing when we were in government. If we did fundraisers, we wanted to ensure the stakeholders, those who were part of our departments, were not part of those. That shows responsibility. Certainly, we would understand if some fell through the cracks. However, I think all of us would want to endeavour to do that.

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The examples I cited, and what we have seen, is the exact opposite of that. Here is a simple solution. The Prime Minister should not do those massive fundraisers and the ministers in turn should not do fundraisers with their stakeholders. That would, in a practical way, go a long way to cleaning this up. It is simple and we all should be able to do that.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am enjoying the minutia of this debate. Actually, I have a quick solution for this whole problem. Why do we not just lower the upper limit for donations? It is \$1,550. Why do we not just drop it to \$200? Then we would not have this debate at all. Neither of those sides are really interested in that.

This year, I think I had 1,200 donors through my fundraising efforts through my EDA. My average donation was \$50. Most average Canadians are not able to give \$1,550 per year to any kind of donation. They will give what they can to support their parties. However, we will not hear those kinds of arguments from either side of the House. For example, in Quebec, the limit is \$100. We could end this whole debate if the Liberals would change their bill and lower the limit to be much lower than \$1,550. We will not hear that. We will just hear a back and forth about who is more corrupt.

Also, this is a very minor bill. The big changes to electoral finance were really led by the province of Quebec. It brought it in the first limits on spending, then eventually increased transparency until we had some of the best finance laws in the world. Therefore, this is a minor bill in a Parliament of minor bills.

When we read books about the histories of parliaments, we will read about the Parliament that brought in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms or the one where women were allowed to vote. The kinds of bills we are debating in this Parliament are nothing of that scope. I think any Canadian watching this today would say that this is a minor tweak to existing laws, and I would agree. That is what is going on here. This is what parliamentary time is being spent on. There are no grand ideas coming out of this Parliament, and I find that sad.

If students of democracy looked through the history of democracy, they would see these moments where things were done because within the House of Commons members had the imagination on how to improve the way decisions were made and how to govern themselves.

There is need for a change. Two great academics out of Harvard have now shown how democracy is declining around the world. What is most scary is that young people now are losing faith in their democratic processes. It is not only that they are not voting anymore, some would actually prefer authoritarian processes over democratic ones. This is a widespread problem. We know this from the World Values Survey that was recently released. It is quite concerning. However, we cannot get any data on Canada because we do not participate in that survey.

We can be bold about how great our democracy is, but we do not even measure it. We do not even pay attention to what is happening here because we do not participate in international surveys. This is a big problem.

Pardon me for yawning through these debates, but they really will not do anything at all to improve our democratic problems.

One of the problems we have, which I have talked a lot about, is under-representation in the House of Commons. About 28% of the seats in the House are filled with women, who make up over 50% of the population. We have had lots of back and forth about how we need to encourage more women to run for office. That is assuming this is a supply problem, which is ridiculous. It is ridiculous to think there are so few women in the House of Commons because of lack of supply.

We have anywhere between 50,000 or 100,000 each in our political parties. Are we saying that out of those 100,000 members, we cannot find 338 women, or even half of that, 170 women, to run for each party? That is ridiculous. The problem is demand. Parties block women from becoming candidates. Time and again this is what academic studies, published in referee journals, show.

I put forward a private member's bill that would help remedy that by using electoral finance law, something that could have been put into this bill but was not. Instead, after the next election what we will have is a Parliament that will look almost exactly the same as this one with respect to gender representation. Because we have taken no action in this Parliament, I bet we do not get anywhere near the 50% threshold. We will probably have around 30% of the seats in the House filled with women. How do I know that? Because both the major parties have decided to protect their incumbents. That basically means we have a gender freeze in the House, unless there is a massive turnover of seats, where one party, say our party, runs 50% women candidates and we take over all the seats in the House of Commons.

• (1705)

This means that if we stay the same, in terms of the percentage of seats and how they are distributed, we would not add any more women in here. It means that, when you come back next time and sit in that chair, Mr. Speaker—and I think you do a very good job—you will look out over the House and see the same gender distribution, because we failed to take action in the House. That is a terrible thing. With all the rhetoric we hear from the other side about a feminist prime minister and “because it's 2015”, there has been no action on that side, and there have been opportunities to take action, which have been dismissed and sneered at.

That is the side of the House that has to live with the lack of change. The Liberals are the ones who said they would do something, promised it, and did not do it. It is the same with proportional representation. The Prime Minister said 1,800 times that the last election would be the last one with the first past the post system. That change has gone by the wayside as well.

When all the dust clears from the 2019 election and we see what the House looks like in 2020, it is going to look exactly the same. The parties might switch around a little, but in terms of representation, it is going to be exactly the same. Also, we will not have proportional representation.

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Let us go to another problem we are having, and that is with the nomination of candidates. We are having all kinds of problems with candidates not being screened correctly or slipping through the cracks in parties when their integrity is in question. We see it in Ontario. We see it all over the place in political parties. These parties are more concerned about electoral success than they often are about the integrity of their candidates. This problem is found all over the world.

The U.S. fixed this problem in the 1920s after the Tammany Hall disaster. There was massive corruption within that institution. What did it do? It let the state do its party nomination process. It had primaries. Why do we never consider that in the House? We have these little details of bills that really do not mean anything to Canadians, but what we could do is clean up our system and have primaries, not party-run primaries, but state-run primaries. Elections Canada would oversee how parties select their candidates. It would make sure that the processes are fair, and that the voting is fair and beyond reproach. There would not be stacked meetings. The nomination processes would be fair. More than that, the citizens could trust in them.

I have given members three ideas of things we could work on. We could work on bills, where we work on gender parity in the House. I have given members the idea of proportional representation, which the NDP has always fought for, and that side has promised but never delivered. I have also given an idea about how we could fix our nomination process by having primaries. This is all about taking democracy where it needs to go. This is not defending a system that has perhaps served us okay in the past and stacked up well against other systems.

As an example, when the Prime Minister took office in 2015, we were 48th in the world in terms of the proportion of women in our House. Since that time, we have dropped to 65th place, which means that there are 64 countries in the world that have more women in their legislatures than we have here in this place. That is the problem with “because it’s 2015”. How can the Prime Minister be the world’s most feminist prime minister, when we have dropped from 48th to 65th place in terms of the percentage of women, and we are doing nothing about it? I applaud the gender-balanced cabinet. It is a great idea, but it is only a symbol. It is not locked into our institutions. The next prime minister could come in and have no women in the cabinet.

We need to change our laws and our rules to ensure that we set a world example, that we set the tone and timbre for the world to follow, and not lag behind as we are.

I have listened to the minutiae of the debate, and I have heard the rhetoric, but this is a very minor bill, when we have major problems we should be fixing.

• (1710)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not get a sense, through the member’s intervention, of whether he is actually supportive of the steps that would be taken in the bill to make political fundraising more transparent and to make party leaders, cabinet ministers, and all federally elected representatives more accountable in the way they engage party members and people within their communities to add a

level of transparency and openness to the political fundraising system. I would like to know whether he supports the pieces in the bill that would improve transparency, as well as the process we are undertaking.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I support the bill, but I will not go home and brag about it, because it is so minor. If I am asked if I support the Liberals’ bill, I will say yes, but no one will even notice it. It is going to be a very small change to our system. The Liberals have challenged me to support their bill and I would challenge the member across the aisle to come up with something more bold that we could debate in a way that matters. Members can say that some members took money for their fundraising and other members took money for their fundraiser, but we are only talking \$1,500. It is not a huge deal.

I would challenge Liberals to do better, but I will support their bill.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is just rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It really does not have a whole lot to do with changing our democratic institutions, the way we elect members and have a functioning modern democracy.

There is a massive public subsidy of the \$1,500, in that the first \$400 is 75% of taxpayer money and then there is a subsequent decrease. I introduced a bill that provided the same thing for charitable organizations, which are tied to a much smaller amount. One would think there would be the highest degree of accountability, openness, transparency, and expectations for the result that taxpayers get when the mere fact is that for every \$1 under \$400, they get 75% back. It becomes a massive public subsidization for the parties in our current system.

Could the hon. member comment about the fact that the public is so invested in massive subsidization?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, most countries in the world move in this direction. They realize that if they allow unions, large businesses, or wealthy individuals to control the system, the laws and budgets favour those folks. I would be much more in favour of, for example, a much lower contribution limit at the same level of taxation limits, but also bring back the per-vote subsidy, which would, of course, eliminates a lot of this problem. It is practised in most places. I do not know why we are discovering it for the first time again and again here. We owe more to taxpayers than this, and we owe them better bills than this.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has definitely been a champion for getting more women in this place, and commend him for his work on that. This is the first time in Canadian history that we have a gender-balanced cabinet, which is a major step forward. There are so many more things we could be doing to improve the balance of women and men in this room, and I look forward to working with him on that.

Government Orders

I want to seek a little clarification on one comment he made earlier in his speech, and that was about the limits of campaign contributions. Not that long ago, there was no limit. In recent memory, we have made some significant changes and have seen fairly restrictive limits starting to come in. I thought I heard him talking about having a limit in the area of \$200. Could he expand on that? Is that his personal position or is that the position of the NDP? I am curious if he can build upon that.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Mr. Speaker, this chamber is where we debate, so I am throwing ideas out for debate. I am bringing forward the fact that there are lower limits in other places. I have been listening to the debate all day. I have heard this going back and forth, and it seems to be stuck. My thought is that lowering limits is one possible way to explore that. It could be talked about in a committee. Why not have witnesses come in from other jurisdictions that have these lower limits?

In the last three years of fundraising, I have raised \$500,000. Most years I had between \$1,000 and \$1,200. The average donation in 2015 was \$65. It dropped to \$35 in 2016. Now it is back up to \$50. The vast majority of donations are around that level. I have a few around \$1,500, but they are usually people like my mom.

What we are talking about here is something different. When there are \$1,500-a-plate dinners, it is a way for the money to come in. If it were dropped to \$200 or something, that would not be the case at all. I would argue that it should at least be studied at a committee. I do not think my party would object, but it is not official policy.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and join the debate today. I have 10 minutes to talk about the government's ethical challenges, which is far too little time for a topic like this, but I will do my best.

We are talking about the issue of political fundraising. Of course, this is a sensitive subject for the Liberals after the fourth quarter of 2017 results. It is surprising that they want to have a discussion about political fundraising, because the Conservative Party has done so much better despite being in opposition than the Liberal Party has in fundraising.

The Conservative Party benefits from fundraising that relies on smaller, individual donors, and people who believe in what our party stands for. Obviously, we are in opposition, so there is no conceivable benefit that they could get in terms of a quid pro quo type of thing. People donate to our party and, generally, people should be donating to political parties because they believe in what those parties stand for and want to express their support for the ideas that those parties represent. However, Liberal ideas are not so popular right now. Therefore, the government has had to rely on other ways of fundraising, and here we come to their dubious cash for access fundraising program.

What appears to have happened, and there has been a great deal of criticism about this, is that we have had ministers and the Prime Minister meeting with people, in the context of fundraising, who have done business or are looking to do business or to get some kind of benefit from the government at these very high-dollar fundraising events. In some cases, the maximum is \$1,500. People pay this money presumably in the hope of being able to talk to a minister or

to the Prime Minister about the specific issues that they are dealing with the government on.

This is very different from what was done under the previous government. I know the guidelines, because I was a candidate at that time. We had very strict guidelines in terms of how and to whom we could advertise any fundraising event. We could not even highlight the area that a minister was working. We had to simply advertise him as an MP. They were events that were not dealing at all with the specific subject matter of their ministry. Yes, we had fundraising events where ministers spoke, but they were open, low-dollar events, and provided opportunities for anyone to come. Specifically, they were not about trying to bring in people that were potential clients or people who had some kind of special economic relationship with the government.

As I recall, there was one exception, and it is the exception that proves the rule. There was one minister who made a mistake. Actually, it was not even the minister but somebody else who organized an event for, I believe, the heritage minister. As soon as the mistake was identified, an apology was given and the money was reimbursed. This was the only case, and it was immediately rectified. It was something the Conservatives recognized should not happen.

On the other hand, we have the current government that thinks this practice is acceptable. The Liberals think it is acceptable for, hypothetically, the justice minister to have a \$1,500-a-person event where the minister is speaking about how to get a judicial appointment. "Come and pay \$1,500 and hear the Minister of Justice speak about how to get a judicial appointment" or "Come to this \$1,500 event with the heritage minister where we will talk about how to access art grants," and it is only advertised to people who are in the artistic community. There are myriad other possible examples. The Minister of National Defence could speak to those involved in making defence equipment, and one has to pay \$1,500. These are hypothetical examples, but the government does not see anything wrong with the idea of explicitly fundraising to people who are involved in doing business and want to pay for that preferential access.

Very clearly, it is legitimate for government to be meeting with industry, to be sharing information with key stakeholders, but it needs to do that outside of the context of party fundraisers. These things have to be separate. This is the position that we have taken. It is what the Conservatives did when we were in government. As I have mentioned, we were able to have a very strong fundraising program, because we asked people to donate not because they were getting something in return, but because they believed in the ideas that we were standing for. However, the Liberal Party has a different approach to how they have done this, and I think we have seen time and time again that they have a lack of concern for conflict of interest.

Government Orders

● (1720)

Whenever issues of conflict of interest are raised, they will say, “Do you not trust the Ethics Commissioner? Let us leave it for the Ethics Commissioner.” Then when the Ethics Commissioner ruled that the Prime Minister broke the law, when the Ethics Commissioner ruled that the finance minister had to pay a \$200 fine because of his failure in terms of his disclosure, when those things happen, they say, “Let us just move on, and by the way, trust the Ethics Commissioner.”

However, voters of this country are going to hold the Prime Minister, the finance minister, and other members of the government accountable for the choices they have made in those cases where the Ethics Commissioner has shown in reports that they have behaved inappropriately.

The government, in response to its problems with ethics, came forward with Bill C-50, the political fundraising bill. This is an insubstantial public relations exercise, and I might add, not a very effective public relations exercise. Conservatives and New Democrats have spent all day speaking about and highlighting the government's ethical problems. Next time the Liberals try to devise a public relations exercise to cover their lack of ethics, maybe they should go back to the drawing board.

Nonetheless, this is a public relations exercise, a very insubstantial bill that aims to deal with cash for access fundraisers, but it does not in any way prevent the government from continuing with the practice it has been doing. Instead, it requires some greater degree of financial disclosure in the context of these things, but it still allows them to happen. It still allows for situations where the Prime Minister or ministers can charge \$1,500 to people that are directly dealing with the government, with their department, and then discuss issues related to the business of government in the context of fundraisers. There is nothing in this law that in any way changes that. It just requires some marginally greater degree of the release of information.

The government has been saying that there has been criticism of its practices, so it will continue with those practices but it will pass a law that does not in any way materially change those practices and hope people will think that something has changed. I have a suggestion for the Liberals. Rather than put forward this public relations bill that does not substantively change anything, why not focus on changing their behaviour to bring it in line with the standards that Canadians would expect when it comes to conflict of interest? That is the problem. The problem is not the law. The problem is the actions of the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet.

If the government members are going to try to respond to their own ethical failures with new legislation, frankly, they can do a lot better. Here is a proposal that I would have for a change in the law to deal with ethics. Why do they not introduce meaningful sanctions for people who break the law? That is the biggest question I get from Canadians with respect to the Prime Minister's behaviour. They say if they drive too fast, if they park illegally, they have to pay a fine. However, the Prime Minister cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in security costs that should not have been incurred, as a

result of an illegal vacation that the Ethics Commissioner found to be illegal, yet there are no sanctions.

Most of my constituents think that if we are going to change the law with respect to the government's ethics in response to these issues, let us have a law that introduces meaningful sanctions for those who break the law, especially for the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers. For his troubles, the finance minister was fined \$200 which, not to delve too deeply into his personal finances, does not seem like a lot of money. It does not seem like it is going to have a big deterrent effect in terms of future behaviour. Maybe that is something that the government should consider in future legislation.

Certainly with respect to the problems around the fundraising, the government's cash for access program, the bill absolutely changes nothing. It does not address the fundamental problems and the government has clearly indicated that it does not think there is a problem, that it will persist with the kind of behaviour it has undertaken until now. This is completely different from what we saw under the previous government and it begs the question, why does the government not think that people who are not paying for access would be willing to donate? Why do people think it is necessary to engage in these shady types of practices?

● (1725)

We had one suggestion at least from an NDP member musing about the possibility of a return to the per-vote subsidy. I want to say that, on this side of the House, we certainly do not support having taxpayers subsidize political parties.

Let us be very clear. It was the Conservatives who lowered the contribution limit substantially and eliminated corporate and union contributions. We did that as part of the Federal Accountability Act, one of the first pieces of legislation that was brought forward by Stephen Harper. Also, we eliminated the per-vote subsidy. Our democracy is doing fine. We are well-served by the present system and there is no need to return to taxpayers giving money to political parties.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's speech. “Myriad”, it was a good use of that word.

The member does not agree with me on the per-vote subsidy. However, I am wondering if he could perhaps comment on lowering the limit of contributions from \$1,550 to \$500. Does he think that would solve the problem and would he support that?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I do not personally see an immediate need for that. The issue here is around conflict of interest. Frankly, we will always see cases, regardless of what the contribution limit is, where people try to get around these things. I know that when limits were first set on contributions we had a case involving a Liberal leadership candidate where two members of the same family, as well as their very young children, all happened to give the maximum. Obviously, it is important to make sure that the person giving is actually the person giving and that there is not an effort to circumvent this.

Government Orders

Whatever rules we put in place, we always need to be sensitive to the fact that rules are not enough. It is a question of character. It is a question of the willingness of cabinet ministers, the Prime Minister, and others to abide by the principles behind the conflict of interest laws. That has been the problem in this case.

It is an interesting proposal from the member. However, I do not think changing exactly what that contribution limit is would be a panacea, rather we need to see better behaviour from those who are supposed to be leading this country.

• (1730)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am following up on the question from my hon. colleague from Burnaby South to my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. The claim that he has just made that his party does not support taxpayer money going to political parties flies in the face of the reality that the taxpayers of this country, like it or not, and I think many of them would not like it, have to pay for the horrible attack ads that are on our televisions.

The per-vote subsidy allowed a voter to say, “I’d like a token amount, less than \$2 a year, to go to this party that I am voting for. They’re the party of my choice.” However, with respect to the generous taxpayer support, if they donate \$400 to a political party, it costs them \$100. I would love my church to get that kind of rebate on the donations made for charitable purposes. However, even more amazing is the amount spent in campaign, so the more that is spent on terrible attack ads on our television sets, the more money that party gets back. Specifically, Stephen Harper changed the rules so that by having a longer writ period, Conservatives got even more money back.

I know this is a place where everybody lives in glass houses. However, let us not forget that the Conservative Party has done a lot of fundraising that was somewhat sketchy in the past. The Conservative Party has been taking the laws and twisting them to get more money back from taxpayers, not less.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, in this case, I think my house is made of bricks.

The member spoke about other mechanisms by which political parties get money. Let us be very clear, with the removal of the direct subsidy to political parties, the mechanisms that exist are, first, when a contribution is made to political parties, there is a deduction, and second, there is also a rebate for money spent during the writ period.

If memory serves, there was actually a Conservative private member’s bill in this Parliament that sought to equalize the deductions for charities with political parties. I think the member has a good point that there is some unfairness in the process.

An hon. member: No, that was my bill. It was an NDP bill.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: An NDP member may have had this in a previous Parliament, but my memory suggests that it was this Parliament. The member for Provencher had a private member’s bill in this Parliament. If the member for Windsor West would like to endorse this Conservative idea, then that is great.

In terms of what the member said about attack ads, I just want to be clear that of course political parties do run attack ads. I do not

know if the Green Party ever has, but there are also not-for-profit organizations that run ads critical of political parties. Not-for-profits, as well as political parties, engage in different kinds of political speech.

I do not think we should get into micromanaging deductions that different organizations get just because of the level of criticism that they levy. However, a mechanism that has a deduction for contributing to a not-for-profit organization, a charity, or a political party is very different than a direct taxpayer subsidy. A deduction simply says that if I am giving money to an organization, I should get some of that back because it is a not-for-profit. That is different from a direct subsidy to that organization.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that when the topic of political financing reform comes up, many Canadians’ eyes glaze over. It is not the most exciting subject in front of this Parliament, and yet we have heard about 18 or 19 speakers on this topic pointing out both the strengths and the weaknesses of the bill.

I wish the House rules permitted the same level of debate on some of the very important private members’ bills that come before the House. Perhaps we could work together to see that happen in the future.

Bill C-50 is important. We only have to look south of the border to see what happens when there are no controls over who donates to elected representatives or how much they can donate.

During the recent U.S. debate over net neutrality, another exciting subject, companies and groups on both sides of the issue lobbied with their wallets. According to OpenSecrets.org of the 535 members of Congress, 495 received campaign contributions from groups who lobbied the Federal Communications Commission on net neutrality. The telecoms, opposed to net neutrality, donated millions and the Republicans fell in line. The result will be a more limited, more expensive Internet experience for Americans. Thankfully, here in Canada we have largely constrained such obvious vote buying, but that has not always been the case.

In advance of the 1872 election, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald and his colleagues sought out campaign contributions from a Montreal shipping magnate named Hugh Allan. Allan donated what would have been a fortune back in 1872, \$350,000, to Macdonald’s Conservative government and he was rewarded for that donation. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* says:

After the election, a railway syndicate organized by Allan was rewarded with the lucrative contract to build the Canadian Pacific Railway — the trans-continental railroad promised to British Columbia when it joined Confederation.

More recently, former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was implicated in a scandal that became known as the Airbus affair.

Government Orders

My own province of British Columbia used to be the case study for what happens when there are insufficient campaign financing laws. In fact, a year ago *The New York Times* called British Columbia the “wild west” of Canadian political cash, citing the former provincial Liberal government for its many conflicts of interest and describing the “unabashedly cozy relationship between private interests and government officials in the province”. It cited B.C. for having no limits on political donations, and repeated criticisms that under the Christy Clark regime, the provincial government “has been transformed into a lucrative business, dominated by special interests that trade donations for political favours, undermining Canada’s reputation for functional, consensus-driven democracy.”

Thankfully, the new NDP government under Premier John Horgan immediately brought in political finance reforms, including bans on corporate and union donations and limiting individual donations to \$1,200 per year. It is good to see civil reforms brought to the wild west.

Meanwhile, with the current federal Liberal government we have seen the cash for access scandal, where lobbyists were sold exclusive access to the Prime Minister by simply buying high-priced tickets to Liberal fundraising events. During the last election, the Liberal Party made a promise to “close political financing loopholes altogether”.

As we look at Bill C-50, the legislation before us today, we see only a timid attempt in that direction. This bill would force some party fundraising events to be advertised five days in advance, and it would ensure that the names of those attending the function are published.

The new rules apply to events attended by cabinet ministers, party leaders, and some leadership candidates. The NDP offered amendments at committee to include parliamentary secretaries and senior political staff but the Liberal members voted down those amendments.

Observers should note that the Liberal government’s parliamentary secretaries are subject to the Conflict of Interest Act, but with Bill C-50, they are exempt from the transparency rules aimed at cash for access events. At the end of the day, cash for access events will still go ahead; we will just know a little more about them.

● (1735)

Is the government closing political financing loopholes and meeting its campaign promise? Not at all. What should this bill contain? A 2016 *Globe and Mail* editorial titled, “Money and politics: How to end the corruption and conflict of interest” said:

Individual donation limits should be low – possibly as low as \$100. These rules should apply at all times, including election years and during party leadership campaigns.

While I am not sure about the amount, lowering the limit would absolutely take big money out of the political picture. No longer could wealthier Canadians expect to meet with cabinet ministers or the Prime Minister because only they could afford the steep price tag.

On another issue, a 2017 Senate report titled, “Controlling Foreign Influence in Canadian Elections” found that current law “does not sufficiently protect Canadian elections from being influenced by foreign entities, whether through direct interference or by providing

funding to third parties.” Its recommendations, well worth the consideration of this chamber, include a “provision that more clearly states that any attempt made by foreign entities to induce Canadian electors to vote in a particular way is prohibited”, removal of the “six month limitation on the requirement to report contributions made to third parties for the purposes of election advertising”, and “require that Elections Canada perform random audits of third parties’ election advertising expenses and any contributions they have received”. These are provisions I would like to see examined further.

Currently in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, I am often asked about issues that constituents have learned about through media websites. Unfortunately, in many cases, these news websites turn out to be politically prejudiced, are often racist, and in some cases are heavily influenced by foreign elements. They mislead, scaremonger, and prevent fact-based political discourse.

Finally, I would like to point to Bill C-364, introduced by the member for Terrebonne. His bill would sharply restrict individual donations while bringing back a formula for public subsidies to campaigns. While Bill C-364 has not yet had a rigorous review by this House, it is certainly raising some excellent issues that I would like to have seen considered within Bill C-50.

Too often money equals power, but in this place, money should have no influence. While I will be supporting this bill as at least a first baby step in the right direction, I am disappointed that the Liberal government has missed this opportunity to truly strengthen Canada’s political financing laws to truly prevent influence peddling and cash for access.

● (1740)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed and agree with my colleague’s speech, as I often do.

I was wondering if he wanted to elaborate more on why the Liberals and Conservatives seem to be so scared of even contemplating lowering the maximum donation limit from \$1,550 to a lower limit.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, the question actually has a fairly obvious answer.

Government Orders

When political parties are looking for money, \$1,500 as a maximum donation, or \$1,550 as it currently is in Canada, sounds a lot more attractive to parties than a \$200 limit, depending on who is doing the supporting. I am quite comfortable, from an NDP perspective, and again this is not a party position, but I very much appreciate donations of \$200, and I appreciate donations of \$25. I would not be at all averse to seeing lower limits to the maximum that can be contributed.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to hear a Conservative member talk about the fact that there was no public subsidy with regard to the contributions for individuals, but we know as a matter of fact that it is done through tax deductibility, and when there is an increased campaign period, as in the last election, then more money from taxpayers is actually going back. It is interesting with regard to the threshold, which is 75% for the first under \$400, and then after that it declines to around 50%, until the maximum. It is interesting as well that for municipal campaigns in Ontario, there is no tax deductibility. There is no public subsidy with regard to getting money back from contributions.

I would ask my colleague about whether or not, say for example, if they were not going to cap it at \$200, perhaps what should be done is that maybe after the \$200 eliminate the actual subsidy from taxpayers. That could be one of the potential models, to quit making other people pay for other people's donations.

• (1745)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, I have only been a member of Parliament for two and a half years. Prior to that, I was the mayor of Cranbrook, and I can tell the member that the municipal system needs to be fixed in two ways. First of all, we need some maximums on donations to municipal elections. Currently, at least in British Columbia, there are none. If one had the money, he or she could donate \$1 million to get a candidate elected in a city of 5,000 people. Second, there are no tax donations at all from municipal elections. When people are out encouraging people to send some money their way, they really have to support them fully in order to write a cheque. I think there needs to be some changes at the municipal level.

In terms of the per-vote subsidy, again, I was not around when that was in place, but one of the aspects I like about it is that it is a bit like proportional representation but it is done through votes. If a party gets a certain number of votes, it gets a certain amount of cash back, and it is done in proportion to the number of votes the party gets. Since the Liberal government has abandoned proportional representation completely, which left many of us feeling totally betrayed, bringing back the per-vote subsidy may be one way to get a little proportional representation back into Parliament and how we do business here.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

[English]

Last Friday, my office got a call from a constituent who was unhappy about the government's lacklustre action on the TransCanada pipeline expansion. She wondered how she could get hold of the Prime Minister. She had some other things to say as well, such as

that members opposite should remember that their sunny ways just are not cutting it for many Canadians. She was not interested in paying \$1,500 to meet the Prime Minister, though.

Ralph Klein could have been describing the Liberal government's attitude when he joked, "Edmonton isn't really the end of the world —although you can see it from there." It might seem like the end of the world from Ottawa, but we in Alberta are hurting, as is Canada, with the resource industry and no pipeline to tidewater. When the energy industry is suffering needlessly, that is Canadian jobs and prosperity out the window. My constituent still wants to know who she can talk to and how she can get to the Prime Minister.

The pipeline not getting to tidewater means that in the U.S., they build a hospital a week and a school every day. It means that in Ontario, they build a car for \$30,000, but there is only one market, which takes it for \$15,000 then sells it back to us for \$30,000. It is why the U.S. can buy cheap oil at a 50% discount, haul it back to New Brunswick, and sell it to us at 100%. However, I digress just a little.

My constituent wanted to know how to get hold of the Prime Minister. We all know that it is a tall order. The leader of a G7 country cannot sit by his phone all day and take calls. However he might want to do that, he cannot. What is the answer? How does she get hold of the Prime Minister or a senior cabinet minister? The answer could be that it might take a while, but she will get a response if she writes a letter or an email. It will come in time, but that is just too long. In Canada, one must get an answer without having to shell out \$1,500.

This bill is supposed to make sure that no pay-to-play takes place in this country. That is important. Canadians expect that. Anyone who believes in the integrity of democracy should demand no less.

I have a friend named George who sees the world as black and white, not grey. He understands what right and wrong is, so he has a real problem with politicians. He is a friend of mine, and he has a problem with me. He says, "Don't you guys understand what is right and wrong?" To him, this is a black and white issue, and it is wrong. Making one's case to elected officials is not a privilege only available to those who can afford to do so.

Last year, *Maclean's* ran a story about what the Prime Minister learned from watching *The West Wing* growing up. Apparently, the show was a formative influence. Maybe he remembers season one, episode five, when President Bartlet's chief of staff invited various fringe interest groups to meet with senior officials. He called it the "big block of cheese day". The idea was that everyone has a right to appeal to their government, not just the well connected or the wealthy and not just people who own helicopters and private islands. That is an aspirational example. Maybe the Prime Minister skipped that episode.

Frankly, it is alarming that we even need a bill like this in Canada. Why does the government need legislation to remind itself to act ethically?

Government Orders

I have a friend named Karen who I have worked with for many years. She sees the world as black and white when it comes to ethics. She is a strong, ethical person. She has been involved in politics but cannot understand why we do not get why this is unethical. Can the government not tell right from wrong? It is troubling that it needs Parliament to pass legislation to remind it of such a basic standard, but it seems to think it does.

I have been troubled by some of the headlines on this bill over the last few months. A headline in *The Globe and Mail*, on May 31, 2017, said, "Liberals' fundraising bill fails to quell cash-for-access charges". A headline on *iPolitics*, on October 3, 2017, said, "Liberals' fundraising bill needs teeth, says official". A headline on the CBC, on October 17, 2017, said, "Cash for access fundraising law should be widened, says ethics commissioner". What, the Ethics Commissioner?

• (1750)

The bill, which should not be necessary in the first place, does not stop cash for access. It is an ethics bill that the Ethics Commissioner has misgivings about. An event needs to be advertised before it is held and then a report on the event has to be submitted afterward. Cash for access could continue; this legislation would not stop it. The bill gives this practice an air of legitimacy. As the member for Calgary Shepard mentioned in his speech on the bill, it is window dressing.

We need more than window dressing; we need a real commitment to ethical behaviour. The Prime Minister is the first Canadian prime minister to break a federal law while in office. He violated multiple sections of the Conflict of Interest Act, and he refuses to pay back the expenses he charged taxpayers for his illegal vacation.

The member for Red Deer—Mountain View made a good point in his speech. The member noted that when the Prime Minister was the member for Papineau, he was forced to repay money that had been inappropriately charged to his member's operational budget. Why is this situation any different? When one breaks the rules, one makes amends. That is what is expected of normal Canadians. The Prime Minister needs to show that he does not think he is above playing by the same rules as the rest of us. He needs to pay that money back.

Needless to say, Canadians expect a higher ethical standard from their prime minister. They expect the standard that the Prime Minister outlined for his cabinet in their mandate letters. Those read, "you must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law."

The key points here are that a minister's actions are expected to bear the closest public scrutiny, and they need to go above and beyond just following the law. The reasoning should be obvious: following the law is not enough when it comes to ethical behaviour. If one behaves unethically, one cannot just use the law to cover up for one's actions. Therefore, what happened? A few cash for access scandals, an illegal vacation later, and we have new laws being drafted to make up for these ethical lapses.

I have a friend named Sue. I worked with her, a colleague in a leadership position. To her, ethical behaviour was the foremost thing we needed to practice in our professional lives. It was black and white. We had to understand ethics and make our decisions that way. She was very much respected for her leadership.

When I use public transportation, there are signs indicating that some seats are reserved for those who might have trouble standing. What if those signs were not there? It would not suddenly become ethical to remain seated while someone holding an infant struggled to stand. We would not say, "Sorry, but I won't give up my seat to you unless they pass a law forcing me to do so." However, that is what the government is doing here. Rather than relying on their own integrity to do the right thing, the Liberals are passing a law.

That is why this legislation will not make any difference. Being required to advertise an event and report on it afterwards would not deter those who are determined to practice cash for access. One has to have moral guidelines and principles. It is right or wrong. Cash for access is morally wrong. The best way to stop cash for access is to stop doing it. It is that simple. There is no law that is needed. As with giving up one's seat on the bus, it is basic ethical behaviour.

If we look at rankings of professions in our country, we will see nurses and farmers at the top of that list. They are believed to be acting ethically. Who is at the bottom of that list? Politicians are at the bottom, because the average Canadian does not think we act ethically, and this is an example of why.

I must emphasize again that the issues my colleagues and I are raising today are fundamental to a strong democracy. Canadians are the inheritors of a great democratic tradition, a centuries-old Westminster parliamentary system with its roots in Great Britain. In some respects, we MPs are the guardians of this proud democratic legacy. Canadians trust us to live up to the highest democratic principles. When the government is caught practising cash for access, that trust is broken. It must be regained. I am sorry to say that for the many reasons I have tried to outline today, this legislation is not the way to do that.

Government Orders

• (1755)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Bow River alluded to the fact that cash for access is wrong. The Prime Minister seemed to say as much during the last election when he said that his government would be the most open, transparent, accountable government in Canadian history. He disavowed cash for access fundraising events, with open and accountable government, and then turned around and had cash for access fundraising events, more than 100 in 2016 for the Prime Minister and Liberal cabinet ministers.

In the face of that record, how can Canadians believe anything the Prime Minister has to say?

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Speaker, it goes to the ranking of politicians and where they are in the average Canadian's eyes. On the moral principles of right and wrong, we operate in a grey area far too much.

We do not need laws to make us ethical. Laws do not make us ethical. We either are or we are not. This is an example of where we are not ethical in the average Canadian's eyes, and that is why they rank us at the bottom and put other professions much higher than us. We need to improve on that.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-50 is another effort by the Liberal government to simply pull the wool over the eyes of Canadians. Bill C-50 brings nothing to the table at all on political financing that was not already laid out.

The Liberals like to use the word “transparency”. In fact, it is included in almost everything they produce, including the famous mandate letters. Let us look at the meaning of the word “transparency” in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, which states it is “the quality of being transparent”, such as “(a) the quality that makes it possible to see through something”, for example, “the transparency of a piece of glass”; and “(b) the quality that makes something obvious or easy to understand”, for example, “the transparency of their motives. He says that there needs to be more transparency in the way the government operates.”

Whoever “he” is, I agree. However, let us go to the next definition, which states, “a piece of thin, clear plastic with pictures or words printed on it that can be viewed on a large screen by shining light through it”.

Therefore, while the rest of Canada has been interpreting the word “transparent” as clear and easy to understand, the Liberals have been putting their own words on a “transparency”, which one will need to shine a light on just to see them. Therefore, let us get the light out and shine it on them.

Let me first, in my own effort to be transparent, say at the outset that I have relied heavily on the remarks of my colleague, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, that were made in this place on June 8 of last year on Bill C-50. It is hard to improve on his remarks. However, I think they are worth repeating here tonight.

For instance, he noted that on November 7, 2016, B.C. multimillionaire Miaofei Pan hosted a fundraiser right at his West Vancouver mansion, and he made the case to the Prime Minister, at this event that he had to pay to get into and that he had to host, to allow Chinese investment in seniors care and real estate develop-

ments and ease the rules for rich immigrants from China. What better way to get preferential access than to have it right in one's own house? This took place as the federal government had been reviewing a \$1 billion bid by China's Anbang Insurance Group to buy one of B.C.'s largest retirement home nursing care chains.

An article published in *The Globe and Mail* on December 2, 2016, states:

The Liberal Party has repeatedly told *The Globe and Mail* “individuals wishing to discuss government business at party events are immediately redirected to instead make an appointment with the appropriate office.”

The host of this fundraiser, Mr. Pan, told *The Globe and Mail* in an interview that the Prime Minister was “approachable and friendly” when he raised the issues, including Chinese companies' keen interest to invest in Canadian health care for seniors.

This is a long, convoluted story, which is readily available on the Internet. However, the end result, as reported again in *The Globe and Mail* of February 21, 2017, is that the Liberal government has green-lighted the sale of one of B.C.'s biggest retirement home chains to a Beijing-based insurance titan with a murky ownership structure in a deal that gives China certainly a big foothold in Canada's health care sector. It states:

On paper, a majority stake in Vancouver-based Retirement Concepts—believed to exceed \$1-billion in value—is being sold to a Chinese-owned company called Cedar Tree Investment Canada. That is the deal that federal officials in Ottawa announced they had approved.... However, Cedar Tree is the company that China's Anbang Insurance is using to make the acquisition.

Therefore, shining a light on it becomes that much clearer.

Business people are not going to pay \$1,500-plus in return for a glass of wine and a piece of cheese, only to be redirected to make an appointment with the appropriate office. They could do that without forking over \$1,500-plus and achieve the same result.

• (1800)

However, the goal of Bill C-50 is to legitimize pay-to-play or cash for access events. The Liberals have a majority of government in the House and the bill will pass, but will it pass the smell test with Canadian taxpayers? The Liberals can say that it was the express will of Parliament that this practice be continued, but let me assure members that it is not the express will of this Conservative member of Parliament here. It is only the will of the Liberal Party, because Liberals are the only ones who have the Prime Minister and cabinet in power. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, stay tuned for the Liberal outcry when this changes and they can no longer benefit from this smoke-and-mirrors bill.

Government Orders

There have been over 100 of these cash for access events in the country in the last year. There soirees are not limited to traditional fundraising either. For example, Chinese billionaires have been attending Liberal fundraisers, even though they are not allowed to donate because they are not Canadian citizens. One of these individuals, by the name of Zhang Bin, is a member of the Communist Party. He attended a fundraiser on May 19, 2016 at the Toronto home of the Chinese Business Chamber of Commerce chairperson, Benson Wong. Again, this is according to *The Globe and Mail*.

A few weeks later, as we have noted in this discussion throughout the day in the House, Mr. Zhang and a business partner donated \$200,000 to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, with \$50,000 to build a statue of the current Prime Minister's father. It was a pretty good meeting that he had. I am sure that these donations were made out of the goodness of their hearts, with thanks for the glass of wine and the piece of cheese.

There is another example of pay to play, which was pointed out by my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston. The finance minister was scheduled to attend a fundraiser in Calgary on November 2, at a cost of \$1,500 to get in the door. It was at the home of Shaw Communications president, Jay Mehr. The telecom firm has directly lobbied the finance department eight times. Is there a conflict here? It appears that making an appointment with the appropriate office was not working. Would hosting a Liberal fundraiser prove to be more profitable for the telecom firm? As they say in the movies, Mr. Speaker, stay tuned.

Let me echo this sentiment. The system that is designed to give the incumbent party an ongoing, perpetual systemic advantage is inherently morally wrong, leaving aside the fact that it is giving preferential access to cabinet ministers when the average Canadian does not get the chance. It is absolutely contemptible.

In closing, I would like to say that Canadians deserve better than a Prime Minister who believes that there is one set of rules for him and another set of rules for everyone else. We all deserve to live with the confidence that we do not have to shine a light on every word uttered by the government of the day to get the true meaning of its remarks. We all deserve better than the current government.

• (1805)

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the end of my colleague's speech, he said that this new system the Liberals would bring forward with this bill, until we win the next election and delete it, would make it so that the governing party would have a systematic preference for raising money, which would make it stronger for the next election.

Does the member think that it is more than just a privilege that would give the Liberals more strength? Does he think that this is close to real corruption?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Speaker, I talked about that in my speech, the access because of the \$1,500. People are not only giving \$1,500, but hosting a Liberal event right in their home. Writing a cheque for \$1,500 and mailing it in is very different from hosting an event right in their house. We have seen these allegations about the Liberal Party in the last 18 months, whether in Calgary, Toronto, or British

Columbia. This does not pass the smell test. Canadians know better than this, and they are upset with this legislation, no question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many people from Beauport—Limoilou are listening to us this evening, and I would like to say hello to them. It is a pleasure to represent them, especially this evening as we debate Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing) an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. This bill basically seeks to legitimize and formalize a palpable and tangible form of corruption in Canada. We first saw this system in the 1990s and 2000s, under the successive governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne. However, the federal Liberals have also used this system over 100 times since 2015. They are now trying to formalize and legitimize it by introducing a bill in the House.

What was the system established by Ontario's Liberal government in the 1990s? Two people were responsible for its implementation, namely Mr. Butts and Ms. Telford. Mr. Butts is currently the Prime Minister principal secretary. He works in the Langevin Block. I will always call it by this name because I am very proud of it. Mr. Langevin is a French Canadian who spent his entire career fighting for Quebec's right to have a seat at the cabinet table so that Quebecers and French Canadians would be heard at the start of the 20th century. Mr. Langevin was also a great source of pride for Macdonald's government. Thus, it is an affront to me that his name was removed from the Langevin Block. I now will return to the matter at hand.

Mr. Butts is principal secretary to the Prime Minister, and Ms. Telford is, or at least I think she still is, the Prime Minister's chief of staff. Incidentally, the Prime Minister's Office is another institution that should be shut down immediately. What did those two individuals do when they introduced this system in Ontario? They made sure that ministers—as well as any backbenchers like myself and other members here who want to advance their career and perhaps become a minister to do great things for this country—would have to conform to a system that would relegate the issues that matter to them to the back burner, issues like the Constitution, the development of francophone communities, their ridings, their constituents, and community groups. The members are told that what matters is filling the party's coffers so that they can win elections, not with well-reasoned arguments, but rather by spending billions of dollars.

This system involved quotas for each minister and anyone who wanted to become a minister. For example, the finance minister and the Ontario health minister each had to raise half a million dollars a year. In this tightly organized system, the cocktail parties and fundraisers hosted by ministers had to be linked somehow to their portfolios. Another thing that surprised me about the Liberal members' speeches is that they do not want to talk about the very clear distinction between partisan fundraising events and cash for access events like the ones the Liberals held over 100 times between 2015 and 2017.

Just like every MP in Canada, I have fundraised with members of my own party, the Conservative Party, or with people who were interested in meeting Conservatives in order to better understand our political philosophy, what we can do for Canada, where we are coming from, and where we are going. In short, they wanted to know our ideas for this great country. However, I have never attended a fundraiser where there were 30 people from the same organization or the same profession who had an existing contract, business project, or other interest to bring to the attention of some federal department.

● (1810)

Every time that I participate in a fundraiser, many Canadians who are interested in politics come to meet the Conservatives to find out more about our political party. However, cash for access fundraisers stem from considerable pressure from the Prime Minister's Office. The justice and finance ministers, for example, are required to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. Under this system, every minister purposely and carefully comes up with detailed guest lists that include organizations or individuals that lobby the government on files related to his or her portfolio.

Here are two real-life examples. As recently as 2016, the Minister of Justice organized an event in Toronto. I do not remember the exact date, but this event has been discussed at length today. Most of the people who attended were lobbying the government to make changes to the Criminal Code and the Canadian judiciary, or even to become judges. I would like to know if there was even one Liberal MP at that event or whether even one ordinary Toronto resident was there to learn more about the Liberals' political philosophy—if they have one, other than a desire to be in power. In short, the Minister of Justice had to apologize for organizing this event, since it was so blatant.

It was the same thing when the Minister of Finance met with port authority representatives in Halifax. That event was also attended by businessmen who had very important things they wanted to talk to the Minister of Finance about. Here again, they were not card-carrying members of the Liberal Party who wanted to know more about his vision for the country, and nor were they Haligonians interested in finding out what their 35 or 36 Liberal MPs are doing for Atlantic Canada. They were lobbyists with specific interests who knew full well that paying \$1,500—that is now \$1,575—would give them direct access to the minister and a chance to voice their concerns or make specific requests.

Those are two of the more egregious examples. Luckily, editors-in-chief at Canada's major daily papers got wind of them. Journalists tend to be pretty lenient with this government, but these two typical cash for access functions stank so badly of corruption that the media ran the stories.

The Prime Minister himself said that this practice lacked transparency and that it likely should not be condoned in Canadian politics because it would only make Canadians more cynical and less likely to want to take part in democracy when they see that it takes \$1,500 to gain access to the Minister of Finance. When the media reported that and the Prime Minister and the government acknowledged that it was unfortunate for Canadian democracy, the Liberals decided to fix the problem by introducing Bill C-50, which, as I said

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from the outset, seeks to formalize and legitimize fundraising activities that provide special access.

What questions were raised in the House by my colleague from York—Simcoe, “Let us go back and see what happens. Is there anything in the bill that would stop the exact same thing from happening again?” The answer is no.

He went on, “Is there anything that would discourage it, because that maximum donation to the party is publicly disclosed anyhow?”

No, this will not prevent cash for access fundraisers from happening again. This is a smokescreen. There is absolutely nothing in this bill that will prevent this type of corruption in Canada. On the contrary, the Liberal government is merely legitimizing and formalizing rampant corruption and giving itself a leg up when it comes to fundraising in Canada.

● (1815)

We must condemn this. It is absolutely shameful.

As the member for Beauport—Limoilou, I strongly oppose this bill.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech on this bill. My colleague talked about the fact that journalists picked up the story and covered it for quite a while, since there were so many cash for access fundraising events.

Does my colleague think the Liberals decided to take this approach only because they were caught red-handed? There was a bit of a public outcry. Canadians were not happy that their government could more or less be bought off and that it had no scruples about holding this kind of fundraising activity. Does my colleague think that if the government's practices had not come to light there would be no Bill C-50? Does my colleague think the government would have continued doing what it was doing in secret?

This is an easy response to a problem exposed by the media and the public, who were very upset by this.

● (1820)

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the current government was caught red-handed. It seems obvious that if it had not been caught red-handed, it would have continued organizing these fundraisers. In any case, it is still engaging in this type of activity in a way. The Liberals are just taking a break from their cash for access fundraising events. They will pick up where they left off just as soon as the bill passes third reading, meaning that they will have legitimized and formalized a type of fundraising corruption in Canada. That is what the Liberals are doing.

Let's look at what they are doing with cannabis. It was illegal, but they saw this new product as an unprecedented money-making opportunity for their friends who are in business or play the stock market. This started 10 or 15 years ago in Canada with medical marijuana. Members of the larger Liberal family figured out that legalized cannabis could earn them billions of dollars.

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The government has run gigantic deficits and needs to replenish its coffers by taxing a drug. The sole purpose of legalizing cannabis and this bill is to please the Liberal elite and help get the current government re-elected in 2019. We are going to do whatever it takes to stop that from happening.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from Beauport—Limoilou is quite right that the underlying objective of Bill C-50 is to sanitize the Liberals' sorted cash for access racket. Even though this bill does virtually nothing substantively to improve political financing laws, the Ethics Commissioner did recommend some very modest amendments to the bill. For example, she recommended including parliamentary secretaries, as well as including staff, which would include the likes of Gerald Butts, who headlined a fundraiser for the hon. member for Charlottetown.

If the Liberal government was truly interested in strengthening political financing laws, why would it have rejected amendments recommended by the Ethics Commissioner?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, bluntly, the answer is simple. The only reason the Liberals did not accept any amendments in committee hearings from experts, all the arguments brought forward by the official opposition of Her Majesty, is that the bill was written in a way that would ensure they could continue cash for access starting next month. That is the single goal of the government: to start cash for access again, put money in their coffers, and get back to power in two years.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on Motion No. 1. A vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 2, 3, and 5 to 11.

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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on Motion No. 1 stands deferred. The recorded division will also apply to Motions Nos. 2, 3, and 5 to 11.

• (1825)

The next question is on Motion No. 4. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt 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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The recorded division on Motion No 4 stands deferred.

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division at the report stage of the bill.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until tomorrow, Tuesday, February 6, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Accordingly the recorded division stands deferred until tomorrow at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

TAXATION

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in this adjournment debate, I am pleased to follow up on a question that I asked the Minister of Revenue, but was answered by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage. It seems as though he is the one who will be answering again this evening.

My question primarily has to do with the Netflix agreement. Everyone is starting to understand how this agreement gives Netflix a tax advantage over its competitors. I want to follow up on this issue and on the government's completely twisted logic.

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Last week, the government kept spouting the same empty rhetoric to explain why it decided to give Netflix a tax holiday. This tax holiday was granted in exchange for an investment, but there is no guarantee of this investment. Netflix is getting a tax holiday in exchange for the infamous agreement presented by the Minister of Canadian Heritage. This is what I would like to talk about today.

The government gave a foreign company a tax break for doing business in Canada without having to abide by same tax rules as its competitors. This company is doing business with Canadian consumers. When it sells a product to consumers in Canada, it does not have to charge GST or federal sales tax because the government is allowing this situation to continue. The government is allowing a company to sell a product, in this case a subscription to Netflix, without charging consumers any GST.

According to the government and its twisted logic, this is not a problem because that is just how things work. That is the government's reason for not forcing Netflix to charge GST. It is possible to make Netflix charge sales tax because several other countries have already done so. Although Netflix is an American company that operates all over the world, it pays sales tax in some countries. Most countries actually have taxes associated with the sale of goods and services.

Canada can make Netflix charge sales tax. It is possible. The argument that the government cannot do this does not hold water. In fact, the government is not even using that argument. In the beginning, the Minister of Canadian Heritage said that it was too complicated and that it would require an international agreement to make Netflix charge sales tax. That is completely untrue.

Now the government's argument is that it does not want to impose a new tax on consumers. Based on the government's twisted logic, the GST is a new tax. This is like telling huge multinationals like Target or Walmart that when they come to Canada to sell their goods and services, they will not have to charge their customers GST at the checkout because that would be a new tax. This is like telling a new company that sets up shop in Canada that we cannot ask it to charge GST because that would be a new tax, and Canadians cannot afford any new taxes. That is the logic the Liberals are using today. In other words, they are saying that a foreign company or multinational that has a physical presence in Canada does not have to charge GST, although the store next door does.

Can my colleague explain how the government came up with this logic? How is the GST a new tax for businesses?

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke for giving us a chance to talk about the many benefits of the agreement with Netflix.

This government strongly believes that the establishment of a new Canadian business in the film and television production sector by Netflix is wonderful news for Canadian creators and producers, and ultimately for our cultural industries as a whole.

The approval of this significant investment in Canada under the Investment Canada Act is yet another indication of our government's

strong commitment to growing Canada's creative industries, with new investments that create more opportunities for creators and producers across the country. In fact, this major investment of a minimum of \$500 million over the next five years on original productions in Canada will provide them with even greater access to financing, business partners, and ultimately new ways to connect with audiences across the globe.

Such an unprecedented investment by a digital platform in Canada, a first of its kind for Netflix outside of the United States, is yet another confirmation to the world that Canada is a great place to invest, attesting to the creative talent of this country and the strong track record of our cultural industries in creating films and television productions that really stand out.

[Translation]

It is important to make a distinction between the cultural activities of Netflix Canada, which has committed to investing a minimum of \$500 million Canadian in the production of Canadian-made films and television series, with the activities of its U.S.-based video streaming service. These are in fact two separate kinds of cultural activities.

It is also important to reiterate that all businesses, including those involved in television and film production that set up and operate in Canada, must abide by the Canadian tax system, which includes GST. Given that Netflix Canada plans to operate a production company in Canada, it will have to comply with all GST-related rules, which could apply to its production activities in Canada.

[English]

Lastly I would like to point out that Netflix announced last week that it has acquired the award-winning Canadian film, *Les Affamés*, written and directed by Robin Aubert, one of the most unique voices in Quebec's cinema, to be made available on the international market as early as this coming March. This represents the first of many Canadian films and television series to be acquired or produced by Netflix Canada as a result of its significant investment announced last fall.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary is trying to draw a distinction between Netflix Canada and Netflix USA. I know the two are different. However, he avoided answering my question about Netflix USA subscriptions that are not subject to GST. That was probably intentional, so I would like him to comment on this specific issue. Netflix USA sells a product to Canadian consumers and, unlike its competitors, does not have to collect GST.

Can my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, explain to me why a foreign company is exempt from the tax rules that apply to Canadian businesses? Why are Canadian consumers not paying tax on Netflix subscriptions?

• (1835)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, Netflix Canada created a new film and television production company. This is great news for Canadian creators and producers.

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Once again, over the next five years, Netflix will invest a minimum of \$500 million Canadian in original productions produced in Canada in English and in French for distribution on Netflix's global platform.

[English]

Let us not forget that Netflix already has a strong track record of investing in Canadian producers and content, with recent examples including *Anne* and *Alias Grace* with the CBC, *Travelers* with Showcase, and *Frontier* with Discovery.

We believe that this significant investment in Canada demonstrates that Netflix is committed to continuing to be a meaningful partner in supporting Canadian creators, producers, and the Canadian creative expression.

[Translation]

HEALTH

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 17, 2017, I rose in the House to ask a question about opioid overdoses.

I want to remind members that almost 3,000 people died from opioid overdoses in 2016. Unfortunately, these terrible numbers will continue to rise, as the Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that the number of deaths caused by opioids in 2017 will exceed 4,000.

Those are the statistics. In 2017, a staggering 4,000 Canadians died from an opioid overdose, including an unprecedented 1,400 in British Columbia alone.

However, this is neither an opioid crisis nor an overdose crisis. It is a crisis of social isolation exacerbated by a bad drug policy.

I believe that it is high time the government addressed this serious situation by putting in place an effective response that will resolve this very serious public health crisis.

For several months now experts have been calling on the government to declare a state of emergency and acknowledge the gravity of this crisis. The magnitude of this crisis cannot be ignored. Last year, in the City of Vancouver alone, the number of opioid overdoses increased by 43% compared to 2016. In other words, 335 people died, or roughly one death a day.

In Quebec, the crisis is growing as well. Recently, a 22-year old young man from the Eastern Townships died after ingesting a cocktail of powerful synthetic opioids.

I want to thank all the organizations and frontline workers in our country who have to deal with the major issue that is the opioid crisis. I want to commend the incredible work of the Maison l'Alcôve treatment centre in my riding. Since 1985, that centre has been working with and treating people with alcohol and drug addictions. Maison l'Alcôve is an addiction treatment centre with in-patient accommodation for adults with substance abuse or gambling problems. They do incredible and important work. I sincerely thank them for it.

Front-line workers and partners all tell us that we must work together to get to the root of addiction by offering housing with

support services and combatting homelessness by providing access to essential social services.

The mayor of Vancouver recently asked this government to create a national strategy in response to the magnitude of the crisis. Although many steps have already been taken, mainly at the municipal level, to prevent opioid overdoses, there is still a lot of work to be done.

That is why I am calling on the government to implement an ambitious pan-Canadian action plan, as called for by a task force launched by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, representing 13 cities, including Montreal, Calgary, and Toronto.

When will the government heed these cities' calls, or should I say cries, for help? The time has come to do everything we can to contain this crisis before it becomes a national epidemic.

Jagmeet Singh has proposed the only credible solution: treating addiction as a health care problem and not as a criminal justice problem.

● (1840)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and for her interest in this issue which is, as she mentioned, a real Canadian public health crisis.

The figures remain chilling, as the number of opioid-related deaths continues to rise. This crisis represents a new type of public health challenge for Canada. Before, urgent public health interventions dealt mainly with infectious disease outbreaks, which have a more defined beginning and end. The opioid overdose situation is complex. We will need time and we will have to work with a number of partners to address this crisis.

[English]

The Government of Canada recognizes that there have been calls for the declaration of a national public health emergency. Action has been taken on a national level and in partnership with provinces and territories, all without the need to declare a public welfare emergency under the Emergencies Act. Current federal legislation would not confer any additional powers through such a declaration.

[Translation]

We have responded to the crisis with major new spending and new legislation. We have also fast-tracked new regulations. For example, we have allocated over \$100 million in new federal money to the Canadian drugs and substances strategy and provided emergency funding to British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba.

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[English]

We also passed new legislation to make it harder to bring fentanyl into the country and to streamline the application process for supervised consumption sites. We have approved more than 25 new supervised consumption sites, which are saving lives every day.

[Translation]

Recently, the government announced the implementation of drug-checking services and approved their use in supervised consumption sites. Temporary overdose prevention sites have also been approved for Ontario, the Minister of Health having deemed the province's public health needs urgent.

[English]

We are also reducing regulatory barriers to treatment. For instance, Health Canada is allowing the import of medications for urgent public health needs that are not yet authorized in Canada.

[Translation]

We also supported a pilot project for the delivery of safer alternative treatments to replace often fatal illegal drugs. Our government is continuing to work closely with its provincial and territorial partners on this.

[English]

For example, Canada's chief public health officer co-chairs the special advisory committee on the epidemic of opioid overdoses, which continues to be a key mechanism for collaboration among the senior public health officials leading crisis response efforts in their respective jurisdictions.

[Translation]

The committee, which has been active since December 2016, has made significant strides toward improving rapid information sharing about opioid-related deaths. The committee is now producing quarterly reports about those deaths, and national data have been released three times so far. The latest figures are slated for release in the spring.

[English]

The committee has also played a key role in fostering collaboration between various public safety, public health, and municipal officials within jurisdictions to advance collective efforts.

The federal government has placed public health officers in provinces and territories, upon request, to support jurisdictions in strengthening their data and surveillance systems.

[Translation]

The environment in which we live and work is in constant flux, so the government is continually reviewing and strengthening its ability to prevent, detect, and respond to public health incidents. To that end, the Minister of Health committed to acting rapidly in accordance with her mandate to review Canada's public health emergency management framework together with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[English]

In undertaking this review, the Minister of Health has asked Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada to identify any additional measures or powers that would help her address the current crisis and any similar crisis in the future.

However, our work is not done.

[Translation]

From knocking down regulatory hurdles to improving access to treatment for all Canadians and eliminating stigmatization—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

• (1845)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, despite what the parliamentary secretary might say, I believe that the government is underestimating the extent of the crisis our country is faced with. For months now, a number of my NDP colleagues and I have tried to alert the government to this very serious public health crisis. As I said, we are not the only ones. Thirteen of Canada's largest cities and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities also called on the government to implement a real pan-Canada program to address this crisis, but the government is doing precious little.

In the meantime, thousands of people are dying every year. I am calling on the government to set aside funding in the upcoming 2018 budget to combat this crisis. It is imperative to take action to prevent more of our constituents from dying.

When will the government abandon the failed war on drugs and adopt a health-based approach to addiction and drug use? When will the government finally—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[English]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that opioid-related overdoses continue to claim the lives of thousands of Canadians, devastating families and communities across the country.

[Translation]

For our government, dealing with this crisis is a top priority. To that end, we have used all available tools and mechanisms. To date, we have made new investments, passed new legislation and expedited regulatory measures.

[English]

We will continue to address this crisis by working with the provinces and territories to increase access to treatment, by supporting innovative approaches to address the crisis, and by implementing measures to address the stigma related to opioid use.

[Translation]

As long as this crisis continues, I can guarantee that our government will continue to work hard to find solutions together with its provincial partners.

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[English]

ETHICS

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last October, I asked the finance minister about when he had sold his shares in Morneau Shepell. He had about \$20 million or \$30 million in Morneau Shepell, which he told Canadians he had put in a blind trust. Of course, we found out that was not true, and it kicked off quite a fall for the finance minister.

Here we are, four months later, and the Liberals are once again embroiled in an ethical scandal where the Prime Minister, this time, has been found guilty of breaching the conflict of interest provisions that are provided to ministers and members of Parliament. He has been found guilty by the Ethics Commissioner of improperly arranging his personal affairs, guilty on the charge of accepting illegal gifts, guilty on the charge of illegally accepting a ride on a private aircraft, and guilty on the charge that he engaged illegally in discussions about government business.

We know that the finance minister had similar issues. He was found to have breached the code, as well, for failing to disclose the nature of the foreign corporation that held his French villa.

They certainly kept Mary Dawson, the previous ethics commissioner, quite busy. Her term has expired, and we have a new Ethics Commissioner, and he is now going to be investigating. We anticipate that he will continue the investigation into whether the Minister of Finance was in a conflict of interest when he introduced pension legislation, Bill C-27, that could have directly benefited his former family company, Morneau Shepell, while he was still in control of those shares in that company.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could confirm whether the new Ethics Commissioner has met with the finance minister to discuss that potential conflict of interest with Bill C-27, and whether or not he has answered those questions about whether that directly benefited his personal company.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a throw-back to the last session. I would like to remind my colleague that the first thing the Minister of Finance did when he arrived in Ottawa was to work with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner in order to ensure that he was in compliance with the rules governing the House of Commons and Parliament.

The then commissioner recommended that he set up a conflict of interest screen, which she considered to be the best means of compliance possible. That is what the Minister of Finance did upon his arrival in Ottawa.

In recent months, he announced that he would go one step further by divesting himself of all his shares in Morneau Shepell and placing his assets in a blind trust.

I can assure my colleague that the Minister of Finance continues to work with the new Ethics Commissioner and the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, as he has been doing since he was elected in October 2015, and which he will always do.

If my colleague was following the news when the House was not sitting, he would have seen that the Ethics Commissioner had previously said there was no basis for the allegations and accusations against the Minister of Finance we were hearing too often in the House.

I can only hope that the Conservatives will start to focus on what Canadians care about instead of throwing around wild allegations.

● (1850)

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the Ethics Commissioner cleared the finance minister of one of the allegations that were made. He also continues to investigate whether or not the finance minister was in a conflict of interest when he tabled legislation, Bill C-27, which would change the way that pensions are administered in this country. Only a very few companies in this country are set up to administer those types of pensions, and one of them happens to be Morneau Shepell, his former family company.

Can the parliamentary secretary confirm whether the finance minister has met with the new Ethics Commissioner to discuss those allegations of conflict of interest?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, as I said, since he was elected and came to Ottawa, the Minister of Finance has worked closely with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, with all the respect owed to this institution. He will continue to work with the office to ensure that he is in compliance with all the rules that govern us in the House. He will always follow the recommendations made by the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, as he did in 2015 when the commissioner recommended that he set up a conflict of interest screen.

[English]

We would call this the best possible measure of compliance.

[Translation]

In fact, this was a measure that former Conservative ministers implemented.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.)

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