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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 24, 2018

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 24, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, three reports from the Canadian delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The first is respecting the bilateral visit to Tanzania and Zambia, held in Dar es Salaam and Dodoma, Tanzania, and in Lusaka, Zambia, from August 20 to 30, 2017.

The second is respecting the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, from November 1 to 8, 2017, and the bilateral visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka, from November 8 to 11, 2017.

The third is respecting the 66th Westminster Seminar on Practice and Procedure, held in London, United Kingdom, from November 11 to 17, 2017.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, entitled “A Seamless Transition to Civilian Life For All Veterans: It's Time For Action”.

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

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages,

the 20th report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security entitled “Main Estimates 2018-19”.

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[*English*]

DIABETES AWARENESS MONTH ACT

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce C-403, An Act to designate the month of November as Diabetes Awareness Month.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to introduce an act to designate the month of November as diabetes awareness month. As the chair of the all-party diabetes caucus and a member of the Standing Committee on Health, my colleagues and I have heard about the extreme hardships and enormous demands on our health care system caused by diabetes.

Roughly 11 million Canadians suffer from diabetes and pre-diabetes, with a new diagnosis every three minutes. This terrible disease is a major cause of stroke, heart attack, kidney failure, and lower limb amputation.

I would like to commend many of the organizations that are doing great work to combat this disease, such as Diabetes Canada, Diabetes Action Canada, JDRC, the National Aboriginal Diabetes Association, Diabetes Québec, and many others. Let us combat this disease by giving them access to essential diabetes medicines, technologies, education, and information to help remove barriers to cost-effective prevention resources.

With the support of all my colleagues in Parliament, there is no reason the country that gave insulin to the world cannot lead the fight to defeat diabetes.

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

* * *

•(1005)

TRANS MOUNTAIN PIPELINE PROJECT ACT

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC) moved that Bill S-245, An Act to declare the Trans Mountain Pipeline Project and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada, be read the first time.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present Bill S-245, the Trans Mountain pipeline project act, in the House of Commons.

Routine Proceedings

The Trans Mountain expansion was approved in the national interest more than a year and a half ago. It faced multiple organized, well-financed challenges and delays immediately, and remains at risk.

Six weeks ago, Kinder Morgan suspended all non-essential spending and set a deadline of May 31. Last week, Kinder Morgan said:

We remain steadfast in our previously stated principles: clarity on the path forward, particularly with respect to the ability to construct...and ensuring adequate protection of our KML shareholders.

Bill S-245 would declare the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada. It would make explicit that all works related to the pipeline would be under the federal government's jurisdiction, including all local roads, bridges, power connections, and the ongoing operation and maintenance of the pipeline. Therefore, the pipeline could not be held up any longer by other levels of government or anti-energy activists.

Without real action to remove roadblocks and without certainty, Kinder Morgan officials have said that the risks and costs may be too much to bear. The problem is not, and has never been, about money; it is about certainty.

The Trans Mountain expansion is vital to Canada. It is in the best interest of the whole country. This crisis damages Canada's reputation as a place for investment, our future standard of living, our ability to create middle-class jobs, and reduce poverty.

I urge all members to act expeditiously—

The Speaker: I would remind hon. members that the introduction of bills is a time to explain what the bill is about and not to make the case for it. That will come at the second reading debate.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

COMMEMORATIVE PLAGUE FOR SAM SHARPE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring a unanimous consent motion, seconded by the member for Pickering—Uxbridge, in relation to the commemoration of a member of Parliament and First World War soldier named Sam Sharpe.

The motion is about remembrance and reducing the stigma associated with mental injuries from service. It is the result of the personal support of a number of members of the House. I would like to recognize some of these MPs to show Canadians that remembrance of this nature is beyond partisanship.

To start, I would like to recognize the Minister of Veterans Affairs for his support of the motion, and of course the seconder of the motion, the member for Pickering—Uxbridge, who represents the modern riding once represented by Sam Sharpe.

I would also like to thank and recognize the tremendous efforts of the following members: the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, the member for Parkdale—High Park, the member for Don Valley West, the member for Kingston and the Islands, the member for Winnipeg Centre, the member for Burlington, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, the

member for Barrie—Innisfil, the member for Brantford—Brant, the member for Yorkton—Melville, the member for Cariboo—Prince George, the member for Souris—Moose Mountain, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, the member for Victoria, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

Without the support of numerous parliamentarians, including former senator Roméo Dallaire, and without the support of numerous veterans and passionate Canadians across the country, we would not be able to commemorate the First World War victories we are so proud of and the heartbreaking sacrifices of those who served our country.

[*English*]

Following the provision of detailed information on the history of Sam Sharpe to all members of the chamber and as a result of discussions among the parties, if you seek it, Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, the House:

(a) recognize that Samuel Simpson Sharpe (i) was elected to the House of Commons in 1908, 1911 and 1917, (ii) raised the 116th Battalion from Ontario County and fought with his battalion at Vimy Ridge, Avion, Hill 70 and Passchendaele, (iii) was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for gallant leadership, (iv) was the only sitting Member of Parliament re-elected in the 1917 election while fighting on active service at the front, (v) tragically died by suicide at the Royal Victoria Hospital on May 25, 1918, and that for unknown reasons after the re-opening of Centre Block in 1920 there was no plaque or marker ordered to commemorate the service and memory of Samuel Simpson Sharpe; and

(b) on this day, one day before the 100th anniversary of the tragic death of Mr. Sharpe, call for the commemorative bronze plaque of Samuel Simpson Sharpe, sculpted by Canadian artist Tyler Briley, to be installed in the Centre Block ahead of the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice that ended the First World War and for the Minister of Veterans Affairs to be given the discretion by this motion to allow for the Samuel Simpson Sharpe plaque to be loaned to the Royal Ottawa Operational Stress Injury Clinic, or another suitable mental health treatment facility, for the duration of the closure of Centre Block with the intention that the plaque be returned to its place of installation in Centre Block once it re-opens.

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)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS**BANKING SERVICES**

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by the people of Dubreuilville and White River, who are concerned that banks are shutting down in rural communities across the north. Last fall, RBC closed the only bank in Dubreuilville and in Massey.

The petitioners note that many Canadians do not have access to broadband Internet or reliable cell service to access online banking services. The petitioners add that many also prefer to conduct banking transactions in person.

[English]

The petitioners state that with no local option, people are being asked to travel to communities that actually have banks, which places them at unnecessary risk. For people in Dubreuilville, the closest bank is now one hour away. They are concerned that these bank closures can lead to economic instability. They also add that banks charge customers who want to switch to financial institutions that may be closer. They raise the fact that banks are posting record profits at the same time that they claim they cannot afford to maintain services in small communities.

The petitioners call on the government to work with federally regulated financial institutions to ensure that rural consumers and businesses have access to local banking services, and for the introduction of a three- to six-month penalty-free period to move financial business elsewhere when closures occur.

●(1015)

CAMPGROUNDS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, as we celebrate Canadian RV and Camping Week, I table this petition on behalf of campground owners and operators who are the hard-working small business owners right across the country who play a crucial role in our tourism industry. It certainly is a sector that is dominated by small business.

Every year millions of Canadians go camping and enjoy the beautiful outdoors right across the country. Unfortunately, the CRA has deemed that these private campgrounds are not eligible for the small business tax deduction, resulting in a tax hike that is 300% higher for some of these small businesses.

The petitioners call on the government to ensure that hard-working private campground owners qualify for the small business tax deduction, like all other small businesses.

[Translation]

LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the following petitions on the labelling of genetically modified foods. The petitioners are from Saint-Félix-de-Kingsey, from Saint-Lucien, and from across Drummond, as well as from other parts of Quebec.

They are calling on the government to give Canadian consumers access to all necessary information with respect to genetically modified foods, in light of Health Canada's approval of the sale of genetically modified salmon. They are calling on the Government of Canada to pass legislation on mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods.

[English]

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to table today yet another petition from constituents of

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Winnipeg North emphasizing the importance of a national pharmacare system that would cover prescription drugs. They join great organizations like Unifor, which is out today promoting pharmacare, the Canadian Labour Congress; and many other organizations.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present three petitions. The first one calls on the House of Commons to permit Christians to robustly exercise their religious beliefs and conscience rights, both in their private and public acts, without coercion, constraint, or discrimination.

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls on the government to rescind its discriminatory Canada summer jobs program attestation. Petitioners call on the government to remove the discriminatory requirement and allow Canadians to continue to exercise their freedom of religion and freedom of expression without facing institutionalized discrimination by the Government of Canada.

PHOENIX PAY SYSTEM

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition calls on the Government of Canada to abolish the Phoenix pay system and replace it with a pay system that has been proven to work with a variety of pay levels, hours of work, and collective agreements; to pay all monies that are owed to public servants completely and on time; and to stop wasting taxpayers' money.

CYCLING

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise and table a petition on behalf of Canadians who would like to see a national cycling strategy. It is timely, because next week is Bike to Work Week and, of course, it is national cycling day on the Hill.

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Cycling is one of the most sustainable methods of transportation, requiring fewer natural resources and producing less waste than any other transportation alternative. The benefits of cycling should be made available to all Canadians, regardless of age, ability, gender, economic status, or location. A national cycling strategy would promote research, upgrade infrastructure projects, and establish a clear framework for investment in support of and to increase all types of cycling in Canada, including commuter, tourism, and recreational cycling. We know it plays a positive role in healthy lifestyles and reduces health care spending. A national cycling strategy would enhance national safety standards, including measures like mandatory side guards for trucks. Increased cycling would also support Canada's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Alberni will be pleased to hear that I was cycling this morning, as a matter of fact.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents and present three petitions this morning.

The first petition notes that the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to create a national strategy on palliative care to ensure that every Canadian has access to high quality palliative care at the end of life. The petitioners note that the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that competent and consenting adults who have a grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes enduring and intolerable suffering should be allowed to access physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia. They note it is impossible for a person to give informed consent to assisted suicide if appropriate palliative care is unavailable to them. Therefore, they are calling upon Parliament to establish a national strategy on palliative care.

• (1020)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition from members of my riding calls upon the government to scrap Bill C-71, an act to amend certain acts and regulations in relation to firearms, and to instead devote greater resources to policing in Canada.

CANADA SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members of my communities are calling on the Canadian government to recognize that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms identifies, among other things, freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of belief as fundamental freedoms, and that the Government of Canada must defend the rights of all Canadians, regardless of whether the current Liberal government agrees with the specific views held by individual Canadians.

The petitioners believe that the current Liberal government's proposed attestation, requiring Canada summer jobs program applicants to hold the same views as the government, contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to defend the freedoms of

conscience, thought, and belief, and withdraw the attestation requirement for applications to the Canada summer jobs program.

FIREARMS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear that you were cycling this morning. Hopefully, you were also target-shooting or hunting this morning, because I am tabling an important petition on firearms. It refers to the 10-round magazine reclassification enforced by the RCMP, and asks for the power of the RCMP to arbitrarily make classification decisions on firearms to be removed. Many of my constituents are concerned about the fact that arbitrary reclassification can happen where a firearm previously deemed to be safe suddenly is no longer deemed safe. This reclassification could affect anyone, even you. Therefore, I commend this petition to the consideration of the House.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member, though it would be challenging to hunt and cycle on a bicycle. I did see a deer this morning, he would be interested to know.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have honour to rise today to present a petition from my constituents.

This petition is about poverty, and it calls on the House of Commons to adopt a national poverty strategy to provide for fair, sustainable living conditions for all Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

FEDERAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-57. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC) moved:

That Bill C-57 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-57 again. This bill, effectively, would amend the current Federal Sustainable Development Act. Members may recall that in a previous Parliament, it was John Baird and the Conservative Party that strongly supported the original legislation, brought forward under a private member's bill, to establish the Federal Sustainable Development Act. That act requires that all government decision-making be reviewed through an environmental, economic, and social lens in the appropriate balance. That is the rub: "in the appropriate balance".

The bill before us today aims to make decision-making related to sustainable development more transparent, first; more certain, second; and subject to greater accountability, third, especially within government. This bill would require more departments and agencies of government—in other words, additional departments and agencies—to contribute to the federal sustainable development strategy, bringing the total to more than 90 departments and agencies from the current 26. The bill would also require these departments and agencies to prepare specific strategies to ensure sustainability and to table progress reports on their implementation.

Bill C-57 would also increase from three to six the number of indigenous representatives sitting on the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. Government, of course, relies heavily on these advisory councils to provide it with strategic advice on the implementation of that legislation. The bill would expand the council's mandate and provide that representatives appointed to the council may be compensated for expenses. We just heard the Speaker mention that a motion was being tabled that addresses the issue of remuneration. It has been my party's position that although the members of this advisory council should be compensated and reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses such as travel and lodging, they should not be remunerated. This should not be a job they do, but their contribution to society in making sure that Canada has an effective sustainable development plan.

The act would be subject to a mandatory review every five years. It has already been studied at the environment committee, on which I sit, where the Conservative members strongly supported it, subject to the amendments that have been brought forward this morning. We strongly believe that any decision government makes should always be reviewed through the lens of sustainability and should ensure that social, environmental, and economic factors are in the appropriate balance. This act also supports a whole-of-government approach to sustainable development.

As I mentioned earlier, the challenge, the real rub, is finding the appropriate balance among those three: social, environmental, and economic considerations, especially the balance between the environment and the economy. Our friends in the Liberal Party are fond of saying that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, which is a nice platitude, but the implementation of that intent is a different matter altogether. We see major failures in the Liberal Party's efforts to implement sustainability in Canada. Despite the fact that the Liberals brought forward this legislation, which is supposed

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to strengthen sustainability in Canada, their performance reflects quite a different approach. It is one that pits Canadian against Canadian, province against province, and the federal government against province and territory. While in government, the Liberals have not found it as easy as it may seem to implement sustainability.

I will begin by highlighting the relationship among the provinces, the territories, and the federal government. Members may recall that the Prime Minister, when running for election in 2015, made a host of promises, most of which have been broken.

● (1025)

One promise the Prime Minister made, which is now broken, was to usher in a new era of co-operative federalism. Nobody understood exactly what he meant, but everybody took him at his word. They assumed he was a man of his word and had every intention of doing this. In fact, he then began to interpret sustainability as having one's cake and eating it too.

When the Prime Minister was in British Columbia, he would pretend he was the champion of the environment. He would talk about the oceans protection plan and how we have to move off fossil fuels. However, when the Prime Minister was in Alberta to appease the residents there, whose livelihoods depend on our oil and gas, our resource sector, he would claim he was the great champion of the energy sector, again wanting to have his cake and eat it too and trying to be all things to all people. Those of us who have been involved in business, who have had to pay salaries and make important decisions within our businesses, know that we cannot be all things to all people. Tough decisions have to be made that serve the greater interests of Canadians.

There was our Prime Minister travelling across the country and pretending to be all things to all people, and suddenly the Trans Mountain pipeline comes along. He tells our friends in Alberta that if they implement a massive carbon tax, Albertans will win the social licence to be able to build the Trans Mountain pipeline to get their crude oil to foreign markets, get their crude oil to tidewater, where ships can then take that oil to foreign markets where it will fetch the highest price.

Trusting the Prime Minister, the Government of Alberta moves ahead with this massive carbon tax, which is hurting Albertans right across that province. I know some of my colleagues will share the pain being suffered by Albertans.

Now the Trans Mountain pipeline wants to move forward. Kinder Morgan wants to start building that project, but British Columbia steps up and says it opposes a pipeline coming through British Columbia. Even though there is an existing one there and all we are doing is twinning it, British Columbia is opposed. Now we have a war between the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, a fight between the provinces and the federal government, and there is an appalling lack of leadership on the part of the Prime Minister, who had made a promise that if Alberta implemented this heavy-handed carbon tax, at least it would get a social licence out of it. Now it turns out there is no social licence. In fact, there never will be a social licence.

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Canadians have been misled by the Prime Minister, but it gets worse. We are talking about sustainability, finding the appropriate balance for our economic prosperity as a country, using our resources wisely, getting the maximum dollar for them, getting them to markets, and then a report comes out from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Actually, it emanates out of the Auditor General's office. In this report, dated March of 2018, we read that in Canada greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, which the government committed to reduce, are expected to be nearly 20% above target. This whole report from the commissioner is riddled with criticism of the government's performance on the environment file.

Then we have Bill C-69, which is the impact assessment act revisions, which were intended to shorten timelines and provide more predictability and certainty for approvals of resource projects and pipelines. In fact, we are now hearing from industry that these timelines are much longer than they were before and that there are many additional criteria that are going to make it even more difficult for resource projects to be approved in Canada. As a result, what we are finding is that on the economic side, we are losing out.

• (1030)

We have a Prime Minister who pretends he is the defender of our economy, but who in fact is completely pandering to the environmental movement and those who are on the extreme left.

I would suggest that this legislation, although it does reflect the consensus of the parties within this House, has not been implemented by the Liberals in their actions and in their legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I believe the member is just wrong in his assertion.

In fact, what we have, for the first time in many years, is a Prime Minister who understands how important it is to work with stakeholders, whether it is indigenous people or other levels of government. The proof is in the pudding. We can talk about the environmental agreements between the provinces and Ottawa, the health care agreements between the provinces and Ottawa, or the CPP agreement that was achieved between Ottawa and the provinces. When we talk about working with the environment and the economy, it is the government that gets it and the opposition that does not quite understand.

As the member across the way tries to go on as if the Conservatives know what they are doing on the environment, can he clearly indicate to this House why the Conservatives seem to have only one approach when it comes to energy development, which is full steam ahead? The Conservatives do not necessarily negotiate or have discussions, or even seem to care about the environment. Why is that the case?

• (1035)

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, the evidence shows otherwise. In fact, it was under our previous Conservative government that greenhouse gas emissions actually went down for the first time in Canadian history. We were the only government under which that happened.

My colleague suggests that somehow the Liberal government has this wonderful relationship with stakeholders and a wonderful relationship with indigenous communities, while his relationship with the provinces and territories is completely falling apart. The government is in a fight with Saskatchewan on the carbon tax and in a fight with Alberta and British Columbia on the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

When it comes to indigenous communities, at our environment committee we just finalized voting on all the amendments to Bill C-69 that were brought forward, which I referenced earlier. Members may recall that the Prime Minister promised that he was going to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, so members will be surprised to hear what happened at committee: our Liberal friends over here, every time someone brought forward an amendment to include UNDRIP within that legislation, voted against it on at least 25 occasions. They were speaking out of both sides of their mouth.

The Prime Minister is all over the country pretending he is one thing in one area and another when he is in a different region of the country. It is hypocrisy at its very worst.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Abbotsford just made a statement that the Conservatives were responsible for a decrease in emissions. What the Conservatives tend to overlook is that over 2008 and 2009, we had a worldwide recession. Would the member not agree that the corresponding decline in industrial output and activity was probably more responsible for the decrease in emissions than any Conservative policy could have hoped to have been?

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Speaker, we experienced unprecedented growth over the 10 years that we were in office. We led the G7 in economic growth. Let that be clear on the floor of this House. We had the best growth in the G7 countries.

We understood the appropriate balance between the economy and the environment. When I think of an NDP government, let us imagine what that would be like. It was a disaster in Ontario. The last one we had in British Columbia was an unmitigated disaster. Let us remember the fast ferry fiasco. It just went on and on. My colleague, unfortunately, is not qualified to comment on economic growth.

I can say that the previous Conservative government was the only one that has seen a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, while today's Liberal government here in Ottawa has been held responsible by the commissioner for failing to meet its targets. In fact, the United Nations itself has said that we are going to be somewhere in the order of 90 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions short of our targets under the Paris Agreement. This is a government of capital-F failure.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, this discussion is actually supposed to be about the Federal Sustainable Development Act, but we would not know it from the speech or the responses from the member for Abbotsford.

The member for Abbotsford supported the bill at second reading and at committee and did not move a motion to amend the bill in this way, so why now? The member also moved an amendment at second reading to clarify remuneration of reasonable expenses, which the committee accepted, so why this amendment now? This is simply a delay tactic, trying to waste the time of the House by talking about things that have no bearing on a bill that the member supported. The amendments he moved at committee were accepted. This is just a waste of people's time.

• (1040)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I'm sorry, but it was to be resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary was asking a question. I will not allow the member for Abbotsford to respond, but should the member wish to continue his speech, he can.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[Translation]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to address my colleagues in the House and to reaffirm our government's commitment to sustainable development and future generations of Canadians.

[English]

Through Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act, the government is working to ensure that decision-making related to sustainable development is more transparent, is subject to accountability, and promotes coordination across the Government of Canada.

Let me begin by thanking all members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development for their excellent work.

[Translation]

The committee's hard work has led us to a stronger and more transparent bill, which builds on the government's commitment to promote consultation and public engagement.

[English]

It is this last point that I would like to speak to today.

Worldwide we are seeing a resurgence of interest and desire to promote sustainable development and take action on climate change. By adopting the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Canada will contribute to a global framework of action that strives for global sustainable development and aims to eradicate poverty and to leave no one behind.

Through its participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the historic Paris Agreement, Canada is also signalling a renewed global commitment to address climate change.

[Translation]

It is in this global context that we find ourselves, resolutely committed to ensuring that Canada is a sustainable development leader.

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[English]

That is why we are proposing amendments to the Federal Sustainable Development Act that would propel us along a path to a sustainable future and ensure that we have the interests of future generations in mind.

The current federal sustainable development strategy is the strongest to date. It was developed using an inclusive participatory approach aimed at engaging and involving all Canadians. We released the draft strategy in February 2016 and asked Canadians to share with us their vision for a sustainable Canada and to suggest how we could strengthen transparency and accountability. The response was unprecedented. Canadians provided more than 540 written comments, 12 times the response received to the previous strategy. On social media they contributed about 900 posts and replies on the draft strategy. Overall, the draft strategy had a reach of more than 400,000 people over the course of the public consultation period.

[Translation]

We heard from individual Canadians who are fully committed and indicated that they are interested, engaged, and passionate about sustainable development.

[English]

We also heard from provincial governments, indigenous organizations, industry and professional associations, academics, and environmental non-governmental organizations. The strategy also benefited from the standing committee's review of the act and its recommendations. Evidence from the review included insightful testimony from witnesses such as the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development and the Hon. John Godfrey, the originator of the bill that became the act. We also spoke with the Sustainable Development Advisory Council, with representatives from each province and territory, as well as with members drawn from indigenous peoples, organizations representing business, organizations representing labour, and environmental non-governmental organizations.

In the public consultations, Canadians showed their support for the strategy, as well as for the 2030 agenda and other key sustainable development initiatives. They also appreciated the accessibility and transparency of the strategy, and the government's openness to receiving comments and input. However, Canadians also stressed that they are looking to the government for further progress and improvements, including greater inclusiveness to further guarantee the development of a strategy that engages all Canadians.

As a response, we felt we could go beyond improving the strategy, to improve the act itself. That is why, spurred by the standing committee's unanimous recommendations, our government introduced Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

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The Federal Sustainable Development Act already requires the government to engage Canadians through public consultations on the federal sustainable development strategy, including through the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. However, we wanted to further increase the effectiveness of our engagement activities, starting with improvements to the council itself.

Bill C-57 would position the council to be better able to advise the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on matters related to sustainable development referred to it by the minister. Expertise and advice from the council would be sought on the development of the draft federal sustainable development strategy before it goes to public consultation. The council could also be asked to review the draft FSDS progress report during its development and to provide suggestions on its form, content, and direction. Similar to the current practice of including a summary of the council's comments on the federal sustainable development strategy, a summary of advice could also be made public by including it either in the federal sustainable development strategy or in the progress report.

Our bill also proposes to double the number of indigenous representatives from three to six. The Minister of Environment would further reflect the diversity of Canadian society by taking into account demographic considerations such as age and gender when appointing representatives to the Sustainable Development Advisory Council.

In addition, we have removed previous restrictions that denied council members reimbursement for reasonable costs incurred by them in connection with the business of the council. The proposed amendment would remove the prohibition on reimbursement of Sustainable Development Advisory Council members, in order to enhance effective engagement and inclusiveness. This was framed and was a recommendation by the member for Abbotsford.

The current act does not allow council members to be remunerated or reimbursed for their expenses, because it was part of a private member's bill. What that has meant in practice is that the council has been convened only virtually and by teleconference to review draft federal sustainable development strategies, and that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has never met face to face with the council. Members are located in every province and territory from coast to coast to coast. Changing this would further help to minimize financial constraints on participants, particularly youth and members located in rural Canada. It would be unfortunate if individuals with a great deal to offer do not consider putting their name forward to be part of the council because they could not afford to participate.

Enabling the government to compensate or reimburse SDAC members would provide the ability for the council to play a more effective role in shaping the government's sustainable development approach. It would also enable the minister to engage with the council through in-person meetings or by bringing clusters of members together when appropriate.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

We believe these changes would increase the ability of the council to guide and support our sustainable development agenda.

[*English*]

These proposed changes also reinforce the addition of numerous sustainable development principles. In addition to the basic principle and the precautionary principle, which are already included in the Federal Sustainable Development Act, the bill adds principles of intergenerational equity, openness and transparency, the importance of involving aboriginal peoples, collaboration, and results and delivery.

Let me say a few words about these principles, which will guide the government's plans and actions on sustainable development. The principles emphasize that sustainable development is a continually evolving concept and allow the government to address new and emerging issues within future strategies. They also highlight approaches that the government should consider when developing sustainable development strategies.

In particular, the principle of intergenerational equity is the essence of sustainable development. It is the recognition that the decisions we make are not just about today but about tomorrow and far off into the future.

The polluter pays principle and the internalization of costs are also integral to sustainable development: that we must go beyond thinking of economic growth in conventional terms and stop seeing environmental damages as externalities.

The principle of openness and transparency supports the Federal Sustainable Development Act's stated purpose to make decision-making related to sustainable development more transparent and subject to accountability to Parliament.

The Government of Canada is committed to advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples through a renewed nation-to-nation, Inuit-crown, and government-to-government relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. Our principle of involving indigenous peoples reflects this commitment, as well as their unique understanding of and connection to Canada's lands and waters, and the important role of traditional knowledge in supporting sustainable development.

Sustainable development requires contributions and actions from all parts of society: the public and private sectors and civil society. The principle of collaboration is about that joint pursuit of our common objectives.

The government has made it clear from its first day in office that we are committed to results and delivery.

[*Translation*]

Our principle on results and delivery emphasizes the importance of developing sound sustainable development objectives, associated strategies, indicators for measuring progress, and accountabilities. The Federal Sustainable Development Act must promote real change.

Government Orders

[English]

The proposed amendments to the principles are to be considered in the development of sustainable development strategies. Building more flexibility into the advisory council's role builds on these principles, particularly the principles of involving indigenous peoples, collaboration, and transparency and accountability, by providing an external perspective on sustainable development and ensuring that our federal sustainable development strategy reflects the diversity of Canada.

I hope that highlighting some of the major features of our bill would give members a better sense of how we can collectively move toward a more sustainable future for our children and grandchildren. I am sure this is something all members of the House fully support.

• (1050)

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to probe the member's comments about the great work done on this bill at committee, with all due respect to those who are on the committee. The member may not know this, as I am not sure he was present during the marathon that took place at the environment committee. I was there subbing in. There was a programming motion at committee that prevented any debate on any of the amendments after nine o'clock, which meant that amendments were immediately voted up or down with no discussion, no explanation from the mover, and no debate.

Hundreds of amendments were proposed, many coming from the Liberal side, which suggests that maybe there were some issues with the bill that the Liberals had not thought through when they initially proposed it. More to the point, members were expected to vote on changes to an omnibus bill with no discussion or even explanation allowed whatsoever.

We owe it to Canadians to give them the best, most well-considered legislation we can. Simply as a matter of process, does the member think that this is an appropriate way for the committee, the one place where people are supposed to be experts and actually dig into the details, to be considering amendments? Does he think this is something the government would consider doing in the future with other omnibus bills it has?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member may be a bit confused. The discussion today is on Bill C-57, which is about the Federal Sustainable Development Act, and I think he is referring to a completely different bill. The amendment that was moved by one of his colleagues relates to Bill C-57, which is about the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

I have to say that it is a bit disappointing to see the opposition trying to politicize a bill that we all support, on all sides of the House. One of the great disappointments for many of us who got into politics quite recently is how everything, even things we agree on, tends to end up in a partisan discussion inside this chamber. The hon. member who moved the motion and I have a very good relationship outside the House. However, I am always surprised at how narrowly partisan some of the things that I hear coming out of his mouth in the chamber are.

I am proud of the work that was done by the committee on this bill. I am proud of the bill itself. It is something that all parties in the

House have indicated they support on a go-forward basis. In the spirit of the non-partisan way in which the committee worked, I would simply ask that we continue to talk about a bill that we all support and leave some of the partisanship aside.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, I have to correct the hon. member, whom I appreciate dialoguing with and enjoy working with. I think everybody in the House supports the idea that there should be sustainable development, but that does not necessarily mean that we think the act is as it should be. To be absolutely correct, yes, there was hard work done by the committee, but in fact the government chose to ignore the majority of the recommendations made by the first review of the committee.

When we reviewed the bill, one of the strong recommendations came from the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. She supported a proposal that many of our witnesses heard, which is that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be specifically referenced in the bill. This was backed up by the justice minister, who said this last November:

With the direction and leadership of [the] Prime Minister...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.

However, here we have this environmental bill, and the government is refusing to incorporate UNDRIP. Could the member please explain why the government has refused to incorporate UNDRIP in the bill and respect indigenous rights?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson: Madam Speaker, I enjoy working with the hon. member, and the committee has been a very thoughtful group that endeavours to work together in a non-partisan way.

The government did actually accept the vast majority of recommendations that came forward from the committee. Included in that were a range of principles that are being embedded in the Federal Sustainable Development Act, as well as guides to the strategies that will be done by over 90 different agencies of the federal government, in place of 26, going forward. A number of measures that were included relate to the incorporation of indigenous participation in all of this, which is obviously a key priority of the government and something we will continue to ensure is reflected in all legislation we bring forward.

• (1055)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak to this bill. It is very important that we strengthen sustainability legislation in this country. We have taken a few baby steps forward, but regrettably, this bill has not gone far enough. It is not enough for the government to simply say the word "indigenous", say it cares about indigenous people, and then not take the step it promised, which is to actually incorporate that declaration into the law of the land.

Government Orders

It is important at the outset to recall that the Federal Sustainable Development Act was initiated in 2008 as a private member's bill with, frankly, much stronger measures. It was transformed by the then Liberal government into the law as it exists today. Second, it is important to recognize the earlier decision in 1995 to create of the office of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development within the Office of the Auditor General. A requirement was also imposed on departments to prepare and table sustainable development strategies. The commissioner was mandated to audit and publicly report on the government's delivery on these responsibilities. During the 1990s, a cabinet directive was also issued requiring ministers to provide an environmental assessment of any policies, plans, or proposals submitted to cabinet. As my colleague mentioned, that would include pipeline approvals.

In 2015, Canada joined other nations in signing a United Nations resolution, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". This agreement committed the signatories to take bold and transformative steps that are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. Two months later, Canada also committed, in Paris, to deeper actions to address climate change.

Finally, Canada has declared its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which I will refer to as the UNDRIP from now on, much of which deals with the indigenous right to self-determination, including on resource development, environmental protection, and sustainability.

Over the past decades, consecutive audits by the commissioner have reported abject failure by departments and ministers alike in incorporating credible environmental or sustainable development assessments for decision-making. It is similarly noteworthy that as recently as this past spring, after the tabling of Bill C-57, the commissioner delivered a highly critical audit on the government's commitment to implementing the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals, finding no federal governance structure, a narrow interpretation of sustainable development, limited national consultation and engagement, no national implementation plan, few national targets, and no system to measure, monitor, and report on national targets. It was a very scathing review.

It is important, then, in assessing Bill C-57, to determine if these proposed reforms to the act brought before us today are sufficient to update Canadian law to ensure delivery of our international and domestic commitment to ensuring sustainability.

A year before the bill was introduced, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development led a study of a draft federal sustainable development strategy, as required by law. The result was a series of recommendations presented to Parliament to strengthen this very law and the process of applying it. Last fall, the Minister of Environment tabled Bill C-57 to amend the act. The bill was debated and then referred back to the committee, which again undertook a study and reported back a number of recommended amendments. On behalf of my party, I proposed a series of recommended amendments, for the most part based on recommendations from the commissioner, experts heard at committee in both of its reviews, and the committee itself. Regrettably, almost all of them were refused, despite having been put forward by the committee itself in its earlier study.

Among my proposed amendments was that the bill provide specific reference to a commitment to the UNDRIP. Why did I propose this? The Prime Minister has committed to deliver on all 94 of the calls for action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including calls 43 and 44, which call on the federal government, in fact all orders of government, to fully adopt and implement the UNDRIP as the framework for reconciliation and to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to achieve those goals. Clearly, one of those measures would be to include the UNDRIP in this law.

• (1100)

In her address to a conference on implementing the UN declaration, in November of last year, the Minister of Justice stated:

With the direction and leadership of [the Prime Minister], 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.

It could not be clearer. This address was made to the Assembly of First Nations, and it interprets that as meaning that the UN declaration will now be incorporated into every federal law going forward.

The government has publicly stated its support for Bill C-262, tabled by my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, which calls on the government to enact the UNDRIP in Canadian law.

This directive by the Prime Minister is clear: all Canadian laws must be written and applied to align with the UN declaration. The federal commissioner of the environment and sustainable development recommended to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development that it seek amendments to Bill C-57 to specifically include the UNDRIP. Again, it came from our federal commissioner.

Any reasonable person would conclude, therefore, that failing to reference the UNDRIP in the bill was just an oversight. Perhaps no one advised the minister that her Prime Minister, her justice minister, and the commissioner had recommended exactly this action. Therefore, it appears well-founded that I table this exact amendment. After all, the government's intent was clear.

What was the response by the majority Liberal-led committee? It voted down this amendment. One wonders, of course, why the Minister of Environment had not made this reference herself in the bill, but there we are: no support for inclusion of the UNDRIP in our nation's sustainable development law, which is supposed to guide all decisions on policy, programs, and law going forward.

Government Orders

There is no commitment to entrenching indigenous rights, but what about the other recommended measures to strengthen the bill? In testifying before the committee, the commissioner expressed appreciation that the minister had heeded the advice of the committee to incorporate into the law at least some of the recommended guiding principles, such as intergenerational equity, the precautionary principle, and polluter pays. Other recommended principles, including environmental justice and the right to a healthy environment, were not included.

The commissioner expressed concern that additional international commitments critical to sustainability remain missing from the bill. These include, for logical reasons, the United Nations agenda 2030 on sustainable development goals and the Paris climate convention.

During its review in advance of Bill C-57, the standing committee sought advice from a number of leading Canadian and international experts on sustainable development on ways to strengthen the federal resolve to deliver on sustainable development. These included, as mentioned, the current commissioner of the environment and sustainable development and the head of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, who was also the former commissioner. It also included Welsh and German experts on sustainable development, Global International, and the World Future Council. Clearly, the committee heard advice from a wide array of expertise on sustainable development.

A widely supported recommendation was to shift to a whole of government approach in instituting sustainability considerations in government decision-making by incorporating into law measures to improve enforceability and accountability on the sustainable development targets, appointing more senior-level authorities to provide oversight, and entrenching the cabinet directive in the statute. The minister chose not to follow this sage advice

These recommendations were repeated by the federal commissioner when testifying before the committee. She reiterated her call to shift the oversight role from a junior-level officer in the environment department to a central agency. It is no surprise why she came to this conclusion. As mentioned earlier, audits delivered over the past several decades reported abject failure across authorities, including the departments of environment and Public Safety, to comply with the law. Her fall 2017 report found a mere 20% compliance rate by the five departments audited.

●(1105)

As recently as this spring, the commissioner reported that the government has no federal government structure, a limited interpretation of sustainable development, and no system to measure or monitor sustainable development.

I would welcome questions and just share that I am deeply disappointed. This was an opportunity to strengthen the resolve of the federal government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, time is up. Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is something in the legislation that many

indigenous people would see as a strong positive, and that is that it would mandate representation on the development advisory committee, which would ensure that there would be a strong indigenous factor. When we think of ongoing development into the future, one would think that would be a strong positive.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide her thoughts on that aspect of the legislation, which is an important part, because the advisory council, in good part, would provide strong leadership going forward with respect to this legislation and beyond.

Ms. Linda Duncan: I am sorry, Madam Speaker, but to appoint indigenous representatives to an advisory council to ensure delivery of a bill, when the government refuses to incorporate and entrench its obligations under the UNDRIP, is a vacuous measure.

Of course, it is terrific that we are adding indigenous members to advise the government. This should be happening across the board, but the government is refusing in this legislation, and refusing in its omnibus environment bill, to specifically make the UNDRIP binding on the government. Indigenous members will be there, but they will not have a law to hold the government accountable.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my friend from Edmonton Strathcona for her tireless work on environment and climate issues.

I want to ask my colleague about the potential to find something positive in the bill.

I have been just appalled by the lack of advisory bodies for the Liberal government. Let me give a quick review. We used to have in Canada the Economic Council of Canada, which existed from 1963 until the 1990s. The Science Council of Canada existed from the 1960s until the early 1990s. The Canadian Environmental Advisory Council existed from the early 1970s to the early 1990s. All three were abolished in the early 1990s, because the government created the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. We were told that we did not need the Economic Council, the Science Council, or the Environmental Advisory Council anymore, because we had the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, which, in the spring of 2012, was killed in the Conservative omnibus budget bill, Bill C-38.

Nobody seems to be aware of the paucity of basic research and the combining of themes around sustainable development that we used to take for granted.

This is a pretty weak instrument we have in proposed subsection 8 (1) of this legislation. We have a Sustainable Development Advisory Council, which I think has potential, but it has to be properly funded. The Liberal government needs to see the potential to replace all those bodies we used to have that gave us good advice.

I wonder if my friend from Edmonton Strathcona thinks that is something we should push ahead with in Bill C-57.

Government Orders

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, what my colleague did not mention is that the Conservative government also got rid of the Law Reform Commission. I was advising it on environmental laws at the time the government struck it off, too. It would be nice to bring back all of those entities.

It is a vacuous opportunity to advise on a bill that is not a strong bill. It would be important that UNDRIP, the right to a clean, healthy environment, and the right to environmental justice be principles in the legislation and that UNDRIP be made binding. Those who sit on the advisory council could then hold the government's feet to the fire on the fact that it was not delivering on those binding obligations.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the most disappointing aspects of the government on the environment file is that when it came to power, it adopted the Stephen Harper climate change targets, and then the Prime Minister went to Paris and signed the Paris accord commitments. We are not on track as a country even to meet the weak targets the Stephen Harper government met, never mind the targets of the Paris accord, which obligates Canada to meet a 30% reduction over 2005.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague could comment on where Canada is at in terms of actually meeting Canada's climate change commitments, which, after all, are the basis for sustainable development.

• (1110)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, that is where the rubber hits the road. Sustainability means that we are actually delivering on all of the commitments we made, including on climate. As I mentioned, the government also failed to reference the Paris Agreement in this, which kind of tells us how committed the Liberals really are to it and that we cannot, therefore, hold them accountable.

We need to point out that the law says what the law says, but what the commissioner is saying clearly is that the government has failed abjectly over decades to deliver on its obligations to do an assessment of all programs, policies, and decisions, including decisions on major resource projects such as dams, pipelines, and mines.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak about how our government's priorities and Bill C-57 align with the core principles underpinning the sustainable development goals and support the overarching philosophy of the 2030 agenda to leave no one behind. For Canada, leaving no one behind means that everyone can participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The 2030 agenda is an informative agenda rooted in the principles of universality, inclusiveness, interconnectedness, and the need for meaningful partnerships that deliver positive change for all. It commits all countries irrespective of their income levels and development status to contribute to the comprehensive effort toward sustainable development.

As Canada's Prime Minister said in his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2017, "the SDGs are as meaningful in Canada as they are everywhere else in the world". The 2030 agenda seeks to benefit all people in need, in a manner that targets their specific needs and vulnerabilities. To do so, the 2030 agenda calls

for inclusiveness and participation by all segments of society irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, and identity. This generates an unprecedented demand for diverse regional and local understanding of community-based issues and robust data.

For instance, we know that while drinking water in Canada is among the safest in the world, access to clean water and sanitation remains a challenge in on-reserve first nation communities. This is why clause 5 of the bill, which addresses the composition and mandate for the Sustainable Development Advisory Council, is so important. Clause 5 seeks to increase the number of indigenous representatives on the council to better reflect the indigenous groups represented and the broad range of challenges they face across Canada.

This directly supports our efforts to forge a new relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. Clause 5 also seeks to reflect the diversity of Canadian society by taking into account demographic considerations, such as age and gender, when appointing representatives to the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. Gender equality and the empowerment of women, for example, are foundational pillars of Canada's leadership in the fight against climate change. We are enhancing our gender-based analysis across all areas of work on environment and climate change to ensure that our actions promote gender equality.

To further support diversity and inclusion in the Federal Sustainable Development Act, clause 5 provides that representatives appointed to the Sustainable Development Advisory Council may be reimbursed reasonable expenses incurred so they can meet as a council face to face. Council members would only be reimbursed for expenses incurred under the Treasury Board Secretariat travel directive. This directive applies to public service employees and other persons travelling on government business, and its purpose is supported by clause 5, which would ensure fair treatment of those required to travel on government business. The travel directive provides for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses necessarily incurred while travelling on government business, and does not constitute income or other compensation that would open the way for personal gain. The ability to meet face to face will enable more fair and effective engagement of the council.

The 2030 agenda rests on the interconnected nature of its goals. For example, ensuring access to clean water and sanitation supports the achievement of zero hunger and good health and well-being, by providing clean water to grow food and eliminating potential sources of disease.

To support the principles of interconnectedness, clause 5 provides that the Sustainable Development Advisory Council may advise the Minister of Environment on any matter related to sustainable development. Given that it was previously limited to reviewing the draft of the federal sustainable development strategy only, this will help to ensure that the core elements of sustainable development—social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental protection—can be further examined to ensure timely and meaningful advice to the minister.

Government Orders

All Canadians, including all levels of government, indigenous peoples, civil society, and the private sector, have a role to play in advancing the sustainable development goals and ensuring that no one is left behind.

• (1115)

In 2016, our government undertook an extensive consultation process to review our international assistance policy. Canadians showed strong support for the themes and issues addressed by the sustainable development goals. Canadians want to support the health and rights of women and children, to ensure peace and security, to provide clean economic growth and climate change, and protect governance, pluralism, diversity and human rights.

Responding to this consultation, Canada's feminist international assistance policy supports targeted investments, partnerships, innovation, and advocacy efforts with the greatest potential to close gender gaps and improve everyone's chances for success. As we implement the policy, we will strengthen our priorities through working in areas such as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human dignity, and growth that works for everyone.

Domestically, we have already begun to respond to the challenge of the 2030 agenda and the sustainable development goals through the 2016-2019 federal sustainable development strategy, our plan to promote clean growth, ensure healthy ecosystems, and to build safe, secure, and sustainable communities over the next three years.

The strategy presents 13 aspirational goals that are a Canadian reflection of the SDGs of the 2030 agenda, with a focus on their environmental dimensions. Our goals are supported by medium-term targets, short-term milestones, and clear action plans. Currently, 41 federal departments and agencies contribute to meeting our targets and advancing our goals. Our strategy was shaped by input from stakeholders and Canadians, and it recognizes the important role that our partners and all Canadians play in achieving sustainable development.

Recognizing the complex nature of coordinating the SDGs, budget 2018 announced \$49.4 million over 13 years to establish a sustainable development goals unit to provide overall policy coordination and to fund monitoring and reporting activities by Statistics Canada. To facilitate meaningful engagement, budget 2018 also provided up to \$59.8 million over 13 years for programming to support the implementation of the sustainable development goals. This means the development of an ambitious, whole-of-Canada national strategy, in consultation with provinces and territories, indigenous peoples, municipalities, universities, and civil society, to catalyze action across the country, build public awareness, and foster new partnerships and networks in advancing the sustainable development goals.

Many Canadian priorities, such as taking on climate change, clean energy, and oceans, growing and strengthening Canada's middle class, reconciliation with indigenous peoples, and advancing gender equality, already support the 2030 agenda. However, we know there is more work to do to ensure that no one is left behind. Canada's efforts to implement the 2030 agenda to date will be showcased this July at the UN high level political forum on sustainable development in New York, where we will present our first voluntary national

review. Canada's voluntary national review will highlight our efforts and achievements to date, recognizing areas where more work is needed.

In conclusion, the sustainable development goals can only be achieved if everyone is on board. This is a Canadian agenda, a shared agenda, and an agenda that calls for all hands on deck. We strongly believe that Bill C-57 is in lockstep with our commitment to a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

• (1120)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, but find some of them a little ironic. He talks repeatedly about drinking water, clean water and sanitation, clean energy, and clean oceans, and yet the environment minister, shortly after she was appointed in November of 2015, authorized the dumping of eight billion litres of raw sewage into the St. Lawrence River, and just this February, another 43 million litres of raw sewage from Quebec City. How can the member stand in the House and talk about the commitment of the government to environmental cleanliness, especially when it relates to water, when these kinds of issues are ongoing in our country.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the question is about something that is completely unrelated to the bill. Nonetheless, I will take a stab at trying to answer it.

When the minister has to make these extremely difficult decisions that no one wants to get involved in, she has to work with the infrastructure that has been built in the country today. She is working with the infrastructure that the previous government had been supporting.

The approach the member is taking is extremely short-sighted. Most Canadians, I am sure, are aware that our government is focused squarely on making sure that all first nation reserves have access to clean, safe drinking water. It is a commitment we made during the election, and it is something we are starting to see being delivered. Perhaps that is why the Conservative member is concerned, because we are able to deliver on something that they, quite frankly, could not.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is just about the only commitment you will be able to deliver on, that and pot. It is very interesting.

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

The hon. member knows full well that she is not to speak when someone else has the floor, but it seems she needs a reminder.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, the concerns remain and, indeed, have been raised by the Liberals' very own Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development .

She made some strong recommendations backed up by global organizations that deal with sustainable development and a number of world experts. Their recommendations were based on Canada's abject failure, under both Liberal and Conservative governments, over the decades to deliver on what it has promised to do, and not just under this law but under a cabinet directive that was issued in 1995.

The strong recommendation was that instead of having a low-level official buried within the Department of Environment providing the oversight, to appoint a senior central authority so that all ministries deliver on these commitments. Why has the minister not delivered on this, but is leaving to a junior official the responsibility to tell the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Defence, the Department of Natural Resources that they should start delivering on their legal obligations?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I sat on the environment committee with the member for a couple of years, and I know she is extremely passionate about this. I heard her in debate during that time as well.

The gist of my comments was about the advisory council, not only the shift to add more diverse representation to it but also the manner in which it members will be able to conduct themselves. Previously the advisory council was only allowed to talk about and critique the act specifically, and now it is being asked to give recommendations and advice to the minister, which I think is completely different from before.

There is a degree of strengthening the power of the advisory council and how it will be able to enforce, and make suggestions and recommendations to the minister.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the minister has talked about the importance of actually looking at and reviewing the act on an ongoing basis.

Could my colleague provide his thoughts on how important it is that this not be a static thing and that when we talk about sustainable development, we should continue to engage Canadians?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, that is the core principle underpinning sustainability, keeping the act in a sustainable fashion by continually going back to it, looking at it, and re-examining it to see how it can be changed.

This is definitely the right approach, and I am proud to be part of a government that is choosing to move forward on it.

• (1125)

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be joining the debate today. For people who are watching on TV or following the debate in the galleries, Bill C-57 is one of those pieces of legislation that would be in many ways be viewed more as a process piece of legislation. It is not so much about a particular policy; it is about how to set up the particular processes, the mechanisms, the various government reports, etc. to come to a

particular policy. Therefore, it is often fairly difficult to explain for people who do not live, breathe, and inhabit Parliament Hill why legislation needs to exist. However, we need certain processes and mechanisms to accomplish legislative aims.

What is fundamental about this bill is that it would expand the number of people who would be involved and the number of departments that would have to report. While that is all fairly interesting and probably useful in the long term, and may or may not have positive outcomes, I think the underlying question most Canadians want to ask is whether all these processes actually make for a better environment, do they get Canada where it wants to go. A process is only as useful as its end result.

Therefore, this is in many ways a difficult bill to comment about because we really do not know what the end result of all these changes to process will be.

What I will contribute to today's debate is to make some suggestions based upon the history and knowledge of what actually works in environmental policy, so when these processes come to fruition, the people who are involved in it will have some idea of what the various parliamentarians thought about what would be good input to have to create proper legislation in the future.

Again, to some degree, we are buying a pig in a poke today because the bill would create more fees and funding for people who would be on the advisory committees. It would require more departments to have more reports. Maybe that is good, maybe it is not, but as far as what the substance is to make the environment better, we really will not know based upon this legislation.

Let me give some advice for the House as to what has worked in history to make better, more proper, more positive environmental legislation.

For all the talk we have nowadays from the Liberal government about what works or what does not, the Liberals have not looked at the broader scope of world history to see what has fundamentally made our environment better. I know this may get some challenges from some parts of the House, but one of the things that has been most useful and successful as far as making the environment better has been the rise of capitalism and free enterprise.

Around the world, the countries that were the first and earliest to embrace capitalism and free enterprise now have the best environment. They may be drifting away from the free enterprise system, but systematically this is one of those things that cannot be disputed from history.

In places like Europe, which was having massive problems with deforestation, the Europeans brought in coal technology. The market brought it in to replace wood for energy. They began to use things like the market mechanisms to move food around the world. Ships that were run by oil, diesel, fuels, and coal were able to take food from parts of the world, such as North America, Europe, and various other places, and move it around.

How did that help the environment? Very simply, instead of local areas having to use their marginal resources to produce food, they were able to bring it from different parts of the world by using market mechanisms.

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Technology has also helped to improve the environment. One of the ironies of the expanding debate around fracking and tight shale and different things about that, is these technologies have helped to create a greater supply of natural gas, lowering the price for natural gas which then replaces coal. I am no critic of the coal industry, but natural gas, when it is used for electricity, produces less greenhouse gases than coal.

• (1130)

Here is the irony. Petroleum engineers, through free enterprise, have done more to cut greenhouse gases than all the government regulations proposed by the various left-wing regimes around the world. If we look at the other place in the world, where there were major cuts to greenhouse gases, it was after the collapse of the Soviet Communist bloc in Eastern Europe. They got rid of the heavy industry that was subsidized by the socialist-communist regimes of Eastern Europe. That was why the European Union was able to claim such massive credits. However, the irony of it all, for all the talk about regulation and taxation that the Liberal government puts forward, is that free enterprise and capitalism have actually done more for the environment than anything else. This is not surprising when we look at what people take responsibility for. They take responsibility for their own actions and their own property.

I used to live in the former Soviet Union for a short while as it was transitioning to becoming the various republics and independent nations it is now. I could see, as was to be expected, that people had environmental respect of their own property. However, for the broader collectively owned property, they did not. Free enterprise, responsibility, and all those basic things work to help protect the environment.

If we look at what the current government is doing, it has not been following those historical patterns. It has not looked at what broadly works to integrate with human nature to do it. Its ultimate policy is to do things like Bill C-57, which is about process, more talking, more reports, and more people being appointed to more committees to get more per diems and more payments, and so forth. Unfortunately that all tends to lead to more taxes and more regulation. The whole drive of the Liberal Party's environmental policy is to tax more and more.

What do people naturally do when they are taxed more? They do not necessarily change their behaviour in regard to the environment. They would if it were their own property and they needed to preserve and protect it. They do what people naturally should do. They try to avoid these carbon taxes.

I worked with the Saskatchewan Mining Association, which has been trying to communicate with the Minister of Environment, and not all that successfully I might add. However, it is very clear that it wants to work and do the best job it can for the environment. However, if the government overtaxes it with carbon taxes and regulations that have no basis in reality, its investment will move. Therefore, we do not actually clean up the environment. We do not actually have a better environmental outcome. What we do when we put on these carbon taxes and other regulations that are unnecessary for environmental improvement is that we move the industrial activity, hurt the Canadian economy, and do nothing to improve the environment.

If we tax electric plants in Canada that are generated by coal and we tax them so they move from Saskatchewan to North Dakota, all we have done is kill economic activity in Canada and moved it to the United States. We have not done anything to improve the environment.

This is what I encourage the government to do today. Process legislation is fine. Bills such as Bill C-57 could, if the process is actually implemented, do something positive.

Here is my challenge to other members of the House. When we look to support legislation, such as the bill before us, look to see what the historical record shows has been done to improve the environment. It has not been taxes, big government, or big government regulations. It has been people taking their own initiative under a free market, free enterprise systems, doing what they can with private property rights to improve it. That is what the historical record has shown and that is what we can expect to see in the future.

Again, a policy of big taxes, more regulation, and more government interference and bureaucracy will not improve the environment.

I realize I will not have convinced all of my hon. colleagues in the House, but I hope they are willing to enter into a discussion on what fundamentally will help improve the Canadian environment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 10 years ago, the Province of Alberta came up with the specified gas emitters regulation. In essence, it was putting a price on pollution. By the way, it was a Progressive Conservative government that came up with the initiative. It led the country and North America. It was the first jurisdiction to say that we needed to have a price on pollution.

That seemed to be okay with the Province of Alberta 10 years ago. Alberta's economy, despite the ups and downs of the price of oil, has done relatively well. The last few years has been a bit of a challenge, but the people of Alberta are rebounding because of the price of oil. However, I would argue that the Progressive Conservative price on pollution 10 years ago has not hampered Alberta's economic performance.

Does the member across the way believe that the Conservative government back then was wrong to put a price on pollution?

• (1135)

Mr. Brad Trost: Madam Speaker, I would have not put the price on emissions that the then Progressive Conservative government in Alberta did.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, sometimes when we are holding up competing models, we tend to fall in the trap of going either one way or the other. I think most Canadians want a bit of both. We can have totally free unbridled to market capitalism or the extremes of communism.

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However, I think most Canadians agree that we want to allow small businesses and industries the freedom to go out and employ people, to make profits, and so on. Also, I think Canadians want to ensure there is a clear set of rules so everyone is playing equally. I know that is the case for many small business owners, who I count as friends and supporters. They want regulations to ensure a level playing field.

When it comes to environmental sustainability and looking after pollution, there are numerous examples in the corporate world where corporate boards have chosen to maximize profit. If, in some cases, that means polluting the environment, they have gone down that route.

I hope the member appreciates that we have to meet each other halfway in order to make the system work, where people have that freedom, but also there is a level playing field with a clear set of rules that applies equally to everyone.

Mr. Brad Trost: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's remarks, but I will point this out. It is often big business that has the least difficulty dealing with these government regulations. They have the resources. They have the lawyers. They have the capital. In fact, sometimes we can see big business supporting government regulation because it will be a more onerous burden on their smaller competitors and therefore allow for a more monopolistic market.

It is often the small businesses, the individual proprietors, people like them who suffer the most. Someone such as myself, who came from the mining industry and worked with the junior mining companies, I know they were often the ones that had the biggest difficulty meeting the regulatory burdens that the government put into place. The big players have the resources. It is often the little guy who suffers the most when these sort of regulations are put into play.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government makes the assertion that its carbon tax policy is aimed at addressing admissions, yet it is a policy that by its very structure can have no emissions targets embedded in it. The Liberals have their emissions targets on the one hand and their carbon tax policy on the other hand. However, imposing a tax does not give one any sense of a specific target embedded in that policy. Very clearly, this is about raising revenue for the government.

Could my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Brad Trost: Madam Speaker, it is fairly clear that the Liberals have a large deficit. They need to find extra revenue. They are trying to put together a moral rationalization for them to raise extra revenues due to their excessive spending. The carbon tax is about that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can assure members, particularly the member who asked the question, that this is not the case. There is an expectation, and unlike the Conservative Party, we, as a political entity, believe it is important to listen to Canadians. Quite often the Conservatives are completely out of touch with what Canadians believe are important issues, but we, as a government, are responding to what Canadians expect of good government.

Today we have before us legislation that deals with sustainable development, and believe it or not, Canadians support sustainable development. That is why we believe they would support this legislation. It is encouraging, I must say, that we appear to have support from all members of the House. All members are speaking in favour of the legislation itself, and it would have been nice to be debating this particular piece of legislation at third reading.

I question why the member for Abbotsford brought forward an amendment. I would ask my colleagues to reflect on this. A standing committee reviewed the bill. This particular amendment would get rid of the advisory council. When the member for Abbotsford stood to give his explanation, what did he say? He said he wanted clarification that no one on the advisory council would get remuneration. That is what the member for Abbotsford was hoping to get all members of the House to appreciate and understand. He was, therefore, suggesting that this clause be deleted. By deleting this clause, we would get rid of the advisory council. The advisory council is something I understand every member of this House supports, and yet he wants us to get rid of it.

To further complicate it, the member for Abbotsford, who was at committee, proposed an amendment at committee stage. Get this: the Conservative Party, through the member for Abbotsford, moved an amendment providing clarification that members of the advisory council would have their expenses covered. If they have to fly to Ottawa, their plane tickets would be paid for. He suggested an amendment that in essence supported the advisory council. It is no surprise that it was accepted. It was not only the government that supported that amendment; New Democrats did too. Now the member for Abbotsford wants to delete it. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever, unless, of course, the Conservative Party is moving an amendment for the sake of moving an amendment. Conservatives say they support sustainable development and the legislation, yet they move an amendment that makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

What would have happened had the member for Abbotsford not moved the amendment? It would have meant that today we would be debating the bill at third reading. Instead of talking about an amendment that should never have happened, we would be talking about the important issue of sustainable development. That is why, with the remaining time, I would like to talk about the importance of that issue.

There has been a great deal of work on this legislation. The draft strategy was put together and presented to Canadians in different forums. There were hundreds of submissions from different stakeholders and individual Canadians who had the opportunity to express their thoughts, priorities, and ideas on important legislation. It was very much appreciated and welcomed. The minister responsible and the staff did a fantastic job in reaching out beyond the Ottawa circle.

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•(1140)

However, we also had a standing committee, which came up with ideas, recommendations, and reflections on what could be done to give more strength to the legislation itself. We had a standing committee, and the parliamentary secretary made reference to it when he said that we had all parties build a consensus to move forward on the issue of sustainable development and what that should look like in the form of an act. We actually had Conservatives, New Democrats, and Greens working together with government to try to improve legislation. Personally, I think Canadians would have loved to have seen that. Canadians can be assured that there was a high sense of co-operation from all sides of this House. The minister and the parliamentary secretary did a fantastic job in putting together legislation that we could all get behind and support.

It goes to second reading, and again it receives a favourable response. It goes to committee, and once again amendments were suggested and brought forward. The amendments—not all, but in good part—were supported, and some were incorporated into the legislation itself.

I can appreciate that things can always be made better. The Prime Minister of Canada often talks about how we can improve and make things better. We are genuinely open. That is one of the reasons that in the legislation there is the reference to the need for an ongoing review over five years. For sustainable development, all sorts of ideas could be generated in the meantime, so we want to ensure that the dialogue, discussion, and debate do not end the day this bill receives royal assent. It is actually incorporated in the legislation itself.

My NDP friends often say “what about this?” or “what about that?”. They are very quick to be critical of government. Sometimes it is constructive and sometimes it is more of a filibuster. I believe that for the most part, on this legislation, their attempts were meant to be constructive. We appreciate that.

In the case of indigenous issues, it is about working with indigenous peoples so that projects can move forward with some sort of consensus-building with different stakeholders. In this legislation, we are saying we have this fantastic Sustainable Development Advisory Council, and within that council indigenous representation will be guaranteed. That is very positive.

It is in keeping with what the Prime Minister said we need to do: not only re-establishing but supporting and enhancing that relationship between indigenous people, the Government of Canada, and Canadians as a whole. This legislation makes a genuine attempt to do that, at least in part, in a small way that still counts, that still matters and is significant.

This is something we see as a very strong positive. Imagine more transparency through engaging additional departments and agencies by the dozen. We are going to have more accountability and transparency through other departments and agencies with the passage of this legislation. Again, we see that as a positive thing.

Let me conclude my remarks by commenting that I believe the constituency I represent believes it is important to see both economic action and action on the environment too. In fact, sustainable

development is all about ensuring that the economy and the environment work hand in hand. That is something we have consistently said, not only prior to the election but after the election as well.

•(1145)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things the bill talks about extensively is sustainable development. The part about being sustainable is that whatever process is happening could continue into infinity, essentially. If it is a sustainable practice, it can continue.

I wonder if the hon. member feels that the current practice of his government in terms of deficit spending is sustainable.

•(1150)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I did not quite expect an issue related to the budget as a question, but let me attempt to answer it. The member has the right to ask the question, and I would be more than happy to answer that particular question.

When we talk about deficits, I would suggest to my friend that we need to look at it from a historical perspective also. When Paul Martin was prime minister, he left office with a multi-billion-dollar surplus. That multi-billion-dollar surplus was converted into a multi-billion-dollar deficit under Stephen Harper, even before the recession had taken place. Stephen Harper, at the end of the day, added in excess of \$150 billion to the national deficit. Then, in the last election, during the campaign, we talked about investing in Canadians, investing in new infrastructure, and assisting Canada's middle class and those aspiring to join it. We are fulfilling that commitment.

However, what we will not do, I hope, is follow the advice from Conservatives with respect to deficits, because every time they have had the opportunity to govern the country, they have had deficits, especially under Stephen Harper.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague really hit the nail on the head about halfway through his speech when he started to talk about the motive behind this particular amendment.

I sat on the environment committee when we discussed this particular strategy and when the strategy was going through committee, and he is absolutely correct that it was the member for Abbotsford who brought forward this section of the legislation, for which he has now put forward an amendment in the House to delete. We took the time to discuss his amendment in committee. We voted on it. We treated it in good faith. Then the bill comes to this place, and now the same member who put forward the motion, the member for Abbotsford, the Conservative, is asking us to remove it.

I do not want to be overly cynical, but what could possibly be the motive? I would be curious to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, in 20-plus years as a parliamentarian, I have seen all sorts of amendments and parliamentary tactics and so forth. If I reflect on the amendment that is being proposed for this legislation, it makes absolutely no sense at all. The only thing that is possible is that it is an attempt to try to slow down the passage of the legislation.

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The Conservatives tell Canadians that they support the legislation. On the one hand they say they support the legislation, but then they bring in an amendment that makes absolutely no sense. It is meant to do only one thing, to slow down the process, to filibuster, yet they say they support the legislation. It is a tactic that is often used toward the end of a session, but usually with legislation that is opposed, not supported.

If the Conservatives are going to move an amendment, they should at least do some homework on it. They should understand how they are amending the legislation. If members in the Conservative Party really reflect on the amendment, my recommendation would be to not support what the member for Abbotsford has put forward. It will be interesting to watch the vote, because if their vote is to prevail, there would be no advisory council. A lot of the fine work the member for Abbotsford did in the committee stage would be reversed.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always happy to take part in debates in the House, especially on this issue. It is also always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Winnipeg North and his prose.

[English]

I can assure all members, and especially the member for Winnipeg North, that I will support the member for Abbotsford, because I know that he is on the right side. Based on his experience as a senior cabinet minister under our government, I know that he achieved great things for Canadians. I am sure he is on the right track.

• (1155)

[Translation]

We are gathered here today to discuss Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act. I will remind the House that this bill seeks to enhance, improve, change, and amend the initial bill, which had been adopted, tabled, and debated in 2008 by our government, under the guidance of the Hon. John Baird, then minister of the environment.

Various elements are addressed in this bill, but it is essentially about the environment. The speech I am going to make today is about the Liberal government's achievements and track record, considered against the commitments it made and the legacy we left behind from our time in government.

Let us look at the facts. In its electoral platform, the Liberal Party made numerous references to the environment scattered over more than 10 pages. Page 39 said that the Liberal government would "take action on climate change, put a price on carbon, and reduce carbon pollution."

There are three assertions there: take action on climate change, put a price on carbon, and reduce carbon pollution. The first is debatable. The second is a promise that the Liberals did keep. The third is one they did not. That is the reality.

It is not the Conservatives who are saying so, but a neutral and objective authority, the Auditor General, who analyzed every step this government has taken in the past 31 months with regard to the environment.

The Auditor General reached three fundamental conclusions in his report to Parliament on the environment and sustainable development. Let us look at what he had to say in that report.

First, the Auditor General found that the Liberal government failed to reach the targets set when the Paris Agreement was signed. Second, he found that there has not been any improvements with regard to greenhouse gas emissions. Third, he found that the federal government is not providing the proper and necessary leadership to fight climate change with the support and co-operation of the provinces. The environment is a federal-provincial joint responsibility and we need to work with the provinces.

The Auditor General found that the government failed in these three key areas, which are meeting targets, making progress, and providing leadership while working together with the provinces. The Auditor General said that.

This could undermine the efforts that must be made and the realities to which Canadians are accustomed when it comes time to take action on greenhouse gas emissions.

In fact, the Liberal strategy was quite simple. They would impose a Liberal carbon tax on all Canadians. Let us remember that the Prime Minister famously said in this place that the Liberals would work with the provinces and invited them to implement a carbon tax or participate in a carbon exchange.

At first, this makes sense. However, we should not overlook what else was said, namely that if the provinces did not agree, a carbon tax would be imposed on them.

That does not really show leadership. That is forcing the provinces to do what they are told, or it will be rammed down their throats.

That is the approach of a Liberal government that came to power by saying that it would work with the provinces. If they do not cooperate, the government will force them to do what it wants. We do not believe that this is the right approach.

We should remember that this government has a study in hand that indicates what the impact of the Liberal carbon tax will be on Canadian families, a report that is not available to Canadians. We submitted an access to information request, which we now have in hand.

I will quote this study, which spells out the cost to families of the Liberal carbon tax:

...the potential impact of a carbon price on households' consumption expenditures across the income distribution. The key findings are:

The rest is blacked out. All of the information has been redacted. When people are ashamed of their numbers, they hide them. When they are proud of their numbers, they make them public. In this case, not only are they not making the numbers public, but they are also hiding them. Apparently they do not want Canadians to know how the proposed Liberal carbon tax will impact them directly.

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In our view, the Liberals are out of line. Let me remind the House that if the provinces happen to want to introduce carbon taxes and if they happen to want to introduce their own carbon exchanges, that is their choice. I have first-hand experience with that. In 2011, I represented Chauveau in the National Assembly. There was a debate on whether Quebec should join the carbon exchange. Some people were in favour of it and others were against it. The political party I led at the time was against it. There was a proper debate. There was a debate and a vote, and Quebec has had a carbon exchange ever since. I was against it then, and I still am. People got to pass judgment on my stance three times, and I was elected three times with a clear majority each time. I was perfectly fine with that.

Just because someone is against the carbon tax and the carbon exchange does not mean that they are against the environment, on the contrary. People are smart enough to differentiate between the Liberals' partisan position and the facts.

The facts might surprise some because the propaganda we keep hearing about how the Conservatives were against the environment, did nothing for the environment, and are the enemies of the environment is completely false and not backed by facts. We hear this propaganda far too often.

Our government started by implementing a green plan, Canada EcoTrust, a \$1.5-billion program, with the support and co-operation of the provinces to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a scientific, tangible, and practical way. Hon. members will recall that in February 2007, the Charest provincial government and the federal Conservative government agreed to invest \$349.9 million to fight climate change. That was done with the help of technology to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and it worked.

Those who claim the Conservative government did nothing are lying to Canadians. We worked in collaboration with the provinces, as well as private companies. I am in the best position to talk about it because there is a high-tech environmental firm in my riding called CO2 Solutions. For over 10 years, it has been working with Natural Resources Canada to shrink the Alberta oil industry's environmental footprint. Its methods are working. I am very proud of this company from my riding, because we believe that putting the ingenuity of private enterprise at the service of greenhouse gas reduction efforts is a promising approach.

Our government's track record therefore boasts a 2.2% decrease in greenhouse gases and a 16.9% increase in GDP. That is the perfect combination: tackling greenhouse gas emissions and growing Canada's economy.

Others will say that this is not true at all. I say that it is true. Public television viewers may have been a bit surprised last week when I answered an incisive question directly with that statistic. To silence the skeptics, I quickly put the information online, and I am pleased to repeat that statistic. The information comes from Natural Resources Canada:

Between 2005 and 2015, Canada's GHG emissions in the energy sector decreased 2.2% while real GDP grew by 16.9%.

That is the reality. Those are the facts. That is the Conservative track record. We had a real policy coupling economic prosperity with greenhouse gas reduction, unlike this government, which is not even capable of meeting its own targets, which incidentally are the targets

that we set when we were in government and that were subsequently adopted by the Liberal government, President Obama, and the entire planet in the Paris Agreement.

• (1200)

That is the Conservative track record, and we are very proud of it.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Speaker, when the Progressive Conservative party in the Province of Alberta was in power, it was the very first government in North America to bring in a price on pollution, and my colleague and friend, who articulates quite well, commented on the Province of Quebec and how it had a debate on carbon pricing in its legislature. We know that the Province of Ontario and the Province of British Columbia have a price on pollution. However, we also know that at times there is an important role for the national government to play, whether it be going to Paris and having discussions there and then meeting with the provinces in Vancouver, where there was a discussion and the feeling that we need to have a national system with price on pollution.

Does my colleague across the way not agree that at times and in certain sections we need to have strong national leadership, and that when Canadians are concerned about climate change, now is the time we should be listening to what they have to say and to have a national price on pollution?

• (1205)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I agree with some of the comments made by my colleague from Winnipeg North. Yes, we need strong federal leadership, but it has failed. The current government has failed. It was the Auditor General who said in his report that there is no strong federal leadership. That is because the government is imposing a Liberal carbon tax on each and every one who does not have a carbon tax or a cap and trade deal. Let me remind all members that this responsibility belongs to each and every province. If Parliament would like to have a carbon tax, go for it, vote for it, and then decide what it wants, but it is not the role, as far as we are concerned, of the federal government to impose something on the provinces. On the other hand, we suggest giving a hand to those who want to protect our environment. That is exactly what we did in 2007 with our program with such great success, providing \$1.5 billion in direct, good investment for protection of the environment. In French, we call it "*éco-fiducie*". This is why we had the right approach, and the Liberals do not have it.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear the member speak and it is fun to work with him.

The problem is that we have a bit of a reality check here, as I mentioned in response to the Liberal members. The truth of the matter is that when the commissioner responsible for auditing whether both governments had delivered on the sustainable development obligations audited them, both governments abjectly failed.

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For the entire 10 years of the Harper government, the commissioner failed that government on delivering on what it had promised to do: balancing the environment and economic development. We hear that over and over again. What his previous government did was to promise oil and gas regulations. Did it ever deliver those? The Conservatives thought regulations were the answer, but gosh darn, they did not do it. Perhaps the member could speak to that. The Conservatives are saying they have a plan. Are they still going to promise the same measures they did not implement when they were in power?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, the point is that the facts are clear: *les réductions de gaz à effet de serre* to 2.2%, and growth of the economy by 16.9%. Those are the facts. Yes, I can assure the member and all Canadians that we will have a strong platform on that issue, and I welcome the time when we will be in an election in 18 months.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, my colleague gives some of the best speeches around here, no doubt. One of very interesting things in his speech was the good numbers he cited. He said he had posted them on the Internet. Where on the Internet did the member put them?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I put them on Twitter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):

[Member spoke in Cree]

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and speak in support of Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act. I would like to acknowledge the great work that was done by members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Of the many recommendations put forward by the committee, I would like to focus on the recommendations to introduce amendments to the Federal Sustainable Development Act that would enable a whole-of-government approach and comprehensive engagement of all central government agencies in the development and implementation of the federal sustainable development strategy. I am going to speak to the House today about the roles and responsibilities of the various players in implementing the Federal Sustainable Development Act. These include the federal sustainable development strategy departments and agencies, the sustainable development office, parliamentarians, and the main purpose of this debate, the Sustainable Development Advisory Council.

When we think about a whole-of-government approach to sustainable development, we know that it can be accomplished in a number of ways.

First, Bill C-57 introduces some changes that would expand the act's coverage to include all federal organizations named in schedules I, I.1, and II to the Financial Administration Act, more than 90, in total compared to 26 in the current act. The act also provides for adding other entities at a later date and for removing entities.

While Environment and Climate Change Canada coordinates the development of the federal sustainable development strategy and its

progress reports, these documents are the product of a collaborative effort involving all implicated federal organizations. The bill would require departments and agencies bound by the act to contribute to the development of the federal sustainable development strategy and its progress reports. It would also strengthen the accountabilities of all departments and agencies by requiring annual reporting to parliamentary committees.

Second, under an amended act, primary responsibility for the federal sustainable development strategy would remain with Environment and Climate Change Canada. However, Bill C-57 would formalize Treasury Board's role in leading greening government operation efforts. The bill provides that the Treasury Board may establish policies or issue directives applicable to organizations covered by the act in relation to the sustainable development impact of their operations.

Parliamentarians must also play an important role to ensure a whole-of-government approach to the FSDA when strategies and progress reports are tabled and referred to committees. Furthermore, Bill C-57 allows for the permanent review of the act, which further provides parliamentarians with the ability to ensure that the act takes a whole-of-government approach and remains, most importantly, transparent.

Stakeholders—which include parliamentarians, the Sustainable Development Advisory Council, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, non-governmental organizations, academia, associations, and Canadians—would also play a major role in developing the FSDS by providing input and feedback on the development and drafting of the FSDS.

In fact, under Bill C-57, the sustainable development office at Environment and Climate Change Canada would remain required to consult with stakeholders and Canadians for feedback and input into the FSDS for a period of 120 days. Under the current act, comments received from stakeholders and Canadians are summarized in a consultation synthesis report that is produced and posted to the web by the office, and these comments inform the final federal sustainable development strategy and subsequent progress reports. However, Bill C-57 moves one step further by stating that designated entities under the bill shall take into account comments made under public consultation.

Finally, and the reason for this debate, the sustainable development office is to seek advice from the Sustainable Development Advisory Council, the SDAC, as part of its governance structure and its consultation and engagement process.

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When we first started the debate, it was led off by the Conservatives, who came up with a beautiful little statement that they felt they were being misled by the Prime Minister. Incredibly enough, we were misled by the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, for he cancelled the national round table on the environment and the economy, the NRTEE, which was a Canadian advisory agency founded by the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada in response to the 1987 United Nations document “Our Common Future”. The NRTEE focused on sustaining Canada's prosperity without borrowing resources from future generations or compromising their ability to live securely. The Conservative government of Stephen Harper ended funding to the NRTEE, which ceased to exist on March 31, 2013.

● (1210)

The national round table was an independent policy advisory agency of the Government of Canada. Its mandate was to raise awareness among Canadians and their governments about the challenges of sustainable development. Over 25 years it released dozens of reports on priority issues—forests, brownfields, infrastructure, energy, water, air, climate change, and more. It offered advice to governments on how best to consolidate and integrate the often divergent challenges of economic prosperity and environmental conservation. It brought together hundreds of leaders and experts with first-hand knowledge in a diversity of areas. Its members, appointed by the federal government, were active in businesses, universities, environmentalism, labour, public policy, and community life across Canada.

On March 21, 2013, the Conservative government, in the decade of darkness under Stephen Harper, eliminated the budget for the NRTEE, effectively ending it. The then environment minister initially offered the rationale that the funding was unnecessary because Canadians could at that time access climate change research through the Internet, universities, and think tanks.

However, in response to a question in the House of Commons, then foreign affairs minister John Baird said the government should not be funding the round table because it had issued a series of reports advocating a form of carbon pricing, which he said the people of Canada had repeatedly rejected. He said the round table should agree with Canadians and should agree with the government and should not offer independent advice.

The round table released several reports that concluded that the federal government would have to act more aggressively in order to reach its Kyoto protocol target of a 17% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels by 2020.

On March 26, 2013, the then minister of the environment issued a directive preventing the round table from transferring its research and the contents of its website to Sustainable Prosperity, a national research network based at the University of Ottawa. Instead, he said, Environment Canada would lay claim to all previous work, which was promised to remain accessible to the public. However, the move appeared to leave the fate of the two unpublished documents on the history, role, and relationship of the round table to the government uncertain. These reflections of past leaders of the NRTEE were subsequently leaked and posted on the Internet.

It is important that under this legislation the Sustainable Development Advisory Council would play an important role by advising the minister on any matter related to sustainable development that is referred to it by the minister. More specifically, it would ensure that the government takes a whole-of-government view, seeking the advice and expertise of Canadians who reflect our country's diversity of background, ethnicity, age, gender, and circumstance.

Research indicates that several OECD member countries have a national sustainable development commission or council similar to our Sustainable Development Advisory Council. These councils often meet on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

Moreover, reforms to the Sustainable Development Advisory Council set out in Bill C-57 would enhance inclusiveness by increasing representation of indigenous peoples from three members to six, by clarifying that the Sustainable Development Advisory Council has a broad mandate to provide advice on sustainable development, and by enabling more effective engagement.

There are governance mechanisms already in place to ensure proper oversight of the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. The additional provisions in clause 5 of Bill C-57 will help to ensure that the best possible advice and guidance is provided on issues that touch all Canadians.

I hope that all of us in the House can support our common desire to make decision-making related to development more transparent, promote coordinated action across the Government of Canada, and ensure we receive maximum benefit from the Sustainable Development Advisory Council based on expert advice using data and science.

● (1215)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at one point in my colleague's speech he talked about a 120-day consultation. I am wondering if he could elaborate on what that 120 days is all about.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Simply put, Mr. Speaker, under Bill C-57 the sustainable development office at Environment and Climate Change Canada would remain required to consult with stakeholders and Canadians for feedback and input into the FSDS for a period of 120 days.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development's recommendations was to “clarify that sustainable development encompasses and requires thorough consideration of economic, social and environmental factors.”

Government Orders

That is not what is in the bill, and I would like to know why.

• (1220)

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I did not understand the question in French.

Could the member rephrase her question?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Would the member for Hochelaga please repeat her question?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I will try to speak a little slower.

The Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development made several recommendations. One of them was to “clarify that sustainable development encompasses and requires thorough consideration of economic, social and environmental factors.”

That is not reflected in this bill. Why?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that with all the mechanisms provided in the bill, such as the advisory council, we will be able to hear a variety of expert opinions. I am sure that Environment and Climate Change Canada will have all the data and resources needed to ensure environmentally sustainable development.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. colleague the first time when he said what the 120 days were for, but he emphasized it a second time, as if he was incredulous about the 120 days and there was some other meaning to the 120 days that he was concerned about. Because he repeated it a second time, I am wondering what the incredulity about the 120 days was.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, 120 days is an adequate amount of time for people to consult with stakeholders, prepare a report, and report back. It is just about holding people to account.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, someone I have gotten to know and who I know is very sensitive on a number of files.

On the issue of sustainable development, I would ask for his thoughts from an indigenous perspective on just how important the environment is and why indigenous consultations take place on projects when it comes to matters of economic development.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member for Winnipeg North, my esteemed from colleague just north of me, from the member for Winnipeg Centre.

It is interesting that he should talk about sustainable development among indigenous communities. In Manitoba, six years ago, there was a flood. People were not planning for sustainable development for the environment, and an indigenous community was flooded just outside of both of our ridings. There was an NDP government at the time, and it is just recently that members of the community have been able to move back into their homes with funding from our government at the federal level. This is important, because these

communities are often impacted by flooding because they are seen, or were seen, as being very unimportant.

We are looking at how to build bridges between different peoples and how to ensure that all peoples who make up the diversity of Canada are represented not only on the advisory council but in government decisions, using the whole-of-government approach to ensure we have not only a diversity of opinions but expertise from across all government agencies that have a role and an impact on sustainable development.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this particular bill. The bill has the stated objective of ensuring sustainable development and improving accountability and transparency. I would like to talk about those three concepts. I know that they are often talked about in this place, so I am pleased to stand up today to add my voice, the representative voice for Peace River—Westlock, to this debate.

We have a lot of things going on these days, but today I would like to move a motion. I seek the unanimous consent of the House for the adoption of the motion, seconded by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, that the standing orders be amended by deleting Standing Orders 57, 61, and 78.

• (1225)

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

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence, and I appreciate the audience that has returned. There they go again. However, I know for sure that my biggest fan is here today, so I will be pleased to speak to her if nobody else is available to listen to my speech today.

My speech has three points I want to discuss: sustainable development, transparency, and accountability. One of the parts of this bill I am incredibly pleased about is increasing the number of indigenous voices on the advisory councils. That is an important part. Indigenous people bring something I am very pleased about, which is the whole concept of the Creator. Whenever they are talking about the environment or working in this space, they always bring in the Creator. Whenever we are in the presence of first nations people, we see that they like to start events with a prayer, and they always recognize the Creator. When it comes to talking about sustainable development, an important aspect is this interplay between people and creation, and how that works in terms of public policy.

It would be a good addition to have these voices there, which understand that creation is not ours but granted to us by a higher being. That would temper and allow us to see ourselves as managers. I think that this would be a good voice at these tables. We are to manage the creation because it has been endowed to us by the Creator. I am really excited to see how these new bodies will work this all out.

Government Orders

Sustainable development is sometimes a bit of a loaded term, so I would like to talk about that as well. In my mind, sustainable development means that whatever we develop can go on in perpetuity. That would be what it means to be sustainable. Now, when we talk about it in environmental terms, we are often asking if the environment can handle it. In many cases, there is not just one lens through which to look at any particular issue. It is not just the environment that can be looked at. The idea first nations bring is that there is a Creator who will then look at it. That is a better way to look at particular issues, rather than through just one lens, the environment. It is good to look at sustainability in terms of how it impacts people, children, the vulnerable, and finances. Something is not sustainable if it goes broke. That is another part of sustainable development that we need to undertake.

In the House, I think we all agree about sustainable development, but we often have very different ideas about what the term “sustainable development” even means.

I have four minutes left. Well, that is unfortunate, but if four minutes is all I have left, I will have to work with that.

I do not think the Liberals really understand sustainable development, particularly when we see their own budgets. If we want this country to develop sustainably, we would not run massive deficits into the never-ending future. With the current rate of spending by the government, I would be a very old man by the time we get to balancing the budget, if we continue on this path. All this does is place an increased burden on our children and grandchildren.

●(1230)

I am happy to support this particular bill, but I would call on the Liberal government to get an understanding of what “sustainable” actually means.

That brings us to the whole idea of transparency. Once again, this is a great concept. I think all of us in this place want transparency in government. That is something that is very important. Once again, we see that the government talks a good game when it comes to transparency. The Liberal platform in the last election said great things about transparency. The Liberals were going to open up a whole new level of transparency, as the Prime Minister said.

However, when it comes to the carbon tax, the entire thing was blacked out when we asked what the cost of the new carbon tax imposed by the Liberals would be to the average Canadian family. The Liberals are not being transparent.

Once again, I am happy that we are all supportive of this particular bill. I am happy that it is improving transparency, and yet, as is often the case, every party in this place uses the word “transparency” to mean different things. In the case of the Liberals, they just say words and expect that everybody will believe them, just as they say that the pipeline will be built. We have to see if that is actually going to happen.

I am happy to support transparency. I am happy to support this bill. However, once again, I call on the Liberal government to reflect on the fact that while it says it supports transparency, its actions speak louder than words.

I get the impression that my time is coming to a close.

Finally, we have the word “accountable”. Whenever the government talks about accountability, it does so with its hand on its heart, and yet it is always frustrating to see that the government is not necessarily always accountable. The Liberals see the word “accountable” and think about their bank accounts and how they can put more money in their bank accounts, rather than being accountable.

We have seen it over and over again with the ethics scandals that have been going on, and also pay-to-play. The Liberals then say, “Oh well, we have been caught, and now we will fix the problem. Sorry, we did not understand.”

Accountability is a great thing to be supporting. Once again, I call on the Liberal government to reflect upon what it means when it says “accountable”. When it says that it wants to be an accountable government, it should actually do the things that it takes to be accountable.

With that, I would like to close my speech. I am happy to support this bill and its efforts toward sustainable development, transparency, and accountability. I hope that the Liberal government of the day reflects on those three items, reforms its ways, and comes to some sort of semblance of sustainable development, transparency, and accountability.

●(1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member wants to see action as opposed to words. Within this legislation, there is action on all three. We have seen a high sense of co-operation among the different parties at the committee stage.

We talk about accountability. Here is the question I would put to my friend across the way. The mover of the motion to amend the legislation in committee put in an amendment to ensure that the advisory council would receive some form of compensation for things such as travel. The amendment that the member for Abbotsford put forward today is going to delete the amendment that the Conservatives put in at the committee stage. What sense of accountability do the Conservatives get out of putting in an amendment to change the legislation and then taking away the changes they put in at the committee stage? It does not make any sense.

Is the member going to support this amendment, based on what he now knows about the amendment?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting the amendment. The member for Abbotsford moved the amendment, and I trust his judgment on this.

I know what he has told me. Whenever the Liberal government builds some new form of entity, it always comes with lots of paid positions. The Liberal government loves to spend taxpayers' money. With this particular amendment, we are standing up for the taxpayers and ensuring that they are fairly compensated and protected. In the House, there is no party, other than the Conservative Party of Canada, that stands up for the taxpayers.

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does my colleague agree that economic, social and environmental factors should be treated equally when it comes to legislation on sustainable development? Furthermore, whether he agrees or not, does he think that this is reflected in this bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague asked if social and economic pressures should be taken into account whenever we are making decisions when it comes to sustainable development. I think I addressed this at the beginning of my speech. However, if the member is now asking if they are equal, I think that possibly is the difference.

Everybody typically has the same set of values, but it is just how they are ordered that determines how people make decisions. Therefore, I am not sure these would always necessarily have equal weighting when taking things into account, whether that be the social or environmental aspect. I am not sure how we would determine if they are to be equal. One person may put more weight on one than the other. That is just a matter of fact. As a Canadian society, we grapple with these things.

However, the advisory council will go a long way, particularly with the first nation component that has been included in the bill. I think that is a great start. Our first nations typically have a good balance of economy, people, and the environment. I am happy to see that in this particular bill. This bill is a step in the right direction.

• (1240)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we hear a lot of discussion about sustainability from the government. However, the Liberals do not seem to have a broad appreciation of what that means. They are undertaking tax increases as an environmental policy without any real plan to actually focus on measurable improvements in the environment. By the way, their fiscal policy is entirely unsustainable: they are running massive deficits that future generations will have to pay off.

In that light, I wonder if my colleague can comment further on what the government's concept of sustainability is and how far it misses the mark on it.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, one of troubling things about the government is its very cynical approach to the environment, namely that it must be protected from Canadians. The Conservative Party's approach is that the environment must be protected for Canadians. That is the key, driving motivation.

I firmly believe that between our ears we have the capacity to solve most of the problems that present themselves when it comes to dealing with the environment, rather than just taxing Canadians in an effort to try to change their behaviours.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand again in the House on behalf of my wonderful riding of Saint John—Rothesay and to have the privilege of addressing my colleagues and to reaffirm our government's commitment to sustainable development and future generations of Canadians.

Through Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act, our government is working to ensure that decision-making related to sustainable development is more transparent, subject to accountability, and promotes coordination across the Government of Canada.

Let me begin by thanking the members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development for their excellent work. It has culminated in a unanimous report calling on the government to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act. The committee's hard work was seminal in guiding the government in the development of Bill C-57.

Stable development is critically important not just in Canada, but across the world. By adopting the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, Canada will contribute to a global framework of action that strives for global sustainable development and aims to eradicate poverty and to leave no one behind. Nobody knows more about poverty and the fight against it than I do in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

Through its participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the historic Paris Agreement, Canada is also signalling a renewed global commitment to address climate change. Our government is making sure that Canada succeeds during the clean growth century and the shift toward cleaner, more sustainable growth.

It is in this global context that we find ourselves resolutely committed to ensuring that Canada is a sustainable development leader. That is why we are proposing amendments to the Federal Sustainable Development Act that will propel us along the path to a sustainable future.

For those who are unfamiliar with the Federal Sustainable Development Act, let me say a few words about its origins, what it is, and what it does. In particular, I want to discuss how the amendments in clause 5 regarding the Sustainable Development Advisory Council would strengthen accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness in developing future strategies and how they complement action we are already taking under our current federal sustainable development strategy, FSDS.

The original act was introduced as a private member's bill by the Hon. John Godfrey in November 2007. Sustainable development was seen as such an important issue that it received all-party support in the minority 39th Parliament.

The purpose of the current act is to provide a framework to develop and implement the federal sustainable development strategy to make environmental decision-making more transparent and accountable to Parliament. The act also sets out which departments are required to develop a departmental strategy in compliance with and contribute to the federal sustainable development strategy. In addition, the act outlines the requirements to consult on a draft strategy; to create an advisory council; and to table a strategy and progress report every three years.

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A key outcome of the act is the development of the federal sustainable development strategy, which is the Government of Canada's flagship strategy on sustainable development. The strategy itself sets out Canada's sustainable development goals, targets, and implementation strategies to meet those targets.

The current federal sustainable development strategy is the strongest to date. It was developed using an inclusive, participatory approach aimed at engaging and involving all Canadians. We released a draft strategy in February 2016 and asked Canadians to share with us their vision for a sustainable Canada and to suggest how we could strengthen transparency and accountability.

The response was unprecedented. Canadians provided more than 540 written comments, 12 times the number of responses received by the previous strategy. On social media, Canadians contributed about 900 posts and replies on the draft strategy. Overall, the draft strategy reached more than 400,000 people over the course of the public consultation period. That is an outstanding response.

● (1245)

We heard from individual Canadians, who showed they are interested, engaged, and passionate about sustainable development. We also heard from provincial governments, indigenous organizations, industry, professional associations, academics, and environmental non-governmental organizations. We spoke with sustainable development advisory councils, with representatives from each province and territory, as well as members of indigenous groups, and organizations representing business and labour, and environmental non-governmental organizations, as I mentioned.

The strategy also benefited from the standing committee's review of the act and its recommendations. Evidence from the review included insightful testimony from witnesses, such as the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, and the Hon. John Godfrey, the originator of the bill that became the act.

The current federal sustainable development strategy also demonstrates a more strategic and aspirational approach than others in the past. It contains more measurable and time-bound targets, including reduction of Canada's total GHG emissions by 40% by 2030 relative to 2005 emission levels. However, we felt we could go beyond improving the strategy, to improve the act itself. That is why, spurred by the standing committee's unanimous recommendations, our government introduced Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

Our bill proposes a number of changes to the act. First, it amends the purpose of the Federal Sustainable Development Act, with a view to making decision-making related to sustainable development at large—not only environmental decision-making—more transparent and accountable to Parliament. The 2030 agenda makes it clear that sustainable development is not just about the environment, and the revised purpose recognizes this by proposing to remove the current emphasis on the environment.

The purpose also promotes co-ordinated action across the Government of Canada to advance sustainable development and respect for Canada's domestic and international obligations relating to sustainable development. The amended act would therefore recognize the 2030 agenda, the Paris Agreement, and Canada's other

international obligations that bear on the well-being of future generations of Canadians.

Bill C-57 also proposes the addition of numerous sustainable development principles. To the basic principle, the precautionary principle, already included in the Federal Sustainable Development Act, the bill adds principles on intergenerational equity, openness and transparency, the importance of involving aboriginal peoples, collaboration, and results and delivery.

Let me say a few words about these principles that would guide the government's plans and actions on sustainable development. The principles emphasize that sustainable development is a continually evolving concept, and allow the government to address new and emerging issues within future strategies. They also highlight approaches the government should consider taking when developing sustainable development strategies. In particular, the principle of intergenerational equity is the essence of sustainable development. It recognizes that the decisions we make are not just about today, but also about tomorrow and far into the future. The principle of the polluter pays and the internalization of costs are also integral to sustainable development, in recognizing that we must go beyond thinking of economic growth in conventional terms and stop seeing environmental damages as externalities.

The principle of openness and transparency supports the Federal Sustainable Development Act's stated purpose to make the decision-making related to sustainable development more transparent and subject to accountability in Parliament. The bill is about promoting a whole-of-government approach and increasing accountabilities under the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

● (1250)

Bill C-57 would dramatically increase the number of federal organizations that are covered by the act, from the current 26 to over 90. This would truly make it a whole-of-government strategy.

I hope by highlighting some of the major features of the bill, members will agree it would help to push Canada along the path toward a more sustainable future for our children, for our grandchildren, and for their children after that. I am sure all members of the House would support that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to what my colleague had to say. I want to repeat a couple of phrases that he used throughout his speech, such as environmental decision-making, sustainable development strategies, meeting our domestic and international obligations, and stopping environmental damage. I think we are all in agreement with those principles.

However, earlier today I asked one of his colleagues about the dumping of eight billion litres of raw sewage into the St. Lawrence River from Montreal. That happened in 2015, just after the government took office. Then again this year, in February, another 43 million litres of raw sewage was dumped into the St. Lawrence River from Quebec City.

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How does that kind of action, degrading our environment, fit with these four principles I heard throughout his speech, principles of environmental decision-making, sustainable development strategies, meeting our domestic and international obligations, and stopping environmental damage?

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to sustainable development and having that commitment reflected in the Federal Sustainable Development Act. Canadians have told us they want a sustainable future for Canada. The bill clearly shows that sustainable development and the environment are at the forefront of our thinking in government decision-making going forward.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think I speak for the broad majority of Canadians when I assert in the House that Canadians want sustainable development. We want to have a strong economy and we want to do it in a way that protects our environment for the long term.

One of the ways we measure that is by whether Canada is meeting its obligations for greenhouse gas emissions and carbon emissions as set out in the Paris accord. I was disappointed to see the Liberal government adopt the previous Conservative government's unambitious climate change targets. Apparently we are not even meeting those targets. Our greenhouse gas emissions are not on a trajectory where we will achieve those targets. The Prime Minister went to Paris and signed on to more onerous targets through the Paris accord, and we are nowhere near meeting those targets.

If Canada is not on target to meet our present greenhouse gas emissions targets and we are not on target to meet the Paris accord targets, could my hon. colleague explain why his government is pushing for an expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure in the country, which would no doubt make hitting those targets even harder?

• (1255)

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, it is consistent that the NDP does not think we go far enough on a lot of environmental things, yet those members do not seem to have answers themselves. We have an NDP government provincially that is supportive of a pipeline. We have a national NDP now that is against the pipeline.

Through the committee recommendations, the sustainable development bar for Canada has been raised. The committee has already been instrumental in how we develop the 2016 to 2019 federal sustainable development strategy and how it is currently being implemented. It will continue to influence development and implementation of future strategies.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, reflecting on the importance of leaving a healthy economy and environment, could my colleague share his thoughts from a constituency perspective?

Mr. Wayne Long: Mr. Speaker, my riding is Saint John—Rothesay. I do not think that is any secret. It is an industrial riding, in fact one of the most industrial ridings east of Montreal. We are also a coastal community. We have seen flooding and we have seen a change in climate. Therefore, people in my riding, including industry, understand the significance of this and the impact this would have.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to support Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

I would first like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development for their excellent work. We congratulate the committee members and the witnesses for their points of view and commitment to addressing the challenges of sustainable development in the federal government. The government supports the committee's positive approach and constructive ideas.

The committee's recommendations in its report "Federal Sustainability for Future Generations" include broadening the purpose and scope of the act, adopting well-accepted sustainable development principles, increasing the number of federal entities that prepare a sustainable development strategy, establishing criteria for the targets, improving enforceability, and engaging and empowering Canadians.

Not only were the committee's recommendations helpful in developing the bill, but the report and the recommendation played an important role in establishing the 2016-19 federal sustainable development strategy, the FSDS.

First, the strategy recognizes the role of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its global sustainable development goals. In fact, the FSDS targets are a reflection of environment-related sustainable development goals. We drew inspiration from international sustainable development goals and other international commitments in order to develop more ambitious and measurable goals, and we made a clear commitment to the principles and the adoption of a whole-of-government approach.

Reflecting the committee's comment that sustainable development goes beyond the environment, the strategy includes goals with strong social and economic dimensions, including clean growth, clean drinking water, sustainable food, and safe and healthy communities.

Second, the strategy addresses the committee's recommendation for strong targets and increased accountability by including more ambitious and measurable targets compared with the draft 2016-19 strategy and past strategies. For example, it establishes a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from federal government operations by 40% by 2030, which is significantly more ambitious than the draft strategy's 30%-reduction target. It also reflects the government's commitment to address long-term drinking water advisories in first nations communities, replacing a previous target that did not directly address drinking water safety or quality.

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Third, reflecting the committee's recommendation to include short-, medium-, and long-term targets, the strategy includes new short-term milestones that complement its long-term goals and medium-term targets. These milestones will help the government to gauge progress toward the strategy's goals and targets and, if necessary, to make course corrections during the strategy's three-year cycle.

Fourth, it responds to the committee's recommendation for a suite of well-accepted sustainable development principles by providing a clear commitment to principles beyond the two set out in the act: the precautionary principle and the basic principle that sustainable development is based on an ecologically efficient use of natural, social and economic resources. These principles include polluter pays, reconciliation, intergenerational equity, public participation, and integration.

Fifth, reflecting the committee's recommendation for a whole-of-government approach, the 2016-2019 strategy provides broader participation across the federal government than ever before. Fifteen federal departments and agencies participate voluntarily in the strategy in addition to the 26 required to do so under the act.

• (1300)

This brings the total number of departments and agencies to 41, which is 8 more than in 2013-2016. The committee's recommendations have already had an impact on the FSDS.

Now, I want to take a look at the amendments before us. The revised purpose of the bill includes respect for Canada's domestic and international obligations relating to sustainable development, such as the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This new purpose will bring the strategy in line with Canada's future obligations and commitments, as well as the changing priorities and decisions related to sustainable development.

The bill also includes new sustainable development principles that will be added to the act. The new principles include prevention of pollution, intergenerational equity, openness and transparency, the involvement of aboriginal peoples, collaboration, a results and delivery approach, and the preservation of the basic principle of sustainable development and of the precautionary principle.

These principles set clear guidelines to help departments develop their own sustainable development strategies and draft an annual report on their actions and results to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and to the corresponding Senate committee. Furthermore, the government will continue to publish a whole-of-government progress report on FSDS, at least once every three years, which will highlight actions taken by participating ministers and agencies and their results.

We also believe that the government should be a leader, which is why we think the Treasury Board should step up and ensure that the Government of Canada's operations are environmentally sound. Leadership from central agencies will establish guiding principles on the federal government's environmental footprint, providing for an integrated, pan-governmental approach. This way, the government will lead the way on cutting emissions.

In addition, the changes proposed would increase the number of federal agencies from 26 to more than 90, extending the scope of the act to federal institutions and agencies that have a considerable ecological footprint, such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the National Energy Board.

The principles of openness and transparency will be strengthened by encouraging the release of information to support accountability. The bill also proposes that interdepartmental evaluation mechanisms be put in place, including requiring federal ministers to report annually to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development and the corresponding Senate committee. These committees will play a key role by forcing the government to account for its sustainable development results and monitoring the implementation of the act.

For example, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in particular will play a central role in holding the government accountable for sustainable development results. It may monitor the implementation of our overall approach and ask departments to account for their progress in achieving the FSDS targets. Several other amendments will help make the federal sustainable development strategy even stronger.

The committee also proposed enshrining the principle of intergenerational equity in the act. The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development supports intergenerational equity. Amendments to the act will result in a reform of the Sustainable Development Advisory Council. Council members will take into account demographic considerations such as age and sex so that the council is more representative of diversity and Canadian society.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we support Bill C-57 and the sustainable development strategy. Throughout the member's speech, I heard a number of phrases used, such as quality of drinking water, pollution prevention, polluter pays, a results-based approach, and the precautionary principle. Those are all great, and Conservatives support them.

However, I asked twice already today in the House, and both times did not receive an answer, how to square the idea of these good principles, these great-sounding words, with the actions of the Liberal government on the protection of our water and drinking water. In November of 2015, the government approved the dumping of eight billion litres of raw sewage into the St. Lawrence River in Montreal. One would think that was just a mistake it made, but again, in 2018, in Quebec City, another 43 million litres of raw sewage were dumped into the St. Lawrence River.

How can we use these great principles and good-sounding words but not follow them up with action that actually protects our environment?

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[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Our government also takes spills very seriously. They affect the environment, and we are making decisions concerning this issue. I am convinced that everything is in place. That is why our government has put so many members around the table: to make the best decisions we can, to answer all the questions and to produce the most complete report possible.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last two and a half years, we have seen strong leadership on the environment file. When we talk about the importance of sustainable development, I would argue that one of the best examples is the Trans Mountain pipeline. We have a government that listened to the different stakeholders. There is a report based on science. The national interest was taken into consideration, and ultimately, we are seeing a commitment to the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline. That is what sustainable development, in good part, is all about: looking at ways we can advance the economy and the environment at the same time.

We now have legislation that would enhance more accountability and transparency by getting different departments and agencies working collaboratively in certain areas. This is a positive thing. Indigenous representation is guaranteed on the Sustainable Development Advisory Council that reports to the minister. I would argue that these are all positive and encouraging things that have happened in a relatively short time span. It was only two and a half years ago that the Liberals were elected.

I am wondering if my colleague can provide his thoughts. For me personally, it is important, because it is what I believe my constituents want. I would ask him to reflect on what he believes his constituents want, from the government's perspective.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. He gave a partial answer, since our government firmly believes that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. That is the case in my riding, Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, through which the pipeline will eventually run.

Our government has held historic consultations. We met with organizations, municipalities, provinces, territories and Aboriginal groups. We held consultations across the country to explain to people that the environment and respect for the people on the land are priorities for our government. Ultimately, the economy and the environment must go hand in hand in this project.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke said that the economy and the environment go hand in hand. The official opposition, the Conservatives, completely agree. Contrary to popular belief, Conservatives do not wake up every morning plotting to destroy the planet. We did a lot for the environment in the past.

The principles of Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act, are commendable. Nobody can argue with the bill's intentions. However, now that we know how this government operates, we have serious doubts about its intention to respect our environment, set clear benchmarks, and make Canada more attractive to foreign investors so we can grow the economy while respecting the environment. I would point out that Canada has some of the strictest environmental standards. The previous government, under Mr. Harper, did a lot for the environment.

As I was saying, the bill's principles are commendable, but we have some serious concerns. The Liberals have been kind of inconsistent and seem to have trouble keeping their promises. People are losing confidence in the government, especially when it comes to the environment. To substantiate that claim, I would refer to the commissioner of the environment, who, in her recent reports, commented that she is very disappointed in the results but congratulated the former Conservative government on its actions. That reflects well on us. People should stop saying that Conservatives wake up every morning looking for ways to destroy the planet because that is totally false.

I would like to come back to the minister's mandate letter, which reads, and I quote:

Canadians sent a clear message in this election, and our platform offered a new, ambitious plan for a strong and growing middle class. Canadians expect us to fulfill our commitments...

We can already see that the government has fallen short, just from that section of the environment minister's mandate letter. It goes on to say, and I quote:

If we are to tackle the real challenges we face as a country—from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change—Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty and willingness to listen.

If members read the news and keep up with current events, they will see that Canadians are losing confidence in this government, particularly when it comes to the environment. Fine words are all well and good, but the government also needs to be clear and consistent. It needs to keep its promises. However, the government is not doing what it said it would in the environment minister's mandate letter and in the mandate letters of many other government ministers. The ministers are not keeping their promises and they are not necessarily being honest in their actions. They want to look good, but when it comes right down to it, they are not keeping their word.

The mandate letter also says, and I quote:

It is important that we acknowledge mistakes when we make them.

The Liberals have a lot of trouble doing that and they wait a long time to own up to their mistakes. The opposition is forced to draw attention to those mistakes day after day until the government realizes that it needs to reconsider. The Liberals are not even following the instructions they gave their ministers in their mandate letters. The letter goes on to say, and I quote:

Canadians do not expect us to be perfect...

We do not pretend to be perfect, either, but it is important to aim for perfection, and that is not what the people on the other side are doing. The letter continues:

...they expect us to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

Government Orders

Speaking of honesty and sincerity, let us talk about the marathon study of Bill C-69 that we just finished. I have the privilege to sit on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, which came under pressure to hurry up. All the members of the House were pressured to hurry up, preventing us from doing our work properly. Even the Liberals presented over 100 amendments. We were inundated with more than 30 briefs a day for a month.

● (1315)

Let us do the math. Is it humanly possible for an MP to do their work properly under such conditions? Furthermore, all of the witnesses who appeared before the committee were also hurried along. Very few of them got selected. The number of witnesses was capped. Many witnesses were disappointed not to speak. The avalanche of briefs we got shows how important this issue is to all the witnesses from across Canada. The problem with this process is that we are being made to rush just to get it over with. My personal impression is that the Liberals are following a political agenda. They are not really trying to protect the environment with Bill C-69.

They rushed us, they bulldozed through the process, and they made an omnibus bill. It is more than 650 pages long. I do not claim to be an expert, but most, if not all, of the experts who testified before the committee said they were deeply disappointed with this bill. The committee even heard from a university professor who suggested scrapping the bill and starting fresh. That says it all. That suggestion did not come from the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. It came from a specialist who studies the environment on a daily basis.

I come back to the mandate letter for the Minister of Environment, whom I respect greatly, but who is guided by political agendas and opportunities. Unfortunately, she has no control over what happens in her department.

In partnership with provinces and territories, establish national emissions-reduction targets, ensuring that the provinces and territories have targeted federal funding and the flexibility to design their own policies to meet these commitments, including their own carbon pricing policies.

That is not what the Liberals did. They imposed the carbon tax and then left it up to the people to figure it out and do what they wanted. They cannot even tell us how this is going to reduce greenhouse gases. Take Australia, for example. That country implemented a carbon tax, but that tax no longer exists in Australia because it was ineffective.

Let us look at British Columbia and see whether greenhouse gases are on the rise or on the decline. That province has a carbon tax.

I am committed to leading an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians, lives up to the highest ethical standards, brings our country together, and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds.

Considering what I said earlier, I do not think I need to comment. My colleagues can draw their own conclusions. We have serious doubts.

In her report, the environment commissioner emphasized that the Liberal government has not succeeded, I repeat, has not succeeded in reducing greenhouse gas emissions or adapting to the effects of climate change. I am not the one saying this. This is not partisanship, it is the environment commissioner who said so. I have much more respect for her than for our friends across the aisle. The

commissioner clearly indicated that the Liberals have made no progress in honouring Canada's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. She confirmed that there was a lack of leadership in adapting to the effects of climate change. We should not be surprised.

In the last Parliament, we, the Conservative members of the House, implemented important measures that enabled us to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We cut them by 15%. That is something. We did such a good job that the Liberals used our targets when they went to Paris to negotiate the Paris Agreement. They submitted the targets the Conservative government set when it was in power, and they applied them. They spent their time criticizing our work, but they used our tools.

I could say considerably more, but I will allow my colleagues to ask me questions.

● (1320)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have only one very simple question to ask my colleague, who made a very nice presentation. I congratulate him on the excellent work he has done for us on the environment.

I would like to raise the fundamental question of transparency. He briefly mentioned that the government currently has documents that indicate beyond a doubt the cost of the carbon tax for Canadian families. However, the government redacted these documents to hide the exact amount it will cost Canadians.

Can my colleague tell us his thoughts on this and share what he heard about the carbon tax in committee?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who has done excellent work. I will be adopting his hairstyle on June 9. I will become his disciple. It suits him, but we will see what it does for me.

As my colleague mentioned, we have our doubts. We do not have the information and the government is hiding information. We do not even know what effect the carbon tax will have on greenhouse gas emissions. We cannot say how much money will be taken out of Canadian families' pockets. That is not very reassuring. Of course, we must protect the environment and take steps to introduce new technologies, but this government is not taking action. It is only trying to look good. Once again, with Bill C-69 it is making it look as though it is implementing additional controls and enhancing the regulations, but, in the end, the government has the last word. It is the minister who has the power.

If we reread Bill C-69, we see that this government does not have confidence in the people. It wants to keep the power for itself and is acting like the Liberals did in the past. Members will recall the Gomery commission.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in committee, the Conservative Party moved an amendment to the legislation to allow members of the sustainable development advisory committee to claim their airfare for travel. Therefore, if they flew to Ottawa, they could recover that cost. It provided that clarification. It is important to acknowledge that this was a Conservative amendment brought forward by the member for Abbotsford.

Today, the Conservative Party, through the member for Abbotsford, has introduced an amendment to get rid of the amendment we all supported at committee. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever to have this amendment before us today.

Could the member explain for the listeners and those following the debate today why the Conservative Party moved this amendment to get rid of the amendment, which we all accepted, that was proposed by the Conservatives in committee?

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg North for his excellent question.

As I said at the outset, we agree with the principles of Bill C-57. We wanted to improve the bill and we have serious concerns about the Liberal government's intentions. Why does it want to reimburse committee members for their expenses in addition to paying them? Is it trying to put a cash value on political assistance? Does this government really intend to put in place an effective committee that will advocate for the environment? My colleague can answer those questions at another time.

[English]

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today in support of Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

Specifically, I will discuss how the bill supports a results-oriented, accountable approach to federal sustainability. As chair of the environment committee, I also want to mention how the bill has incorporated many of the environment committee recommendations that were tabled as the first report of the committee, and a unanimous report, I might add, which is why today is so confusing with what is being brought forward.

I will begin by speaking about how the federal sustainable development strategy, or FSDS, supports accountability and transparency. Next, I will discuss the indicators that will be put in place to measure progress and how they will help demonstrate sustainable development results. Finally, I will describe how the amendments in Bill C-57 would strengthen accountability in future strategies and how they would complement action already being taken under our current FSDS. This includes clause 5, which seeks to ensure the federal government's approach better reflects Canada's diversity and its heritage.

The government has committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency, and that includes being transparent and accountable when it comes to the sustainable development results we

achieve for Canadians. The FSDS that was tabled in October 2016 reflects this commitment. It provides the foundation for accountability by clearly defining what government wants to achieve.

At the core of the strategy, there are 13 aspirational goals, supported by measurable medium-term targets. The strategy identifies the federal minister responsible for achieving each of those targets.

The sustainable development goals and targets support the vision that Canada is one of the greenest countries in the world and that we want our quality of life to continue to improve. The goals reflect the environmental sustainable development goals of the United Nations 2030 agenda, aligning Canada's strategy with the priorities of the international community.

Responding to the expectations of Canadians and the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, the strategy includes stronger and more ambitious targets than previous strategies tabled in 2010 and 2013.

For the first time, short-term milestones have been included in the strategy. These milestones will help ensure we are on track to achieve our medium-term targets and our long-term goals.

I will now discuss how we are measuring progress on those strategies and communicating our results to parliamentarians, stakeholders, and Canadians.

Our strategy identifies a total of 46 indicators that will help us measure and report on our goals and targets. They are based on sound science and track Canada's progress on sustainable development issues about which Canadians care, such as air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, water quality, and our protected areas.

Many come from a network of environmental monitoring programs from across the country. These science-based programs deliver the data and information needed for the indicators. Many are founded on collaborative partnerships with provinces and territories, our partners.

For example, the air quality indicators report to Canadians on levels of five key air pollutants that can affect their health. These indicators use data from sources like the national air pollution surveillance program and a collaboration between Environment and Climate Change Canada and provincial, territorial, and municipal environmental agencies.

Similarly, the indicator on water quality in Canadian rivers uses data from federal, provincial, and territorial monitoring programs across Canada, as well as water quality guidelines from the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and provincial and territorial sources.

Government Orders

Drawing on the indicators, the FSDS includes starting points so Canadians can closely track the government's progress over the strategy's three-year cycle. For instance, the strategy indicates that in 2014, 64.4% of Canada's electricity came from renewable sources and 80% from non-emitting sources. Canada's target is for 90% of our electricity to come from renewable and non-emitting sources by 2030, and 100% in the long term. As of 2015, 10.6% of Canada's terrestrial area was protected. Our target is 17% of lands and freshwater conserved by 2020. As the strategy is implemented, the government has already begun to report on the results.

• (1330)

The first-ever FSDS update was published in June 2017. The updates have provided early results for short-term milestones and show that a number of them have already been accomplished.

For example, Canada has ratified the historic Paris Agreement. The Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change has been adopted by first ministers of the federal government and the 11 provinces and territories, an achievement about which we should feel quite proud. We have surpassed our target of protecting 5% of Canada's marine and coastal areas by 2017.

Through the tabling of a whole-of-government FSDS progress report that will draw on the indicators, the government will continue to report on sustainable development progress.

I will now describe how accountability and reporting will be enhanced, including through the amendments in Bill C-57.

Following our review of the FSDA in the spring of 2016, the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development recommended that the government take action to strengthen accountability under the act. The government listened and has responded. Bill C-57 includes a number of amendments to significantly strengthen reporting and ensure that the government can be held accountable for results.

The bill provides a comprehensive suite of well-accepted sustainable development principles to guide future strategies. This includes a principle that a results and delivery approach is key to meeting measurable targets. This new approach clarifies the importance of developing objectives, developing strategies for meeting them, and using indicators to report on progress.

Bill C-57 would also require that each FSDS target be measurable and include a time frame. This would ensure that future strategies could support rigorous performance measurement and reporting.

The bill also specifies that departments and agencies across government are responsible for contributing to the development of FSDS progress reports. Sustainable development is not something that one department working on its own can accomplish. It is a whole-of-Government approach with a broad range of federal organizations that must play a role in developing, implementing, and reporting on the strategy.

Our approach must also reflect the input and perspectives of all Canadians, not just the perspective of government. This is why clause 5 of the bill, which addresses the composition and mandate for the Sustainable Development Advisory Council, is so important.

Under Bill C-57, the Sustainable Development Advisory Council would play an important role by advising the minister on any matter related to sustainable development that would be referred to it by the minister. More specifically, it would ensure the government would take a whole-of-Canada view, seeking the advice and expertise of Canadians that would reflect our country's diversity of background, ethnicity, age, gender, and circumstance.

Clause 5 also seeks to increase the number of indigenous people representatives on the council to better reflect indigenous groups represented and the broad range of challenges they face across Canada. This directly supports our efforts to forge new relationships with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

The government recognizes the importance of a transparent and accountable sustainable development approach. It is important that parliamentarians hold the government accountable for sustainable development goals and progress, and the amendments in the bill would strengthen and elevate their role.

The bill would require that all federal organizations bound by the act report each year to parliamentary committees, including the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, on progress in implementing their sustainability strategies. We found it was important to make them accountable back. We do not want to have to wait for the auditor to tell us what is going on. These strategies comply with and contribute to the broader FSDS and support the whole-of-government approach.

With this FSDS, which is the strongest to date, the government established ambitious goals, targets, and milestones that would let Canadians know where we wanted to be on sustainable development.

The indicators show the progress being made, drawing on sound science and high-quality data from across the country. The indicators will help determine whether we are on track to meet the targets and where we need to focus our efforts to address remaining challenges. They also form the basis of the reporting to parliamentarians and Canadians.

Strengthening accountability was a key issue and it was in the unanimous second report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I am very proud of our recommendations, the government's adoption of the recommendations, and the new bill that we are discussing today.

Government Orders

•(1335)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for King—Vaughan for her presentation today, but there are a few things that trouble me. I believe the hon. member's words were that sustainable development is not something one department can work on on its own. I would interject that I do not believe it is anything any department is going to be able to work on now because of the way Bill C-69 was pushed through the House two days ago. I believe there were about 600 pages of amendments. For the last half of those amendments, we could not even have officials in the room to advise the members that were debating the bill. In fact, we were not even able to debate the last half of those amendments.

I will say that there were over 126 amendments from the Liberal Party on their own Liberal government bill. Obviously, the bill came out half-baked, half-finished. As well, we have heard members of the resource sector and some from the energy sector saying that it is the “never do anything again” bill.

How can the hon. member say that all departments are going to have to work together, when the committee she chaired rammed through a bill that is basically going to stop any development of any significant type in Canada in the future?

Mrs. Deborah Schulte: Mr. Speaker, I find it very interesting how the member was weaving work that was done at committee on Bill C-69 into what we are discussing today in the House.

I just want to make a point to answer the question that was raised. All the committee members from all sides of the House brought many amendments. That was really to try to strengthen the bill. The work of a committee is to try to strengthen a bill of the government.

I am very proud of the fact that all the members who were working on the committee, plus those outside the committee, took the time to look at the bill and bring forward recommendations to strengthen it. We did consider all of those recommendations. We voted on all of them. We did. We heard from 50 witnesses. We had over 150 briefs. We considered every single one of those amendments and voted on them.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indeed, yes, the standing committee did review this matter twice. In fact, the committee heard from experts, including the commissioner twice.

The commissioner then came to comment on this bill. She said she was happy that there were some additional factors to be considered, but she was deeply disappointed that although this is a sustainable development bill, it failed to reference the 2030 sustainable development goals Canada supposedly has signed on to. It also failed in reference to the Paris Agreement, although she reports on all the actions.

The commissioner just this year, this spring, issued a castigating report against the government for abjectly failing to have any measures in place to genuinely deliver sustainable development assessments. Let us remember that there is also a cabinet directive, which she had recommended should be incorporated into the act. The government decided not to, and she has given abject failures to every agency for failing to obey that.

Given that the commissioner is still failing the government on action, we did not need a new bill to tell us that it is taking it seriously. What is there about this bill, compared to the former one, that is going to finally make the government take seriously its responsibilities under the agreement it signed with the United Nations?

•(1340)

Mrs. Deborah Schulte: Mr. Speaker, there were quite a few things in that question. I will touch on the one at the end and try to capture the others as well.

One of the things the commissioner brought forward was that there really was not an across-government approach to this, and the departments were not necessarily building toward sustainable development goals, even though they were supposed to. We heard that, and we made recommendations to suggest to the government that it tighten that up, which it has done. It brought in indicators and measures.

We have tightened up significantly. The commissioner brought the concerns to the committee, and we brought forward those changes. She has come back and said that she still wants to see more changes. I think what we are expecting is that the reports back to parliamentary committees are going to very much strengthen the power of parliamentarians to hold the government accountable. We do not have to wait for many years for the commissioner to come back and tell us that things are not what they should be. We are going to have those reports coming back and different committees responding. We will have parliamentarians holding the government accountable. We will also have Canadians holding the government accountable, because we are going to have measures and indicators that they are going to be monitoring.

Mr. Jim Egliniski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here this afternoon speaking to Bill C-57, an act to amend the Federal Sustainable Development Act. I last spoke in the House at length on this bill in October 2017. I am thankful for the opportunity to have served on the environment committee for a while and have wrapped myself around this topic quite well.

What does it mean, and what is its purpose? I am going to refer to a specific section:

The purpose of this Act is to provide the legal framework for developing and implementing a Federal Sustainable Development Strategy that makes decision making related to sustainable development more transparent and subject to accountability to Parliament, promotes coordinated action across the Government of Canada to advance sustainable development and respects Canada's domestic and international obligations relating to sustainable development, with a view to improving the quality of life of Canadians.

There is another factor in that section I want to read:

the principle that sustainable development is based on an efficient use of natural, social and economic resources and the need for the Government of Canada to integrate environmental, economic and social factors in the making of all of its decisions;

I bring that up, because I am going to dwell on that later in my speech.

Government Orders

Our Conservative Party recognizes that sustainability needs to be included in every decision to ensure that there is a balance between social, economic, and environmental factors. We have always believed in that. The record will show that we are the only government in the last decade and a half that has a record of improving greenhouse gas emissions.

This type of policy-making ensures not only that today's generation will have a healthy and prosperous lifestyle but that we can pass health and prosperity on to future generations to come: my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, Mr. Speaker, and everyone else's.

The importance of sustainable development is something on which all parties agree. I do not think anyone disagrees that we have to protect the environment or that the environment can survive on its own but industry cannot. It needs to protect the environment, and I believe we all believe this and will fight for it very hard. This is proven by the fact that the report from the environment committee was unanimous. Sustainable development is so important to the future of Canada and to our grandchildren that not only should environmental factors be considered, but we need to also consider the social and economic pillars that surround them.

If we go back almost 10 years, then minister John Baird, under the Conservative government, supported a Liberal member's private member's bill regarding the federal sustainability act. The bill was passed, and we followed the guidelines. We had positive results, better than I can say from the current government. The act declares that all government decision-making be reviewed through an environmental, economic, and social lens. I want to stress the social lens and the appropriate balance. That is a bit of a rub.

I had a great working career in the RCMP. I have lived near the energy sector in Alberta and British Columbia since around 1986. I also had the opportunity, nearly 20 years ago, to work directly in the oil and gas sector as a regulator, as an enforcer, for the Province of British Columbia after I retired. I have a pretty good understanding of what goes on in relation to oil and gas exploration in Canada and the way we protect the environment.

• (1345)

Part of my job was to make sure that companies out there were doing their job to protect the environment. I will stand in this House all day long and wave the fact that I think Canada—the provinces of B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and even a little has been done in Ontario and Quebec—has the greatest, strongest environmental standards in the world, and we produce the cleanest energy, regardless of what it is, whether it is coal, oil, or gas. We have such strong, stringent regulations that we should be proud of that fact.

Twenty years ago, the B.C. government realized that industry was hampered, government was hampered, the public was hampered, and aboriginal communities were hampered by overregulation. Too many departments, having separate control, were all fighting and vying to do their part to protect the environment and the government and to regulate industry. What did the B.C. government do? Twenty years ago, it realized that it needed to hire one person to oversee it and one person to try to bring it back together, and it did.

If my numbers are correct, we got rid of one-third of the regulations. Industry prospered. We developed a really good working relationship with aboriginal communities. They could understand what was going on and could work with the government and industry because of the way the regulations were modernized and improved.

If we look at this bill, I believe it says that it would require more departments and more agencies to contribute to the federal sustainable development strategy. It would bring the total to more than 90, from the current 26. My God, look back at history, folks. It does not work. We have to modernize it and make it efficient, effective, and understandable so that everyone can work together. If we make it too big, the government cannot control it. If we make it too complicated, industry and the people involved, whether it is on private or aboriginal land, cannot understand it. Here we are with a new bill trying to increase it by over three times. Let us get this thing back to reality.

I am sorry that I am a little scattered. I was told about this about 20 minutes ago, so I came in here and wrote some notes down from what I remembered.

As I said earlier, the environment committee did a fantastic job, and it had a unanimous report on this. Conservative members on the environment and sustainable development committee supported the changes to the FSDS. They wanted to ensure, as did the Liberal and NDP members, that economic, social, and environmental considerations were accounted for by the Government of Canada. They wanted to make sure that happened. They wanted to ensure that the act included measurable targets and enforceability.

Measurable targets and enforceability are so important. We can throw out a handful of rules, but if we cannot enforce them and cannot ever make that number, why put them out there? Make it reasonable for all the people participating, whether it is the aboriginal community, people living in the area, industry, or government. If we all work together and can understand what we are all doing together, we can accomplish a lot together.

My friend from the Northwest Territories understands what I am talking about when I talk about finding an appropriate balance between the environment, the economy, and their lives. We can get everything to work together, but we must make it balanced.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak. I have more to say. I could probably have gone on another 10 minutes.

• (1350)

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to my colleague's debate. Does he not agree that with our planet already facing the effects of global change, from wildfires that rage longer and more harshly to thinning ice, there is a need for such legislation to protect our planet and Canada?

Statements by Members

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I agree, but Canada is protected. We have a good set of rules and regulations in place. I hate to tell you, but we had fires shortly after earth developed. We had natural fires. We are going to continue to have fires. We can do everything you want to stop fires, but fires will start. We have lightning, caused by the weather. We have weather trends. Things dry out some years. Some years they are so wet, we cannot even get into the forest. These things are natural. Can we control them with this? No, we cannot. These are natural things that have been happening over decades, and hundreds and hundreds of years. Fires have always existed. The problem is that man wants to stop the fires. The fires controlled a lot of the environmental problems we have today, such as the pine beetle.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members to place their answers and questions through the Chair.

Questions and Comments, the hon. member for Whitby.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have raised this point in the House before. The Insurance Bureau of Canada has said that between 1983 and 2005, Canadians paid about \$373 million in insurance costs related to weather-related events. Between 2005 and 2015, that number tripled to \$1.7 billion in costs related to wetter, warmer, wilder weather.

Does the hon. member across the way not agree that Canadians are paying exorbitant amounts of money for the costs of weather caused by climate change?

We should be doing something about it. We put in a comprehensive oceans protection plan. We put in a comprehensive plan to ensure that we are charging for pollution. We are taking the steps needed to ensure that those astronomical costs that Canadians are already paying will be reduced.

Does he not agree that this plan, this piece of legislation, will help to contribute to Canadian sustainability now and into the future.

•(1355)

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, I am going to say no. However, the member brings up a very good point. I would like to explain one aspect of what she is talking about. Let us talk about floods. In so many areas in Canada, from coast to coast to coast, governments, whether municipal, provincial, or federal, allow people to build properties, whether residential, industrial, or commercial, on flat plains by rivers. If they had taken the time to perhaps talk to an early pioneer in that area, he probably would have told them that the plain flooded in 1901, in 1896, and in 1932. However, do we listen to him? No we do not. We sit around a table with a bunch of scientists reading a book and coming up with a good, reasoned fact. We should take a common sense approach in the bill, and use people within society, people from the communities, who understand.

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Yellowhead for his contributions on the environment committee. I very much enjoyed the work we did together. We did a great job on the FSDA and FSFS. He spoke to much of that in his speech.

However, I am really confused because we had a unanimous report. I am confused why we are debating today a clause that was agreed in committee and that we worked very hard at in order to ensure that a whole-of-government approach was embedded in the bill. I understand his point about making it very difficult, but if we are going to do sustainability right, everyone needs to be engaged. I want him to explain why we are debating this today and why he wants to change what we did at committee.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, people's minds change. Given a longer time to look at it, we see where the errors and mistakes are, and so we stand up to try to correct those errors and mistakes.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Simon Marciel (Mirabel, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that the Conservatives will now be defending Quebecers' interests. The problem is, we do not know which Quebecers they are talking about.

Clearly, they are not talking about those in the regions, because, yesterday in the House, they voted against using our softwood lumber, and their deputy leader is against supply management.

They will not defend the Quebec City region either. It was their own maritime strategy that cost Davie close to 900 jobs. They will not defend the millions of Quebecers who live along the river.

Their leader, whose name nobody really remembers, is nice and all when he visits us, but when he is in the Maritimes, he promises the return of the energy east pipeline.

Conservatives will definitely not defend Quebecers' interests. At this very moment, they are sponsoring a petition to reopen the abortion debate. That bunch of Harper clones who still believe that the Earth is flat are totally fine with that. They will take Quebecers' money and votes, but when the time comes to defend Quebecers' jobs, they will take a break. They do not defend our rights, our people, or our environment. How then will they defend our interests?

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[English]

HMCS HALIFAX

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the privilege and honour of joining the crew of HMCS *Halifax* as part of the Royal Canadian Navy's Canadian leaders at sea program. HMCS *Halifax* is one of our proudest vessels, and has flown the Canadian flag on the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Adriatic Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Caribbean Sea, and beyond.

*Statements by Members***THE ENVIRONMENT**

I returned from this trip with a renewed admiration for the incredible sacrifices made by our armed forces each and every day. From top to bottom, the crew of the HMCS *Halifax* demonstrated tremendous professionalism, discipline, and hospitality throughout my stay. I would like to salute Commodore Craig Skjerpen, commanding officer Scott Nelson, and, indeed, the entire crew of HMCS *Halifax* for welcoming me with open arms.

[Member spoke in Latin as follows:]

Parati vero parati.

* * *

●(1400)

TONY DAY

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to my constituent and friend, Tony Day, who passed away this morning surrounded by his children and grandchildren.

Tony was the definition of an upstanding citizen. In 1957, he purchased a truck to haul fresh water to the oil drilling rigs. This was the start of Fast Trucking Service, which grew to 85 trucks and to become a major contributor to the Saskatchewan oil industry.

Tony was a legend in the oil field, employing hundreds of people from Carnduff and southeast Saskatchewan over the years. He was a man who truly cared about his community, giving back more than he was given and supporting the citizens of Carnduff in good times and in bad. I have always said he reminded me of my grandfather. Tony was awarded the Southeast Oilman of the Year Award in 1999 and inducted into the Saskatchewan Oil Patch Hall of Fame in 2009. I also presented Tony with a Senate of Canada 150 medal for all of his work and dedication.

Tony leaves a legacy and spirit that will live on forever. To his wife Vi, and his children, Linda, Teresa, Dennis, and Larry, I send my deepest condolences.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it does not take newcomers long to make a positive difference to Canada. Here is a wonderful example. Haya Jumaa is a 24-year-old Mississauga resident originally from Syria. Since her arrival, she has won the Canadian championship for karate four years in a row. She has been named the athlete of the year by Karate Canada for three years. She has just received her Canadian citizenship and will be travelling to represent Canada on the world stage in two international competitions, including the Pan Am Games this June in Chile.

This amazing young woman is studying health science at York University and wants to become a doctor. She aspires to work with the UN to help people in need. Her family is profoundly proud of her. So are we.

Haya's story is Canada's story. Haya is a great addition to our Canadian family. I cannot wait to see her kick some rear end at the 2020 Olympic Games.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Courtenay—Alberni, the District of Tofino, the Town of Qualicum Beach, and the City of Parksville are all moving toward the elimination of single-use plastics within their jurisdictions. Whether it be the banning of plastic straws or banning of plastic bags, they are doing their part to reduce the amount of ocean plastics washing up onto the coasts of Vancouver Island. Next week, the Regional District of Nanaimo will lead a national discussion with mayors and councillors on the crisis of marine litter by issuing a call to action at the conference of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in Halifax.

Vancouver Islanders know the harm caused by plastic pollution in our oceans, because they are seeing it every day. Coastal residents are cleaning up plastic straws, bags, and coffee lids on our beaches in a relentless fight to protect our waters and shorelines. It is time for the members of this House to join Vancouver Islanders and their local governments in this important fight.

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DISTINGUISHED OLYMPIAN AND SCHOLAR

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour Professor Bruce Kidd, an accomplished Olympian, scholar, administrator, Officer of the Order of Canada, and vital member of my community.

As an athlete, he won 18 national championships in men's long-distance running and was a member of Team Canada to the 1962 Commonwealth Games and the 1964 Olympic Games.

He has had a distinguished academic career at the University of Toronto as professor, dean, warden of Hart House, and, most recently, as principal at the University of Toronto Scarborough campus. During his tenure as principal, he brought forward a strategic vision for the campus, encouraged sports, and championed reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

He was recently appointed to the federal working group to advance gender equity in sports. I wish to thank Professor Kidd for his leadership, vision, and friendship. I wish him and his partner Phyllis a well-deserved retirement, and I thank them for their service to our community and country.

I am proud to welcome Professor Wisdom Tetey as the incoming principal at UTSC.

*Statements by Members***WORLD VISION**

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I and colleagues from other parties went to Kenya last week. We saw how Canadians support international development through a non-governmental organization called World Vision. We saw first-hand the positive changes that Canadian taxpayers' investments are making. We saw how we can address malnutrition by equipping small-scale farmers with nutrient-rich, drought-resistant plants. We met with mothers who were learning about maternal and reproductive health, immunization, and HIV and AIDS. We met with schoolchildren who talked about fleeing forced child marriage, female genital mutilation, and child labour. They all were clearly appreciative of the help and expertise World Vision provided in their communities.

It was encouraging to see the impact that can be made when we come together in partnership to contribute to bettering the lives of others around the world. We are truly making a difference. I thank World Vision.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

4TH BATTALION OF THE ROYAL 22ND REGIMENT

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate Lieutenant-Colonel Jacques Nicolas on his new position as commander of the 4th Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment of Châteauguay in Laval. As a former commander of Squadron 21 of the Canadian Armed Forces reserve and as a major in the air force, it was an honour and a privilege for me to attend the 4th Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment's end-of-year regimental day. Their commitment as Canadian Armed Forces reservists deserves to be recognized. They are essential in defending Canadian values and protecting our citizens.

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YVES GRANDMAISON

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Brome—Missisquoi reveals a great volunteer. I wish to highlight the commitment of Yves Grandmaison, from Magog, who has spent his whole life devoted to his community. Yves has owned a barber shop on Magog's rue Principale for more than 50 years. He volunteers for many organizations, including the Fondation Constance-Langlois, which provides assistance to a day centre for handicapped people, and Han-logement, which offers housing that is adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, as well as the Optimist Club, and a number of other organizations. Last Friday, I paid him a visit in his shop to hand him a parliamentary medal and an honorary certificate, in the presence of many of his friends.

I would like to thank all those who devote themselves to their communities and who improve the quality of life in Brome—Missisquoi through their generosity.

[English]

ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last evening, along with colleagues of the Canada–Armenia Friendship Group, I was honoured to attend a celebration of the centennial of independence of the Republic of Armenia.

While we celebrate great strides taken by Armenia, concerns remain surrounding the conflict in the Artsakh region. With over 80% of Artsakh's population voting in a referendum and 99% of those supporting independence, it was unfortunate that Azerbaijan ignored the results and responded aggressively. The conflict resulted in tens of thousands of victims and hundreds of thousands of refugees. In 1994, the conflict ended with a ceasefire agreement.

In a 2006 referendum, the region approved a new constitution. While there have been signs of progress in peace negotiations, there have been several instances of ceasefire violations, most notably in 2016, when dozens of soldiers lost their lives, and since then deaths of innocent civilians have happened far too often.

I call on the Government of Canada to stand up for the right to self-determination of the people of the Republic of Artsakh and to work alongside the global community in seeking peace for this region.

* * *

VANCOUVER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do you hear a waltz? I ask because I am giving a shout-out to the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra as it celebrates its 100th anniversary.

A cornerstone of the Vancouver cultural scene, the VSO is one of the nation's oldest symphony orchestras. It has led world tours, won Junos and Grammys, and contributes annually to CBC radio. The VSO has enriched the city of Vancouver, our residents and tourists alike. Its School of Music has fostered the next generation of talented musicians.

I would also like to congratulate Bramwell Tovey, the musical director of the VSO, on 18 years of service as maestro. Bramwell is a world-class, award-winning icon of symphony orchestras, travelling to various cities in China, Korea, Canada, and the United States.

Tonight the VSO will perform at the National Arts Centre. Members should take advantage of this incredible opportunity. I can assure them that like fine wine, the VSO has aged well, and they will hear a waltz.

*Statements by Members***TRADES TRAINING AT OKANAGAN COLLEGE**

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to convey thanks from Okanagan College for the more than \$3 million in federal support to build the most advanced training facilities for the trades in B.C.'s southern interior.

Last week I had the opportunity to attend the opening of the Trades Training House at Okanagan College's Kelowna campus. This new facility received \$342,000 in strategic investment funding and is a tremendous addition to the recently completed trades complex at the same campus. The Trades Training House provides carpentry, electrical, and plumbing students a hands-on experience in a building that mimics a real-world residential and commercial workspace.

In August the college will be opening another trades facility in Vernon, B.C., made possible in part by another \$2.7-million investment from the same federal strategic innovation fund.

I am pleased to see how federal, provincial, and community supports have enabled Okanagan College to provide world-class training as we address the skills agenda for Canada.

* * *

●(1410)

WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Michelle Stilwell has proven that anything is possible. A five-time Paralympic gold medallist, British Columbia Liberal MLA, and former cabinet minister, she has always championed people with disabilities. How fitting it is that she is announcing today her support for the opportunity for workers with disabilities act. Her support comes along with support from many New Democrats, Liberals, and Conservatives, who all believe that workers with disabilities should be allowed to keep more of their wages than they lose to clawbacks and taxes.

Over a million Canadians with disabilities already work. Thousands more want to, but cannot afford to lose housing, medication, and income to the taxes and clawbacks that come along with it. The opportunity for workers with disabilities act seeks to fix this problem to make work pay for everyone. Let us pass this bill and provide opportunity for all Canadians.

* * *

GIVE 30

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for those in Ajax, in Canada, and across the world who are observing, *Ramadan mubarak*.

For the fourth year in a row, I am fasting for the entire month of Ramadan in support of the charity Give 30. Give 30 asks us to take the money we save from fasting to give to those most in need, to our local charities and local food banks, so that others may eat.

When I walk out of here and walk past a plate of food, because I am fasting I make a choice that I am not eating it, but for so many there is no choice. There is no food to reach for. In connecting us to the suffering of others, Ramadan is enormously powerful.

Give 30 is a tremendous initiative that, since I first spoke in this House, has expanded to the United States and Australia and is now expanding to other parts of the world.

Inshallah, we can do something if all of us take a small part, a small action, to try to do something about hunger.

* * *

GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the anniversary of women in Canada winning the right to vote in federal elections. While we have come a long way in 100 years, we still have a very long way to go. On this auspicious day, parliamentarians would do well to dream and work for what could be.

Let us remember that we remain saddled with an electoral system that leaves women behind—young women, senior women, disabled women, women of colour, immigrant women, trans women, indigenous women, and LBGQT2 women. So much for the promise that 2015 would be the last election in Canada using first past the post. This is an anniversary with no change at all, despite the overwhelming preference among Canadians, experts and citizens alike, for proportional representation.

Women constitute 51% of the population, so 25% representation in this place is not enough. Lip service is not enough. We demand real feminist leadership. We must not let anyone tell us it cannot be done.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' tabling of Bill C-75 is an indication that they do not seem to believe either that crime is a serious issue or that victims' rights should be a priority. The bill contains elements that will permit crimes that are indictable offences to now be treated as summary offences. Perpetrators who commit offences such as participating in the activity of a terrorist group, forced marriage, polygamy, and impaired driving causing bodily harm will now be able to escape the consequences of their actions by simply paying a fine.

To add insult to injury, the Liberals are breaking yet another promise. They committed to protect religious officials by upholding section 176 of the Criminal Code, which says that the assault of religious officials is an indictable offence. In an era when religious officials are vulnerable to acts of hatred, it is puzzling that the Liberal government is once again trying to minimize the fundamental importance of religious freedom in Canada.

Oral Questions

Conservatives believe that Canada's fundamental charter rights and the safety of Canadians should be the number one priority of any government.

* * *

•(1415)

GENDER EQUALITY

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the words of Nellie McClung:

Have we not the brains to think? Hands to work? Hearts to feel? And lives to live? Do we not bear our part in citizenship? Do we not help build the Empire? Give us our due!

One hundred years ago today, some women in Canada won the right to vote in federal elections for the first time, but indigenous women, Asian women, and others were excluded from this right until much later.

We have come a long way in these 100 years, from winning the right to vote, to winning a seat in this House, to 50% women in our cabinet, to our gender-focused budget, to our feminist G7 presidency. We have learned that when we add women, we change everything for the better, and better is always possible.

On this 100th anniversary of women winning the right to vote in federal elections, we celebrate the contributions of so many great women and men towards equality and we commit to doing more.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are new revelations this morning regarding the fisheries minister.

According to a report in *The Globe and Mail*, Chief Terrance Paul and the Membertou First Nation were informed by the minister that they needed to partner with the company run by the Liberal MP's brother in order to win a surf clam licence.

I have a simple question: Are the media reports true? Did the Minister of Fisheries or anyone acting on his behalf suggest to the Membertou First Nation that it needed to make a deal with the Premium Seafoods company in order to win this bid?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that allegation is simply false.

What is more important is the decision our government made to include indigenous nations in this lucrative offshore fishery. It is a historic decision. We had a public process, very similar to the one the former Conservative government had, to consult with industry and indigenous groups about participating in this fishery. We think it was a positive process, and we think it is a positive decision to include indigenous people in this fishery.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the Liberals decided to include their friends and family in this, for sure.

The fisheries minister decided to take surf clam quota away from Clearwater Seafoods and give it to a company with connections to his own family, a company being run by a sitting Liberal MP's brother. To make matters worse, the company he gave the licence to had the lowest percentage of indigenous ownership of all the bidders, and it did not even have a boat. Clearly, the fix was in.

Will the minister do the right thing and restart the bidding process?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no matter how often my hon. friend repeats the same incorrect allegations, it will not make them true. To say that I have a family member who will benefit from this decision is entirely false, and she knows that.

I would draw her attention to the statement made by Chief Sock on the Elsipogtog First Nation website. He has been very clear. I do not have a family member who will benefit from this process. My hon. friend should be more careful before making up those allegations and repeating them, when she knows they are not true.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is just another in the latest long list of Liberal ethics scandals: the Prime Minister under investigation; the Minister of Finance under investigation; the Liberal MP for Brampton East under investigation.

Now the fisheries minister is under formal investigation. There are new, serious allegations being reported, and the minister's credibility is in tatters. No one honestly believes that the deal was above board. It has Liberal corruption all over it.

If the minister will not do the right thing and reset the process, will the Prime Minister remove him from this file?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, obviously, if the Ethics Commissioner has questions or concerns, or would like any documents with respect to this process, we are of course happy to comply and happy to have those conversations with the Ethics Commissioner or his staff.

I would remind my hon. friend again that it is important to stick to the facts. The facts are that we had an open process to consult industry and indigenous communities. The Conservatives' process, which was very similar to ours, forgot to include indigenous communities. We made a decision to begin the conversation—

•(1420)

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

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the investigation into the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard seems never-ending. There are goodies for everyone with Liberal connections, starting with the industrial park that a slew of Liberal friends and relatives have a hand in. Now we are hearing that the minister ordered a business owner to back out of a partnership with Clearwater in favour of an alliance with a Liberal MP's brother who owns Premium Seafoods.

When did the Prime Minister find out that the minister's family would benefit from this very lucrative contract?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apparently my hon. colleague wants to ask the same questions in French. That does not change the facts. As I just explained in English, and in French earlier this week, no member of my family and none of my wife's 60 first cousins benefited from this process. I find it irresponsible of the member to keep repeating these allegations when he knows very well that they are false.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Liberals the only thing that is clear and transparent is the lens taking the Prime Minister's selfies.

Bribery is the only thing missing from the list of allegations of patronage, breach of contract, and deceit associated with the fishing expedition of the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

When did the Prime Minister learn that the minister's family would benefit from this lucrative contract and why is the Prime Minister defending the indefensible?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has only heard these false allegations, repeated by my colleague, here in the House.

The Prime Minister was very clear. Our government decided to open up commercial fishing, the offshore fishery, to the indigenous peoples in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. We implemented an open process to consult the industry and indigenous communities. That was something the Conservative Party forgot to do when it also decided to add stakeholders to this fishery three years ago.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has been clear. The Liberals do not have a plan to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies.

How does the government defend itself? It discredits the Auditor General's work and says that he does not know what he is talking about.

Can the Liberals tell us the total amount of the subsidies for fossil fuels? Can they tell us when in 2019 they will eliminate those subsidies? Can they finally tell us how much money they are going to give Kinder Morgan? Where is the Liberal government's plan?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by the

year 2025, and we are on track to meet that target. At the same time, we know that the Trans Mountain expansion is very important for our country, for our economy, and for jobs across Canada. That is why we are working with the company to find a solution to the pipeline expansion. That is very important.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take us all back to Paris. It was December 2015, and a shiny new Prime Minister from Canada put his hand on his chest and promised the world that Canada would end the subsidies to the big oil and gas companies. If we fast-forward to today, that same Prime Minister beats his chest as he not only keeps the subsidies in place, but is actually adding on indemnification for the Kinder Morgan pipeline proposal.

Canadians and the world want to know what happened to that guy. Where is the support for the green, clean jobs of tomorrow? When are the Liberals going to finally keep their commitment and end the subsidy to big oil and big gas?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have committed to phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies between now and 2025. We are on track to do that. In fact, we took measures to do that in budget 2016. At the same time, we want to make sure that we can move forward with the pipeline expansion, which is in the best interests of our country.

The environment and the economy can go hand in hand. That is exactly what we are doing by taking a commercial approach to finding a way to have that pipeline project go forward without having any subsidy in place in any way.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals say they are committed, but I am committed to having a luscious, full head of hair and it is not happening, either. I am wondering when the Liberals are actually going to do something about it.

There are a lot of things we disagree about in this place, and we should, yet there is one thing we should never disagree about, and that is how Canadians vote in our elections. The way Canadians vote is sacred and a foundation of our democracy. It is not a right or left issue; it is right or wrong. It was wrong when Stephen Harper forced the unfair elections act through Parliament, and it is wrong when the Liberals do the exact same thing.

My question for the government is simple. Will it commit today, yes or no, to not move any changes to our election laws without multi-party—

● (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Democratic Institutions.

Oral Questions

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud of Bill C-76, and I am delighted that it is going to the procedure and House affairs committee so it can get the study and the interrogation it deserves.

I am looking forward to members opposite asking questions of witnesses to ensure that we encourage Canadians to participate in our democracy, to encourage young Canadians to be registered for elections, to ensure that Canadians without identification can have vouching and can use their voter identification card, and to ensure that Canadians living abroad and every single Canadian have the right to vote.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to trust the Liberals.

We are all gathered here to represent our constituents and make their voices heard in Ottawa.

Do the Liberals realize what they are doing by curtailing the debate on the electoral reform bill? Do they understand the irony of the situation? Refusing to debate in a democracy is the same as refusing to engage in the democratic process.

By doing the same thing the Conservatives did in 2014, the Liberals are insulting all Canadians.

Do they realize what they are doing? It is serious.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my NDP colleagues to move this bill forward and reverse the changes that were made by the former Conservative government. We can ensure that every Canadian who has the right to vote can do so. We want to ensure that young Canadians are automatically registered to vote when they turn 18. I really look forward to working with my colleagues in the House to improve Canada's democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have brought forward major changes to our electoral laws, and these are changes that would tip the electoral scales in their favour. I do not know if there is any legislation that could be more significant. After only one hour of debate, they moved notice of time allocation.

As the Liberal member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame stated, “If we are actually debating...any changes to the Elections Act...time allocation and closure need not apply.”

If the Liberals actually respected Canadians, they would let this legislation receive proper debate. Why are the Liberals disrespecting Canadians and trying to ram this bill through?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to respond to my colleague from the Conservatives, because we are making it easier for Canadians to vote. We are clamping down on those who maliciously thwart and interfere in our electoral process. Let us contrast that with the former Conservative government, which made it tougher for Canadians to vote, from robocalls to Dean Del Mastro, who participated in schemes to maliciously thwart the electoral

process. That is also the party that had to pay \$250,000 in fines for breaking electoral laws.

We will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to our democracy.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Niagara Centre will come to order.

The hon. member for Banff—Airdrie.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of things that are broken, how about all the broken Liberal promises? Canadians clearly cannot trust the Prime Minister. If he will not keep the word of his own backbenchers, maybe he will listen to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government, who said:

The government, by once again relying on a time allocation motion to get its agenda passed, speaks of incompetence. It speaks of a genuine lack of respect for parliamentary procedure and ultimately for Canadians. It continues to try to prevent members of Parliament from being engaged and representing their constituents on the floor of the House of Commons.

I have a question for the Prime Minister: Why the hypocrisy?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to talk about things broken, let us talk about broken rules. With Bill C-76, our government makes it easier for Canadians to vote and toughens the sanctions for those who break the rules. The defeated Harper Conservatives, on the other hand, made it tougher for Canadians to vote and broke the rules.

We will not be taking lessons from the Harper Conservatives, who paid a \$250,000 fine for breaking the rules and used robocalls to send people to the wrong polls. The parliamentary secretary to the former prime minister went to jail.

● (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives wanted to protect the integrity of our electoral system, they allowed for 84 hours of debate. I repeat, 84 hours of debate. When the Liberals introduced Bill C-76 to rig the election in their favour, they invoked closure to put the bill to vote yesterday, after just two hours of debate.

What are the Liberals afraid of? Are they afraid of losing the next election?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague opposite remembers the previous government's Bill C-23. With Bill C-76, we are making it easier for Canadians to vote, and we are cracking down on offenders who maliciously interfere with our electoral process. Compare that to the Conservatives, who, when they were in government, made it harder for Canadians to vote and who took part in malicious schemes, like the one involving Dean Del Mastro and his robocalls, to undermine the electoral process. We do not need any lectures on democracy from the Conservatives.

Oral Questions

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the voter information card is not a piece of ID. Many of them end up in recycling bins. Elections Canada admitted that in 2015 nearly 400,000 of them contained errors. In Quebec, voters are already used to having to present a health card, driver's licence, Canadian passport, Indian status card, or a Canadian Forces ID card.

Can the Liberals tell me what class of citizens is excluded from this list?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, 150,000 Canadians were unable to vote during the last election as a result of the rules implemented by the previous Canadian government. The Conservatives are the only ones who are afraid of Canadian voters. We love that Canadians have the right to vote, and we will do everything we can to ensure that all eligible Canadians can vote.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister said that there was something about basic dictatorships he liked, he was not kidding. Once again, he is proving that statement to be at the core of everything he is and everything he represents.

We now know that someone has ordered Elections Canada to implement this bill before Parliament has passed it. Our democratic system belongs to Canadians, Canadians who elect us to this place. They expect legislation to be debated before it is enacted. They expect due process.

Will the Prime Minister instruct Elections Canada to halt the implementation of this bill until Parliament passes the amended version?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, unlike the opposite, we are not afraid of Elections Canada. In fact, that is why in this bill we have given the commissioner of Elections Canada the power to compel testimony, something that may have come in handy when dealing with robocalls. We have also given the commissioner of Elections Canada the power to lay charges.

We also believe that working with Elections Canada is important, which is why we are implementing over 85% of the recommendations from the CEO of Elections Canada should this bill pass. I hope my colleagues on the other side would do this, because it is right for democracy.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like Gerald Butts has found another ventriloquist act to perform with. Where are they now? Where are the great defenders of democracy from the Liberal side, and what do they say now? Nothing.

We now know the Prime Minister ordered Elections Canada to implement this bill before it passed Parliament. If that is not rigging our elections system in their favour, I do not know what is.

Again, will the Prime Minister instruct Elections Canada to halt the implementation of this bill until Parliament passes the amended version?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a woman in politics, I take umbrage with the fact that he is saying I am not speaking on behalf of myself and on behalf of the government. That is unbelievable.

Furthermore, it is not this side of the side that had robocalls. It is not this side of the House that had the parliamentary secretary to the prime minister go to jail. We on this side are doing what is necessary for democracy, which is why 85% of the recommendations from the CEO from 2015 are represented in this bill. Let us do what is right for democracy, all of us.

* * *

● (1435)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have offered to fully protect Kinder Morgan, while Canadians bear all the financial and environmental risks. Now we have learned that the infrastructure bank and the CPP Investment Board may offer up Canadian pension money to backstop this pipeline expansion.

Canadian taxpayers should not have to foot the bill for oil and gas subsidies. This is corporate welfare that the Liberals promised to end. The gig is up.

Will the Prime Minister just admit that he has completely abandoned his promise to end subsidies to big oil?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reinforce our commitment to end subsidies to oil organizations of any sort by 2025. We are on track to do that.

What I can tell members is that we are working hard. We are in discussions with Kinder Morgan, the proponent from the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline. We know this project is in the best interests of Canada, in the best interests of Canadians from a standpoint of jobs and our overall economy. We will work to do this in a way that is commercially appropriate and in a way that does not create any subsidies.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a Liberal's word: an election promise in 2015 and maybe we will get there in 10 years. More than two-thirds of Canadians want these oil and gas subsidies abolished. The Liberals solemnly promised to do just , as we have heard many times in this place. However, there is no plan to do that. They talk about something perhaps 10 years from now. If only they get re-elected a couple of times, maybe they will manage to get there. It is even worse, considering that they now want to compensate this same industry by giving money to Kinder Morgan.

What is their plan to finally end subsidies?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that we have committed to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies by the year 2025. In our first budget we announced the expiration of the accelerated capital cost allowance for certain LNG facilities.

Oral Questions

In the 2017 budget, we announced the elimination of certain tax credits for oil and gas exploration expenses. We are committed to figuring out a solution for the future, because it is very important, but at the same time, we want to find a solution for our economy.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the International Organisation of La Francophonie is funded with Canadian taxpayers' money.

Over the past year, the QMI Agency has reported some troubling facts about the management of this organization under the leadership of Michaëlle Jean. She has refused to publicly explain the frivolous expenses reported by the QMI Agency. She has not been transparent at all, and other scandals abound.

How can this government still have the nerve to support the upcoming re-election of the president of the organization in October?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to support a Canadian woman at the head of the International Organisation of La Francophonie. Madame Jean does excellent work as far as the organisation's mission is concerned. She promotes values that are important to Canadians, such as defending human rights, defending women's rights, and supporting women entrepreneurs and young entrepreneurs.

The International Organisation of La Francophonie needs to modernize its financial practices and we will help it to do just that.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not about pride or flag-waving, it is about pride when it comes to taxpayers' dollars.

The Liberal government has a nonchalant attitude about taxpayers' money. I am not at all surprised that it is inclined to support Michaëlle Jean, since she manages her finances the same way they do, that is to say abysmally.

Can the Liberals at least show us anything at all to reassure us about Michaëlle Jean's candidacy?

Can they at least ask her today for a public explanation?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that we closely watch every dollar invested by our government, particularly in international aid. Much of the funding invested through the International Organisation of La Francophonie goes to help the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly in African countries and in Haiti, to encourage women and young entrepreneurs. We should be proud of this organization.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that only the Liberals are proud of what Michaëlle Jean is doing.

Michaëlle Jean has become an embarrassment to Canada. She has been irresponsible in her management of the organization, doing exactly what the Liberal government is doing now: spending recklessly. Her attitude is completely irresponsible. However, things

have just gotten serious, as France has withdrawn its support for Michaëlle Jean.

How is it that only the Liberal government is defending the indefensible?

● (1440)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I have had the chance to travel to many francophone countries, meet with my counterparts and attend ministerial meetings. I can assure the House that there is a great deal of support for the secretary general, a Canadian who is doing a good job managing the organization.

We would agree that this organization's management and financial rules could be improved, and that is what we are helping Madame Jean and the organization to do.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that she is proud of Michaëlle Jean, but journalist Alexandre Robillard just broke the story of a four-day stay at the Waldorf Astoria for \$50,000. Are you proud of that?

Half a million dollars to renovate her apartment, including a grand piano, for double the estimated costs—are you proud of that?

The Speaker: Order. I must remind the hon. member to direct his comments to the Chair. When we say "you" here, we refer to the Speaker, and I do not believe that he meant to address the Speaker.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, thank you, because I know you are a man who takes pride in responsibility, not like that government over there.

Madame Jean rented a limousine to go half a kilometre. Is the government proud of that? She spent \$2 million on travel, 40% over budget. Is the government proud of that?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this organization operates under long-established rules. It is worth reviewing these rules based on what is acceptable today. I can assure the House that we are working closely with the administration and the secretary general to modernize these rules that, based on today's standards, are no longer acceptable. The Secretary General followed the rules, based on the information I have, and I am proud to support her renewed candidacy.

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[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the United States are renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty, a 54-year-old agreement that has had tremendous impact on communities in the Columbia River basin, including three first nations. Last week, the government told those first nations they would be excluded from the talks, despite the massive effects that treaty has had on their territories.

Oral Questions

Why has the government excluded the first nations from the talks, and what happened to the government's commitment to a new nation-to-nation relationship?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our objective in these negotiations is to ensure that the Columbia River Treaty continues to be mutually beneficial for both Canada and the United States. We have been working very closely with the British Columbian authorities, the first nations up and down its length, and the stakeholders, to ensure that all interests are heard, represented, and addressed in these negotiations.

We will also address environmental considerations and the interests of first nations, and aim to renew this agreement for the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the rights of first nations are protected by our Constitution and by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. When the Columbia River Treaty was signed in 1964, these very nations were excluded from the negotiations. Now that the treaty is to be renegotiated, they are being told that they will again be ignored and excluded from the process. Why is that?

Is it because the most important relationship that this government has is with indigenous peoples?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our objective is to ensure that the treaty continues to be mutually beneficial for both Canada and the United States. We have been working very closely with British Columbia, first nations and stakeholders to ensure that all interests are heard, represented, and addressed in these negotiations. We will also address environmental considerations and the interests of first nations.

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[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the serious crisis in Myanmar is a tragedy that requires an urgent response. The humanitarian situation is precarious, with camps and settlements vulnerable to flooding and landslides during the monsoon season. Congested living conditions continue to increase the risk of disease outbreaks, and more Rohingya are crossing the border into Bangladesh every day.

Could the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie update the House on Canada's latest initiatives to respond to this terrible situation?

• (1445)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from London North Centre for his support to vulnerable populations.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, I was pleased to join my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to unveil our plan to address the Rohingya crisis.

[*English*]

Our strategy includes \$300 million over three years to address humanitarian, development, peace, and stabilization needs in Myanmar and Bangladesh, as well as support to host communities in Bangladesh to mitigate the impact of the crisis, and to build self-reliance and resilience, with a central emphasis on the needs of women and girls.

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[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, problems may not exist in the magical land of Care Bears and unicorns where the Prime Minister lives, but he created a great big one with his thoughtless “Welcome to Canada” tweet.

As we speak, Plattsburgh is being flooded with free flyers explaining how to enter Canada illegally. The flyers even explain how to circumvent our border. What a mess.

There is no need to send ministers all the way to Nigeria. All we have to do is cross the border at Lacolle and dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s. With the Liberals in charge, the border is starting to look like a sieve.

When are they going to plug the gaps?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are aware that a great deal of misinformation is circulating in migrant communities. That is why we continue to reach out to these communities to raise awareness.

Reaching Canada is no guarantee of being granted refugee status. It is vital that we communicate all the important information. That is why our government has asked the organization Plattsburgh Cares to spread the word about the very firmly established criteria that need to be met in order to claim asylum.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are pouring more money down a bottomless pit because they are not turning off the tap: more refugee camps, more money for border services, but nothing to stop illegal border crossings.

While taxpayers are kept waiting at the airport and immigrants face endless wait times, what is the Prime Minister doing to stop this flood of illegal immigrants at the border?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have contacted the organization to allow them to learn the comprehensive nature of our immigration and asylum systems. The consul general in New York will also provide them with more information on all the issues surrounding regular migration to Canada.

Oral Questions

We have an aggressive outreach campaign that has been ongoing since last year, which has been appreciated by organizations and diaspora communities in the United States. It is having an impact. We will continue that outreach campaign, and we are seeing a lot of results with respect to that campaign.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister just said that his plan to deal with his choice to functionally erase the Canadian border is to divert illegal border crossers from Toronto. Last week the plan was to divert them from Quebec to Toronto.

Why is the minister playing a shell game with human beings instead of closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement and restoring compassion and order to Canada's immigration system?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, our record speaks for itself. If we look at the record of the Harper Conservatives, they kept families apart for years. They kept live-in caregivers away from reuniting with their families for five to seven years. They kept refugee numbers very low. They cut refugee health care, which our federal courts called cruel and unusual punishment.

The irony is lost on the Conservative Party.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the City of Toronto announced that it would be opening two emergency services to deal with the arrival of illegal migrants in the city. Mayor John Tory has made it clear that he will have to take extreme measures if more is not done to stop the redirected Quebec migrants. We have a city in a state of crisis.

When will the minister finally close the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Harper Conservatives kept families apart for years. They kept live-in caregivers apart from their families for years. They have recently discovered their compassion for refugees by lecturing us, even though they cut health care for refugees. They have recently discovered the importance of immigration processing, when they kept families apart for years. They have no idea that investment follows talent. Under their watch, talent used to take seven months to get to Canada. Under our watch, it takes two weeks to get to Canada. We are proud of our record.

● (1450)

The Speaker: I have heard quite a bit from the hon. member for Abbotsford today, but he has not had the floor. I would ask him to not interrupt when someone else is speaking.

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister personally witnessed the Liberals on the committee once again refuse to vote on a motion to hear from experts and ill individuals to improve EI sickness benefits.

In 2016, the Prime Minister and the minister said that they were going to fix it by year's end. Two years later, too many ill people still face financial problems.

What is the problem?

Will the minister keep his word, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I did indeed have the chance to attend the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I thanked them for their important work, which among other things has resulted in very compassionate advice for bringing in the Canadian government's first poverty reduction strategy.

I also spoke about the substantial investments in parental benefits and the new family caregiver benefit, the loosening of the rules for sickness benefits, and improvements to the employment insurance system, which benefits tens of thousands of Canadians.

It is on this basis that we will continue to work very hard to improve living conditions and support the EI system.

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[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one year has now passed since Churchill lost its rail line and became a fly-in only community. The closure of the rail line and the port has hurt the entire north. The fact is, Churchill residents do not have time for a years-long legal battle with OmniTRAX to end. They need a deal to get the line back up and running now. In fact, they needed it a long time ago.

After a year, the Liberal government has failed to broker a deal that will restore the line. Therefore, on behalf of northern Manitobans and all those concerned to see them succeed, I would like to ask when exactly they can expect a deal to get the line back on track.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to be committed to the people of Churchill and northern Manitoba. As members know, our chief negotiator has been working with potential buyers of the line and we are also working with indigenous communities and other stakeholders. We are optimistic that we will find an operator to take care of this very important line, and as soon as we are in a position to finalize that, we will let everyone know.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that until this week, a company called iChurchill Inc. was in the process of finalizing an agreement to buy, rebuild, and reopen the Hudson Bay Railway and the port of Churchill. This agreement included a majority ownership stake for Manitoba first nations. However, for some reason, the Liberals decided to intervene and block this agreement. Why?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that we are 100% committed to the people of northern Manitoba and Churchill, and we are going to make sure that this line is rebuilt. At the moment, our chief negotiator is working with all interested parties. We are optimistic that we will find a solution, and as soon as we have one we will let everyone know.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals announced their intention to support new ownership, they laid out three criteria: first, a reasonable price for the sale; second, support from first nations; and third, a viable business plan. iChurchill Inc. believes it met all three of these criteria, but the Liberals rejected this deal with no explanation given. Instead, the Liberals are only willing to deal with one specific company, a Toronto-based financial firm. Why?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to go into the details of negotiations, but I can assure members that our chief negotiator is working with all serious partners in this venture, and when we have a decision, we will let everyone know about it.

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FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government took our advice and declined to allow the sale of Aeon to a Chinese state-owned enterprise. However, in spite of numerous other requests, the Liberals have arrogantly refused to do the same due diligence with Anbang and our senior care facilities. As we now know, Anbang has collapsed, the chairman was arrested, and our seniors' homes are owned by Communist China. Will the minister now commit to fixing the Anbang mess?

•(1455)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is open to investment from other countries. We encourage this because it creates good, middle-class jobs. We do it, though, with careful consideration, depending on the kind of process and the kind of investment. As the decision yesterday proved, we will never compromise our national security. With respect to Cedar Tree and Retirement Concepts, there are guarantees that were put into place. Those guarantees are being followed and monitored, in particular by the provincial government in British Columbia, and we will continue to monitor that situation to make sure that engagements are kept.

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JUSTICE

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was very proud in April 2017 when our government introduced Bill C-46, legislation with the ultimate goal of reducing the significant

number of deaths and injuries caused by impaired driving, a crime that continues to claim innocent lives and wreak havoc and devastation on Canadian families. This legislation includes mandatory alcohol screening, which I understand would significantly deter those individuals who continue to put others at risk by driving while impaired by alcohol. Can the minister please provide the House with an update on the legislation?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the key elements of Bill C-46 is mandatory alcohol screening, which is in use in over 40 countries worldwide, including Australia and Ireland. Our government was very disappointed last night when the Conservatives voted to remove mandatory alcohol screening. We agree with MADD Canada that mandatory alcohol screening saves lives and that it is a fundamental piece in moving forward on and tackling impaired driving. We need this life-saving measure right now.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Chinese Communist regime is bullying and threatening airlines, including Air Canada, with the outrageous demand that they change their designation from “Taiwan” to “Taiwan, China”. The U. S. administration has rightly called these demands Orwellian. By contrast, the Liberals have been silent in the face of a foreign government dictating terms to a Canadian company. When will the Liberals stand up to Beijing's bullying?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada is a private company and responsible for its own website content and its own negotiations. Canada's long-standing position on this issue has not changed.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over two years ago at an event I hosted, the foreign affairs minister of the day, Stéphane Dion, announced that the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture would no longer be optional. It is two years later and nothing has happened.

I would like to reiterate that torture is abhorrent, illegal, and flies in the face of all of the international norms and conventions we have committed to. When will the government finally stand unequivocally against torture and ratify and implement the OPCAT?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government's primary consideration in all of its international engagements is the upholding of human rights. We agree with the member opposite that torture is abhorrent and should not be used.

Oral Questions

Ratifying and acceding to these optional protocols, as with many conventions internationally, requires significant conversations with both provincial authorities and other entities and stakeholders right across the country. That work continues to take place within Global Affairs Canada, across the Government of Canada, and with our partners right across this country.

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CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are currently affected by the flooding in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, and in all of New Brunswick and British Columbia. I personally witnessed the impact of the floods on families, businesses, and first responders who are working 24-7 for their community. This year, some of these courageous people may find themselves unable to file or pay taxes on time. Those people should not be penalized.

Can the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of National Revenue inform the House on the actions the CRA is taking to support affected Canadians?

• (1500)

Ms. Kamal Khara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the important work by members from New Brunswick and B.C. in response to this natural disaster.

Our government recognizes the difficulties faced by Canadians affected by flooding in New Brunswick and B.C., and we are committed to helping to reduce that burden. We understand that natural disasters may cause hardship for taxpayers, whose primary concern during this time is their families, their homes, and communities. Those affected are encouraged to make a request to the CRA for taxpayer relief, either online or simply by calling the CRA.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister called for an independent investigation into events in Gaza, presumably because he lacks confidence in Israel's domestic mechanisms for self-assessment. However, when a Canadian citizen was killed in an Iranian prison, the government said it wanted the Iranian government to investigate itself.

Which justice system does the government regard as more credible to undertake neutral self-assessment, Israel's or Iran's?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives shamefully try to turn Canada's support for Israel into a partisan issue, I will repeat the long-standing position of consecutive governments of Canada, both Liberal and Conservative, that Canada is a steadfast friend of Israel and a friend of the Palestinian people.

Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization since 2002. That is a position our government continues to hold. We strongly condemn its culture of violence, its threats towards Israel, and its acts

of terrorism. Our call for an investigation into the situation in Gaza includes reports of incitement by Hamas.

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[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, asylum seekers arriving in Plattsburgh are given instructions on how to cross the border illegally. One pamphlet tells them how to get to Roxham Road, how much a taxi costs, who to contact in Montreal and what to expect. The minister has known all of this for weeks. What did he just tell us he did? He made a phone call. I am impressed by such vigorous action that will make all the difference.

Does he take us for fools?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know there is a great deal of misinformation circulating in migrant communities. That is why quite a while ago we launched an awareness campaign in the United States.

Making an asylum claim is not a free ticket to enter Canada. We are making sure that everyone clearly understands that they have to appear before an independent tribunal—the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. We have contacted Plattsburgh Cares to inform them about the realities of making an asylum claim.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, GPQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa is preparing to take in more asylum seekers and the Americans are preparing to send them to us, but never through legal channels. The government still refuses to suspend the safe third country agreement between Canada and the United States.

Instead of encouraging illegal entries, and instead of going off to Africa, can the minister show some backbone and go to the United States to fix the problem with the American authorities?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working on a number of fronts on the important asylum seekers file. We will continue to do so. In fact, next week there will be a meeting of our ad hoc committee, which includes not only federal, but provincial departments as well. We are also working with and are in talks with the United States. We need to work on a number of fronts on this important issue.

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[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as the first member of Parliament to raise the issue of the Aecon sale in this place, I am enormously gratified that the Government of Canada has decided to stop the takeover of Aecon by the People's Republic of China, but I am very worried because there is the Canada-China investment treaty. The People's Republic of China can complain about anything, anytime, in secret.

Could the government commit to full transparency if the People's Republic of China complains of the Canadian decision?

• (1505)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we relied on our security agencies and the multi-step review process and we came to a decision, which we think is the right one.

We will use all legitimate and legal means to contest any contestation of that decision to defend Canada's right under our act. That is a commitment I will make to the hon. member right now.

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[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the government House leader share with the House what the business will be for the remainder of this week and for next week?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, we will begin debate on Bill C-75, the justice modernization act. This evening the House will consider, in committee of the whole, the votes in the main estimates for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Tomorrow morning, we will debate the motion to extend the sitting hours. After question period, we will begin debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-47 on the Arms Trade Treaty. We will resume that debate on Monday.

[English]

On Tuesday, we will resume debate at second reading of Bill C-75, the justice modernization act. On Wednesday, we will begin debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-64, the abandoned vessels act.

Finally, should Bill C-74, the budget bill, or Bill C-69, the environmental assessment act, be reported back to the House, they shall take priority in the calendar.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. In a moment I will seek unanimous consent for a motion. I will briefly explain why.

Earlier today, I tabled Bill S-245, which would provide certainty for the Trans Mountain expansion and clearly exert federal jurisdiction over all aspects of its construction and future operations, to stop roadblocks and delays. It would give certainty to the proponent directly and to all the first nations along the route that support it, certainty for energy workers and family, for Canada's economy overall, and for future jobs and opportunities across the country to sustain Canada's social programs and high standard of living.

Since the government has failed to table its own plan in response to the request for certainty by the proponent and the deadline is just one week ago, it is crucial that Bill S-245 proceed as soon as possible.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders require the bill be deemed votable before it can be debated. If this bill is subjected to

Privilege

the usual votability determination process, it will likely be delayed several weeks, which is a delay that is unacceptable to energy workers and harms Canada's investment, regulatory, and political reputation.

To restore confidence and to ensure expeditious debate, study, and vote on Bill S-245, I seek unanimous consent for the following: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-245, an act to declare the Trans Mountain Pipeline Project and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada, be deemed votable.

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

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: I have a notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

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PRIVILEGE

PROCEEDINGS IN HUMA COMMITTEE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege regarding a matter that you will appreciate falls within certain enumerated rights and immunities for the House to treat as a breach of privilege.

Page 145 of Bosc and Gagnon states, "The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House." My question of privilege today is in response to what sadly took place at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, known as HUMA. It happened yesterday afternoon between votes. I am bringing this issue before the Speaker at the earliest possible time.

Page 323 of Bosc and Gagnon states:

When in the Chair, the Speaker embodies the power and authority of the office, strengthened by rule and precedent. He or she must at all times show, and be seen to show, the impartiality required to sustain the trust and goodwill of the House.

Government Orders

At the HUMA committee yesterday, three ministers appeared to answer questions about the main estimates. The main estimates, for Canadians' sake, are how the government plans on spending Canadian taxpayer money. The Liberal members control HUMA, which, in a majority government, is quite normal, and they obviously support the government's main estimates.

The purpose of having the ministers at committee yesterday was to give opposition members the opportunity to question the ministers. The government has said numerous times that the ministers will appear before committees and answer questions to be accountable. Sadly, that is not what is happening.

The HUMA committee started with copies of the ministers' speeches being distributed to all members. I immediately made a request to move to questions to the ministers because of the pending votes. This request was rejected by the chair and the chair assured all members that there would be time for questions after the ministers' speeches.

The chair then asked the first minister to speak, and he spoke for 11 and a half minutes. I then made a point of order reminding the chair of the time restraints because of the votes and that the minister had been permitted more time than what was permitted. I shared my concern that opposition members were being denied their right to ask the ministers questions. The chair again promised all members that there would be time for questions of the ministers after the speeches. The vote bells were ringing and the meeting was suspended, which means temporarily adjourned.

The HUMA committee reconvened at 5:20 p.m. yesterday. The chair asked the other two ministers to speak for five minutes each. The chair then abruptly adjourned the meeting at 5:35 p.m. Opposition members, who were waiting to ask questions, objected strongly, reminding the chair of his promise to let opposition members ask questions of the ministers. The chair acknowledged that he had the discretion to continue the meeting until 5:45 p.m. when the bells would begin to ring, but he turned and walked away with the ministers.

Page 1039 of Bosc and Gagnon states:

The Chair is a key figure on any committee. Chairs are so important that, when a committee does not have one, it is not considered properly constituted. Committee Chairs have procedural, administrative and representative responsibilities.

They are to be impartial. It further states:

Chairs preside over committee meetings and oversee committee work. They recognize the Members, witnesses and other people who wish to speak at these meetings as in the House, all remarks are to be addressed to the Chair. They ensure that any rules established by the committee, including those on the apportioning of speaking time, are respected.

The chair has the responsibility to remain unbiased, to ensure that the rights of all members in the committee are honoured and protected, and to fairly apportion the speaking times to the committee members. To deny opposition members their right to question the ministers was wrong and, I believe, contempt in this case. It has impeded my duties and responsibilities as a member of Parliament, my duties to Canadian taxpayers to represent them and question ministers. I believe the House can consider these acts of the chair, who I personally respect, as falling under the scope of contempt.

●(1510)

If you find this to be a prima facie question of privilege, I am prepared to move an appropriate motion and send this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the question of privilege raised by the member for Langley—Aldergrove. I will add that on page 116 of Bosc and Gagnon, it says:

Misleading a Minister or a Member has also been considered a form of obstruction and, thus, a prima facie breach of privilege.

Yesterday the HUMA committee chair told the committee members that when we returned from votes, he would ask to extend the meeting so that we would have the same time to ask questions to the ministers appearing before the committee. You will find that the chair's assurance is on the record.

The committee resumed after the votes and proceeded to statements by the remaining ministers. Once these opening statements concluded, the chair did not ask to extend the meeting. Instead, the chair immediately proceeded to adjourn the meeting.

The chair's assurance to committee members was misleading, and ultimately, the result was that all committee members were denied the opportunity to ask even a single question to the ministers appearing before the committee.

Opposition members have a duty to hold the government accountable, and my ability to perform that parliamentary duty was obstructed.

●(1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove for raising his question and the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster for adding her views on this.

It is normally the case that a committee is master of its own domain, its own house, and that the Speaker does not have jurisdiction over what happens there. Nevertheless, I will examine the arguments and come back to the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved that Bill C-75, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to speak to Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts. The legislation represents a key milestone in our government's commitment to modernize the criminal justice system, reduce delays, and ensure the safety of Canadians.

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For more than a decade, the criminal justice system has been under significant strain. Although the crime rate in Canada has been declining, court cases are more complex, trials are getting longer, and the impacts on victims are compounded. In addition, indigenous people and marginalized Canadians, including those suffering from mental illness and addictions, continue to be overrepresented in the criminal justice system. For these reasons, I was mandated by the Prime Minister to reform the criminal justice system, and it is why I was proud to introduce this legislation as part of our government's response to those fundamental challenges.

Bill C-75 also responds to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in 2016 in *R. v. Jordan*. The decision established strict timelines beyond which delays would be presumptively unreasonable and cases would be stayed. In such cases, the accused will not stand trial. This is unacceptable, and it jeopardizes public confidence in the justice system.

The bill also addresses issues raised in the June 2017 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which called on the government to address court delays, and it reflects our government's commitment to bring about urgent and bold reforms, many of which were identified as priorities by all provincial and territorial justice ministers in April and September of last year.

The bill proposes reforms in seven key areas. First, the bill would modernize and streamline the bail system. Second, it would enhance our approach to addressing administration of justice offences, including for youth. Third, it would bolster our response to intimate partner violence. Fourth, the bill would restrict the availability of preliminary inquiries to offences with penalties of life imprisonment. Fifth, it would reclassify offences to allow the crown to elect the most efficient procedure appropriate in the circumstances. Sixth, it would improve the jury selection process. Seventh, it would strengthen the case management powers of judges. The bill includes a number of additional reforms related to efficiencies, which I will touch on briefly later.

As noted, the first area of reform would modernize and streamline the bail regime. Under the charter, an accused person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. If charged with an offence, that person has the right not to be denied bail without just cause. The Supreme Court of Canada has repeatedly stated that bail, including the types of release and conditions imposed, must be reasonable, yet we know that police and courts routinely impose conditions that are too numerous, too restrictive, and at times directed toward improper objectives, such as behaviour and punishment. These objectives do not protect public safety.

We also know that there are more individuals in remand than those convicted of a crime. In other words, our correctional facilities are more than half-filled with people who have not been convicted of an offence.

In addition, the current approach to bail uses a disproportionate amount of resources, taking away from more serious cases. It perpetuates a cycle of incarceration.

Consistent with the 2017 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *R. v. Antic*, the proposed bail reforms would codify a principle of

restraint. This would direct police and judges to consider the least restrictive and most appropriate means of responding to criminal charges at the bail stage rather than automatically detaining an accused. The individual circumstances of an indigenous accused and a vulnerable accused, such as a homeless person or one with mental illness and addiction issues, would become required considerations when making bail decisions. This means that an accused's circumstances would have to be considered prior to placing conditions upon them that were difficult or impossible to follow.

The principle of restraint would make bail courts more efficient by encouraging release at the earliest possible opportunity, without the need for a bail hearing in every case, and would take significant steps to reduce costs associated with the growing remand population currently detained in custody awaiting trial.

• (1520)

The bill would also strengthen the way our bail system responds to intimate partner violence by providing better protection for victims. If an accused has a history of violence against an intimate partner and is charged with similar conduct, the amendments would impose a reverse onus at the bail hearing, shifting the responsibility to the accused to show why the accused should not be detained pending trial.

I will now turn to the second area of reform proposed in Bill C-75, which is to enhance the way our justice system responds to administration of justice offences. These are offences that are committed by a person against the justice system itself after another offence has already been committed or alleged. Common examples are failure to comply with bail conditions, such as to abstain from consuming alcohol; failure to appear in court; or breaching a curfew.

Across Canada, accused people are routinely burdened with complex and unnecessary bail conditions that are unrelated to public safety and that may even be impossible to follow, such as when a curfew is broken by an accused because he or she missed the bus in a remote area. In other words, accused people are being placed in circumstances in which a breach is virtually inevitable. We are setting them up to fail.

Indigenous people and marginalized Canadians are disproportionately impacted by breach charges, often because of their personal circumstances, such as a lack of family and community supports. As a result, indigenous people and marginalized Canadians are more likely to be charged, more likely to be denied bail, and if released, more likely to be subject to stricter conditions.

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In addition, administration of justice offences impose an enormous burden on the criminal justice system, as nearly 40% of all adult cases involve at least one of these administrative charges. To respond to these challenges, Bill C-75 proposes a new approach. Police would retain the option to lay a new charge for the breach or failure to appear where appropriate. However, if the offence did not involve physical or emotional harm to a victim, property damage, or economic loss, the police would have an additional option of referring the accused to a judicial referral hearing. This would be an entirely new tool that would serve as an alternative to an unnecessary criminal charge and that would substantially increase court efficiencies without impacting public safety.

In the youth context, these proposals would encourage police to first consider the use of informal measures, as already directed by the Youth Criminal Justice Act, such as warnings, cautions, and referrals, and would require that conditions imposed on young persons be reasonable and necessary. This aligns with the overall philosophy of the act, which is to prevent our youth from entering a life of crime, in part by providing alternatives to formal criminal charges and custody.

At the judicial referral hearing, a court would hear the bail conditions and have three options: release the accused on the same conditions, impose new conditions to better address the specific circumstances of the accused, or detain the accused. This approach would allow for alternative and early resolution of minor breaches and would ensure that only reasonable and necessary conditions were imposed. This is a more efficient alternative to laying a new criminal charge and would help prevent indigenous persons and marginalized Canadians from entering the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

The third area of reform in Bill C-75 is with respect to intimate partner violence. In 2015, Canadians elected our government on a promise to give more support to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment and to ensure that more perpetrators were brought to justice. I am proud to follow through on this commitment within this bill.

As I already noted, those accused of repeat offences involving violence against an intimate partner would be subject to a reverse onus at the bail stage. In addition, the bill does the following: (1) proposes a higher sentencing range for repeat offences involving intimate partner violence; (2) broadens the definition of “intimate partner” to include dating partners and former partners; (3) provides that strangulation is an elevated form of assault; and (4) explicitly specifies that evidence of intimate partner abuse is an aggravating factor for sentencing purposes.

● (1525)

Intimate partner violence is a reality for at least one in two women in Canada. Women who are indigenous, trans, elderly, new to Canada, or living with a disability are at increased risk for experiencing violence due to systemic barriers and failures. The personal and often lifelong consequences of violence against women are enormous.

The fourth area of reforms is to increase court efficiencies by limiting the availability of preliminary inquiries. Preliminary inquiries are an optional process used to determine whether there

is enough evidence to send an accused to trial. Bill C-75 would limit their availability to accused adults charged with very serious offences punishable by life imprisonment, such as murder and kidnapping.

I recognize this represents a significant change. It is not a change we propose lightly. It is the product of an in-depth consultation process with my counterparts in the provinces and territories and with the courts, and it is based on the best available evidence. For instance, we know in 2015-2016, provincial court cases involving preliminary inquiries took more than four times longer to reach a decision than cases with no preliminary inquiry.

It is important to note that there is no constitutional right to a preliminary inquiry, and one is not necessary for a fair trial so long as the crown satisfies its disclosure requirements. In the Jordan decision, the Supreme Court of Canada asked Parliament to take a fresh look at current processes and reconsider the value of preliminary inquiries in light of the broad disclosure rules that exist today. The Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs also recommended that they be restricted or eliminated.

The proposed measures would reduce the number preliminary of inquiries by approximately 87%, ensure they are still available for the more complex and serious offences, help unclog the courts, and reduce burdens on witnesses and victims from having to testify twice, once at a preliminary inquiry and once at trial. For example, this measure would eliminate the need for a vulnerable witness in a sexual assault or child sexual assault trial from having to testify twice.

I am confident these reforms would not reduce trial fairness, that prosecutors would continue to take their disclosure obligations seriously, that our courts would continue to uphold the right to make full answer and defence, and that there would remain flexibility in existing processes, such as out-of-court discoveries, that have been implemented in some provinces already—for example, in Quebec and Ontario.

I will now turn to the fifth major area of reform proposed in Bill C-75, which is the reclassification of offences. The Criminal Code classifies offences as summary conviction, indictable, or hybrid. Hybrid offences may proceed as either a summary conviction or as an indictable offence. That choice is made by the prosecutor after considering the facts and circumstances of the case. The bill would hybridize 136 indictable offences and standardize the default maximum penalty for summary conviction offences in the Criminal Code to two years less a day.

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These proposals would neither interfere with the court's ability to impose proportionate sentences nor change the existing maximum penalties for indictable offences. What Bill C-75 proposes is to provide more flexibility to prosecutors to proceed summarily in provincial court for less serious cases. This would allow for matters to proceed more quickly and for superior courts to focus on the most serious matters, resulting in an overall boost in efficiency in the system.

Let me clear: this reform is in no way intended to send a message that offences being hybridized are less serious or should be subjected to lower sentences. Rather, it is about granting greater discretion to our prosecutors to choose the most efficient and appropriate procedure, having regard to the unique circumstances before them. Serious offences would continue to be treated seriously and milder offences would take up less court time, while still carrying the gravity of a criminal charge.

● (1530)

A sixth area of proposed reforms in Bill C-75 is with respect to jury selection.

Discrimination in the selection of juries has been well documented for many years. Concerns about discrimination in peremptory challenges and its impact on indigenous peoples being represented on juries was raised back in 1991 by Senator Murray Sinclair, then a judge, in the Manitoba aboriginal justice inquiry report. That report, now over 25 years old, explicitly called for the repeal of peremptory challenges. More recently, retired Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci addressed these issues in his 2013 report on first nations representation on Ontario juries.

Reforms in this area are long overdue. Peremptory challenges give the accused and the crown the ability to exclude jurors without providing a reason. In practice, this can and has led to their use in a discriminatory manner to ensure a jury of a particular composition. This bill proposes that Canada join countries like England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in abolishing them.

To bring more fairness and transparency to the process, the legislation would also empower a judge to decide whether to exclude jurors challenged for cause by either the defence or prosecution. The legislation will strengthen the power of judges to stand aside some jurors in order to make room for a more diverse jury that will in turn promote confidence in the administration of justice. Courts are already familiar with the concept of exercising their powers for this purpose.

I am confident that the reforms will make the jury selection process more transparent, promote fairness and impartiality, improve the overall efficiency of our jury trials, and foster public confidence in the criminal justice system.

The seventh area of reforms will strengthen judicial case management. As the Supreme Court of Canada noted in its 2017 decision in *Cody*, judges are uniquely positioned to encourage and foster culture change. I completely agree. Judges are already engaged in managing cases and ensuring that they proceed promptly and fairly through the existing authorities in the Criminal Code, as well as provincial court rules. These reforms would bolster these

powers—for instance, by allowing case management judges to be appointed at the earliest point in the proceeding.

In addition to the major reforms I have noted thus far, Bill C-75 will make technical amendments to further support efficiencies, such as by facilitating remote technology and consolidating and clarifying the Attorney General of Canada's power to prosecute.

Finally, the bill will make better use of limited parliamentary time by including three justice bills currently before Parliament: Bill C-28, Bill C-38, and Bill C-39.

In closing, Bill C-75 proposes meaningful reforms that will speed up criminal court proceedings and improve the safety of our communities while also taking steps to address the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples and marginalized Canadians in the criminal justice system.

Our criminal justice system must be fair, equitable, and just. Victims, families, accused, and all participants in the justice system deserve no less. I urge all members of this House to support this important piece of legislation.

● (1535)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-75 is an absolute train wreck of a bill. Instead of reducing delays in our court system, it is actually going to increase delays.

I want to ask the minister specifically about the hybridization of offences. The purported objective of this bill is to reduce delays in response to the *Jordan* decision. By hybridizing offences, the government is taking a whole series of indictable offences that must be prosecuted in a superior court and making them prosecutable in a provincial court. Under *Jordan*, a delay is deemed to be presumptively unreasonable when 30 months pass between the laying of charges and the conclusion of the trial in a superior court, whereas it is only 18 months for matters in a provincial court, so how does downloading cases onto provincial courts actually deal with the *Jordan* decision?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague across the way about the reclassification of offences. I will start answering the question by speaking to the collaborative work that we engaged in with the provinces and territories in identifying appropriate and bold reforms that would ensure we are collectively addressing delays in the criminal justice system.

The reclassification of offences was strongly supported between and among my colleagues. As I noted in my speech, these amendments would give prosecutors the discretion they need to elect the most efficient mode of prosecution. Evaluating cases on a case-by-case basis would enable some offences to proceed summarily in provincial courts, which our discussions told us would free up time in superior courts for the more serious offences.

This is one of the bold reforms that we are proposing to move forward on that will have a fundamental impact on delays in the criminal justice system.

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Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, about two months ago, a report was issued in the minister's department with the title of "What We Heard—Transforming Canada's Criminal Justice System". I would like to quote from that report and ask her a question.

The quote says:

Almost all roundtable participants stressed the same major concern. They said that most people who come in contact with the criminal justice system are vulnerable or marginalized individuals. They are struggling with mental health and addiction issues, poverty, homelessness, and prior victimization.

How does the minister see Bill C-75 meeting their major concern?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question and the focus on the "What we heard" report. We have done extensive consultations across the country on how we can collectively reform the criminal justice system. I take very seriously within my mandate letter the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system and recognize that it is not just indigenous peoples but other marginalized people as well, such as those suffering from mental illness and addictions.

In terms of how Bill C-75 addresses bail reform and administration of justice offences, conditions placed on marginalized individuals and indigenous persons are more predominantly featured for these individuals. Inappropriate conditions placed on these individuals bring indigenous people or other marginalized individuals back into the criminal justice system. We are providing law enforcement and the courts with discretion to take into account those factors with respect to these populations.

• (1540)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking and commending the minister for the leadership role she has taken on this file and the forward-looking changes she is suggesting with respect to the reform of the criminal justice system.

It is clear that not everyone is going to agree on every aspect, but I would like to ask the minister about the level of consultation and the level of dialogue she had in coming up with the reforms that are in this legislation and the expertise that she gained and heard that brought her to the bill we have before us today.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, as I stated earlier, we have done extensive consultations ever since I was honoured to have been placed in this role. We have done round tables right across the country in every province and territory. Round tables included judges, retired judges, defence lawyers, and prosecutors, as well as representatives of victims' organizations. That consultation has been taking place over more than two years now.

In addition, I and my parliamentary secretaries have had ongoing discussions with our counterparts in the provinces and territories, and I am really pleased to say that our shared responsibility in the administration of justice was taken very seriously. We identified areas of bold reform in terms of bail, administration of justice, reclassification of offences, and preliminary inquiries. These were all intensive discussions that we engaged in with my counterparts, and we also engaged with Canadians through surveys, questionnaires, and online surveys.

There have been extensive consultations with respect to these bold reforms that we are putting forward to answer the Supreme Court of Canada's call to reduce delays in the justice system.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on a question I asked the minister earlier about watering down sentences to make them hybrid offences so they can be prosecuted by way of summary conviction in provincial court. The Minister of Justice stated that one of the reasons for that is to allow serious offences to be prosecuted in superior court.

Among the offences the government is watering down are participation in a terrorist organization, the kidnapping of a minor, arson for fraudulent purposes, and impaired driving causing bodily harm. Is the minister saying that terrorists, kidnapers, arsonists, and impaired drivers are not serious criminals?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, that is absolutely not what I am saying. The member opposite is completely mischaracterizing the bold reforms that we are proposing with the reclassification of offences.

This is not about altering sentencing ranges. This is not about changing the fundamental principles of sentencing, which require courts to impose sentences proportionate to the gravity of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the offender.

What we are doing with the reclassification of offences is providing prosecutors with the discretion to proceed by way of summary or indictment. This is not changing the sentencing ranges. We have not changed the maximum penalties for the most serious offences.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask this question dealing with rural crime, in particular, theft over \$5,000.

In my area there are a lot of vehicles worth \$30,000, \$40,000, or \$50,000. Is the minister suggesting that the theft of these kinds of vehicles will result in a fine only? That is a marketable thing. We will be open for shopping if there is just a fine for stealing a very expensive vehicle. How will this help stop rural crime?

• (1545)

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Madam Speaker, every single case or offence that comes before a court, if it is within the offences that we are proposing to reclassify, will be considered on its merits.

We are not reducing or changing the sentencing regime with respect to these offences. What we are doing is providing prosecutors with the discretion to provide for and determine the individual circumstances of a case. All offences are serious. A prosecutor will have the ability, based on their discretion, to determine what is the most appropriate and efficient manner to prosecute a case.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that when someone has the floor, they should show them respect. I am sure that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton knows that he got respect when he was asking his questions. Nobody interrupted him, and I am sure he will make sure that he provides that same respect when someone else has the floor.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House to address some grave concerns that the Conservatives have with regard to Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

However, we agree with at least one of the sections of bill, the intimate partner violence reforms. I liked the idea of reversing the onus on someone looking for bail if they have already been convicted of assaulting their spouse. The reverse onus on bail, I think, is a good idea.

I like the idea that we are looking into the possibility of restricting the number of preliminary hearings, but we have serious reservations about other things. Again, this is with respect to the intention of the government to reduce penalties by adding summary conviction as a prosecutorial option, which can result in a penalty as minor as a fine.

Let me be clear. These offences are for some very serious crimes, and currently they are listed as indictable offences with a maximum penalty of up to 10 years. I will touch on some of these offences today to make Canadians aware of the massive changes the government is planning to implement and how adversely these changes will impact the health and welfare of all Canadians.

Some of the offences included, but not limited to, are participation in the activity of a terrorist group, leaving Canada to participate in the activity of a terrorist group, punishment of a rioter, concealment of identity, breach of trust, municipal corruption, selling or purchasing office, influencing or negotiating appointments or dealing in offices, prison breach, assisting prisoners of war to escape, obstructing or violence to or arrest of officiating clergyman, causing bodily harm by criminal negligence, impaired driving causing bodily harm, failure or refusal to provide blood samples, trafficking, withholding or destroying documents, abduction of a person under the age of 16 as well as abduction of a person under the age of 14, forced marriage, marriage under 16 years of age, advocating genocide, arson for fraudulent purposes, and participation in the activities of a criminal organization.

Just reading this list is mind-boggling. Offering a judge of the courts the option of lighter sentences or even fines will inevitably result in lenient sentences for some very dangerous crimes.

The Liberals say they have introduced this legislation as their response to the crisis in the judicial system, which they, in large part, have created by not appointing the necessary number of judges to the bench. I should know. In my six and a half years as justice minister, not once did I ever encounter a shortage of qualified candidates to fill vacant positions on the bench anywhere, and in Alberta in particular. At the beginning of this month, there were 11 vacancies on the Queen's Bench and three on the Court of Appeal. What is the problem? There are qualified people in the Province of Alberta who can and should be appointed to the bench. Now, they have started to

get some in May, but this is something that has to be ongoing all the time.

Getting back to the bill, Canadians know that watering down some very serious criminal offences by offering the prosecutorial option of summary offence is not an adequate deterrent, and that the perpetrators of major felonies will not have paid the full price for their offence.

Another Canadian who knows only too well the harm this proposed legislation could cause is Sheri Arsenault, Alberta director of Families For Justice. Sheri lost her son to an impaired driver in 2011. Last fall, she testified before the justice committee with a heart-wrenching account of how her son's life was cut all too short after he and two other friends were struck and killed by an impaired driver. The three boys had just graduated from high school and, of course, had a very promising life in front of them.

• (1550)

In a recent letter to the government she wrote in part the following:

As a victim, a mother that lost my 18 year old son, I have since been working very hard in advocating for all victims of serious offences. All my work seems to have fallen on deaf ears and is all in vain when I thoroughly read the contents of Bill C-75. I cannot understand why our current Government does not consider impaired driving a serious crime when it is the #1 cause of criminal deaths in Canada. It is also the cause of an enormous number of injuries and devastates thousands of families every year.

The public safety of all Canadians should be a priority for all levels of Government regardless of their political stripe or ideology. The safety of all Canadians should be your priority and all Canadians should expect a punishment that is fitting to the seriousness of certain crimes to not only to deter others from committing the same crime but to also deter offenders from recommitting and some sense of justice to the victims and our communities. Summary convictions neither deter nor hold offenders accountable, they also re-victimize the victims again. Victims are being ignored in this Bill. Our justice system should be strengthened rather than weakened and the "rights" of victims and communities should have precedence over the treatment of offenders and criminals.

That is the letter that she wrote to the government with her analysis of Bill C-75, and she has it right.

I am quite sure that we are going to hear from people who have been gravely concerned about impaired driving and all the consequences of that. I am going to welcome them. I hope they come before the justice committee and let the government know how they feel about this. The statement by that victim could not have been put more succinctly.

Bill C-75 in its present form would not protect Canadians. It would put them at greater risk, as dangerous offenders can be set free without rehabilitation and without having paid the full price for their offence.

Ms. Arsenault made the point that lenient sentences often lead to re-offences being committed, with terrible consequences. She cited for instance the tragic impaired driving case from 2010 that illustrates this point very well.

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Surrey resident Allan Simpson Wood was driving at nearly twice the speed limit when he crashed head-on into Bryan McCron's car on Colebrook Road in Surrey in July of 2010, killing Mr. McCron and injuring his 17-year-old son Connor. He then assaulted the teenage boy who was calling 911 in an attempt to save his dying father. Mr. Wood previously had an impaired driving charge in 2002.

If Bill C-75 is allowed to become legislation in its present form, more tragedies such as this will occur, as the possible sentence under Bill C-75 will not serve, in my opinion, and I am sure in the opinion of many Canadians and all of my colleagues here, as an adequate deterrent to the crime.

Future stories like this need not be the case if the Liberal government would listen to reason and not go forward with the reckless clauses in this legislation.

Another issue with regards to impaired driving is that as of last fall, there were only 800 trained drug recognition experts across the nation. With the onset of marijuana being legalized in Canada, police services from across Canada anticipate a spike in the number of impaired driving charges. Indeed, just last fall, the justice committee heard that we would need 2,000 trained drug recognition experts. Ontario police sounded the alarm bell last week, stating that the lack of funding for the impaired marijuana legislation is worrying. It is evident that the government has not been giving this serious issue proper consideration. T

There are so many troubling offences that Bill C-75 would deem as a possible summary infraction, it is difficult to know exactly which ones to highlight.

Breach of prison is one of such infractions and brings to mind the case of Benjamin Hudon-Barbeau, a former Hell's Angel associate convicted of two murders, two attempted murders, and a series of crimes in 2012 related to a drug turf war in the Laurentians. He once escaped from a Quebec prison in a helicopter and is currently serving 35 years.

• (1555)

However, under Bill C-75, not only would this present breach be a possible summary conviction, but so would his involvement in a criminal organization. He has been labelled as a dangerous offender, but had he committed these crimes under this new legislation, the sentence could be much shorter. The thought that these are not serious enough to be taken and prosecuted as indictable offences is completely unacceptable. A fine is not appropriate for this. It is not appropriate for these types of offences.

It is unconscionable for us to think that the government could put the health and safety of Canadians at risk for a quick fix to a problem that it has helped create.

The justice committee recently travelled across Canada, studying the horrific effects of human trafficking. Material benefit from trafficking is another terrible crime. Should Bill C-75 pass in its present form, it would include the trafficking of persons in Canada for material benefit, making it a possible summary conviction. Imagine someone being in the business of making money trafficking human beings, knowing he or she might get off with a fine. People in the business of making money in this would happily hand over \$1,000.

The Liberals have also slipped in getting rid of consecutive sentences for human trafficking. The idea that a crime does not get worse if someone is continuously trafficking human beings is completely unconscionable. I truly believe Canadians agree with us in the Conservative Party that it is absolutely wrong.

As I have stated before in the House, thousands of Canadian children are being trafficked between the ages of nine and 14. Although, unfortunately, many of these crimes go unreported, non-governmental organizations inform us that this is taking place. Our most precious resource, our children, are being violated, and at an alarming rate. This abhorrent form of modern-day slavery is very real and knows no social or economic boundaries.

As I mentioned previously, the target age now for the sex industry is getting younger. As the demand for paid sex increases, supply increases, and our children and the vulnerable are even greater targets for sexual consumption.

During the justice committee hearings on human trafficking, we heard from former human trafficker Donald. He testified that if the government were to be lenient on the sentencing of convicted human traffickers, it would be like a *carte blanche* for traffickers to expand this despicable industry and further harm Canadian children.

Our former colleague and member of Parliament, Joy Smith, testified that 23,000 children were trafficked in our country every year, with many of them ending up dead. This is a grievous epidemic and the government is not helping at all when it offers more lenient sentences for those who make money off of these despicable crimes. The duty of lawmakers is to protect the vulnerable, not make it easier for them to be targeted. It is our moral obligation. The government is failing the citizens of Canada by not keeping the present safeguards in place in the Criminal Code and by lessening the protection of our children.

Clearly, the government has not thought this thoroughly through. By offering the option of lenient sentences, it is encouraging the exploitation of our children. How can it rationalize light sentences for some of the most appalling crimes? Human trafficking is not, and should never, be considered a minor offence. The hybridization of these serious offences is simply an ill-thought-out idea and it is unfathomable that the government does not see the damage that the passage of Bill C-75 could do to the welfare and security of all Canadians.

Clearing up the backlog in the criminal justice system should never done at the expense of victims. Nor should it compromise the safety and well-being of our children. I will reiterate that this is a crisis that the Liberals have helped create.

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On the eve of the Easter long weekend, the Liberals introduced this 302-page omnibus legislation. I bet they hoped Canadians and the public would not take the time to read it in its entirety, but that was a mistake. Canadians across the country are hearing about this and voicing their concerns about the legislation. I recently did a Facebook video on this. Canadians need to be aware of the severe implications the legislation could have on families and their communities.

●(1600)

The Conservatives have always strongly believed that the rights of victims should be the central focus of our justice system, along with the protection of Canadians. This is why we introduced the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights while we were in government.

Among the four principal rights provided in the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights is the right for protection of victims of crime. I would argue that Bill C-75 in its present form does not provide protection of victims of crime. In fact, it would do the opposite. Instead of providing reassurance and the right to live in a society that is safe, secure, and stable, the bill could create a society that would be under the threat and harm of offenders who would not have had the opportunity, quite frankly, to be rehabilitated by serving a sentence that adequately would fit the crime they committed.

Another one of the many offences in the bill is that it encompasses participation in a terrorist group or leaving Canada to participate in terrorist activity. I have to ask this question. What is it about this that there should be a minor offence when a person is leaving Canada for the purposes of participating in terrorism? The Liberals read the papers too. Have they not noticed that this has become more and more of a problem in the world? Their idea to solve that is to make this a summary conviction offence, that these guys will get the message if they get a fine, that if they get a very small penalty, they will not do this again.

I do not buy that. The price that Canadians could pay with this legislation is incalculable. I call upon the Liberal government to stop this and keep the current provisions of the Criminal Code that helps Canadians from being further re-victimized. Under Bill C-75, this would not happen.

I ask all members to stand with me to ensure Canadians are and remain fully protected within the Criminal Code. We will not stand for a crime that gets off with the lightest of possible sentences. This bill is bad legislation.

Therefore, I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after "That" and substituting the following:

"the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-75, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, since the bill fails to support victims of crime by, among other things: (a) changing the victim surcharge; (b) removing the requirement of the Attorney General to determine whether to seek an adult sentence in certain circumstances; (c) removing the power of a youth justice court to make an order to lift the ban on publication in the case of a young person who receives a youth sentence for a violent sentence; and (d) delaying consecutive sentencing for human traffickers."

I hope this gets the support of all members of the House.

●(1605)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it will come as no surprise to my hon. colleague that the government will not be supporting his amendment. There is a very simple reason for that. His commentary is full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, and stale rhetoric. It will come as no surprise to Canadians that the Harper Conservatives keep coming back to the same kind of tough talk on crime. On this side of the House, we believe in principled, evidence-based legislation, like Bill C-75. As the former minister of justice, he should show some fidelity to the facts.

What are the facts? On judicial appointments, 100 appointments were made in 2017. That was a record number of appointments in over two decades. In Alberta, there are now 80 federal judges, five more than at any point in time under the Harper Conservatives.

I empathize with the victim who wrote the former minister of justice, my hon. colleague. However, as he admitted in his introductory remarks, Bill C-75 would do remarkable things for victims. We have reversed the onus at bail hearings to prevent repeated abusers from getting out of jail if they need to be put there pending their trial. We have raised the maximum sentences for those repeat offenders who fall into the category of sexually violent crimes and intimate partner violence.

Regarding Bill C-46, I was astonished by the comments made by my colleague. It was just yesterday that a member of his caucus stood against mandatory alcohol screening, the number one deterrent for impaired driving. He should tell that to MADD, or he should tell that to the victim in his riding or to every victim who has suffered as a result of impaired driving.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I am sure the member from Niagara Falls is able to answer the question on his own.

The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, the hon. member said that the Liberals had made appointments. Yes, they have made judicial appointments, but they should make them on time. What has the problem been in Alberta? I have been hearing for the last two years that they have not been able to make the appointments. I do not want to hear that they did not have qualified people applying. I do not buy that for one single second. There are qualified people in the province of Alberta. The Liberals should fill up the judicial vacancies. It should not be that difficult. It is that difficult, they should ask a couple of us on this side. We will have a look and make recommendations to them.

Government Orders

The hon. member talked about MADD and the sections of the previous legislation. I cannot wait to have representatives from MADD come before the justice committee so I can ask them what think of the Liberal proposal for impaired driving causing bodily harm, that people might just get a fine for that or there is a possibility they could just get a summary conviction. I will be fascinated to hear what the hon. member and his colleagues have to say. They probably will say that they are cracking down on impaired driving, that they are—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I know this is a very passionate issue, but I have to allow for further questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Victoria.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Niagara Falls gave a passionate speech. I am sure, like us, he has consulted widely on the bill. I would like to ask if he has heard, as we have, about the futility of the amendments proposed on preliminary inquiries. We understand they account for only 3% of court time.

The bill would take away the right of people to have a dress rehearsal of a trial, which in some cases, according to the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers chair Bill Trudell, would mean there would be “more wrongful convictions”. Has he heard from those with whom he has consulted about the futility of that change?

• (1610)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I have heard just the opposite. I have given a considerable amount of thought over the last year or two to the whole question of preliminary hearings. It strings out some of these very difficult cases, literally, for a number of years. What it does is re-victimize the victim. When victims come forward and say that they were cross-examined on the stand, for example, about being sexually abused by the accused and then they had to do it again 18 months later, they feel victimized again. Therefore, it is not just a question of expediting the trial process within our criminal justice system. It is also about the victimization of people, about which the Conservatives are always worried. We stand by that.

It works on both levels. It reduces victimization by not always having the option of a preliminary hearing. It has been restricted in this legislation. At the same time, it would help expedite the process in the judicial system.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague.

Is it mathematically plausible under the situation, should Bill C-75 pass in its current form, that a person could get a larger fine for failing to stop at a stop sign than for kidnapping a minor, for impaired driving causing bodily harm, or for participating in a terrorist activity?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, this is the part I have been quite bothered by since the very beginning of this.

We could have a debate on preliminary hearings, and I think it would be great to have that. There was one section that, quite frankly, I thought I had misread the first time I saw it. It was reversing the onus on somebody who has been convicted of

assaulting his or her spouse. It had the reverse onus on bail. That actually helps out the victim. I asked myself whether I had the right legislation, coming from the Liberals. Indeed, it is there.

That being said, the idea that someone who commits a terrible crime, such as kidnapping a child under the age of 14, could be eligible for a fine or a very low offence is not right. Liberals will get this eventually; they will hear it from Canadians. They cannot say that it is just the Conservatives who want this. Canadians will agree with us that this is not right.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I recall a time, not too long ago, when we were doing some battle with the Liberals on Bill C-51. I would just remind the House what that was in regard to. There was an attempt by the Liberals to take away the protection of places of worship. There was a long list of staggering and frightening changes that the Liberal government was proposing to make.

I am wondering whether the Liberal government has used this legislation as a back door to once again make that attack on places of worship.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right.

When the Liberals introduced that bill, they did not even mention the fact that they were removing section 176 from the Criminal Code, the section that protects people at a religious service. It also makes it a crime to threaten or attack a member of the clergy. I had to ask the question, just before Canada Day, “Why are they doing this? What is their problem with this?”

I noticed that the Liberals did back off at that time, but I see that it has been added to the list and can be reduced. If someone wants to attack or threaten a member of clergy, there is the possibility of a summary conviction. The Liberals did not get rid of it, but I guess they said, “If we cannot get rid of it, at least let us reduce the possibility of a penalty on this.”

I do not get it. I said to them, and I thought it was good advice, to forget about section 176. It is a good section of the Criminal Code, and it should stay there. However, I guess the Liberals now have two pieces of legislation and are somewhat obsessed with this.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I want to give my hon. colleague an opportunity to reflect on some of the comments he has made about MADD Canada and its support for Bill C-46.

I note that on March 12, 2018, MADD issued a statement urging Canada's Senate to give its full-throated support to Bill C-46. I want the member to reflect on that statement, because yesterday it was a Conservative senator who put a block to that and tried to obstruct the passage of Bill C-46, which has been recognized as an effective piece of legislation to keep our roads safe.

Will the hon. colleague now join this side of the House and get that bill passed?

Government Orders

•(1615)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I would say that the hon. member should have a look at the legislation tabled here before Parliament.

Let us just ask those organizations, MADD and others we have heard from over the years, which are quite concerned about impaired driving, how they like this Liberal idea that someone could get a summary conviction, the lightest possible sentence, if he or she is convicted of impaired driving causing bodily harm. How about that? Is there anybody in the Liberal Party who is saying that this is going to be a bit of a problem for the Liberals?

I will be neutral on it, to the extent that we should hear from the witnesses and see if they happen to agree with the Conservative Party. I bet they will.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and contribute to what has been a passionate debate. Who knew that criminal justice could be that? Like the colleagues who have spoken before me, we, on the NDP side, have done an enormous amount of consultation with folks from the criminal defence bar, university prosecutors, deputy attorneys general, and the like. Regrettably, as a consequence of that, we have had to conclude that we must oppose this bill.

However, I want to make it clear to my colleagues that our goal is to work with the government, take it at its word, and offer our hand to see whether we can make this a better bill in the justice committee. After all, it is over 300 pages. It is an omnibus criminal justice amendment. We want to work constructively to make it better for Canadians and get it to committee as quickly as possible for that purpose.

Obviously, in any criminal justice reform, there are two goals. The goal of efficiency is clearly the government's stated objective: making our courts more efficient, doing away with the backlog, and dealing with the consequences of the Jordan case, in which the Supreme Court confirmed that we need to have speedy justice in this country. Efficiency is the government's stated objective, and I will come back to that. At the same time, we can never, of course, lose sight of the rights of the accused in our justice system.

With the research and consultation we have done, I want to say at the outset that we recognize there are some good things in this bill, which I will refer to, but there are also some deeply problematic things, which, in some cases, everyone we spoke to thought to be problematic. It is in that spirit that we engage in this debate.

For example, Ms. Sayeh Hassan, a Toronto-based criminal defence lawyer, summarized what many have told us when she wrote:

While there are parts of Bill C-75 that have the potential for improving the criminal justice system, many other parts will not only be unhelpful when it comes to reducing delay but will also wipe out numerous rights currently afforded to an accused person.

The big, ugly elephant in the room is the fact that the government chose to completely ignore what so many people have talked about, which is the need to get rid of mandatory minimum sentencing. That was a hope that people had the right to expect the minister to

address. After all, justice writer Sean Fine of *The Globe and Mail* notes:

As far back as October, 2016, the Justice Minister told the Criminal Lawyers' Association in a speech that she would change the minimum sentencing laws "in the near future." Days later, she told *The Globe* that new legislation would be coming soon, "certainly in the early part of next year."

It is now 2018, and here is a 300-page bill that does not even talk about that reform initiative, which would have dealt with the issue of delay in a much more effective way. I also note that it was in her mandate letter and was ignored in this 300-page bill. Although I have enormous respect for the minister, it needs to be pointed out that the absence of reform of mandatory minimum sentencing is a significant missed opportunity.

We all know we have a clogged-up justice system and so forth. As has been pointed out, we all know the serious injustices that have occurred. Just last month in Calgary, there was a high-profile case involving Nick Chan, an alleged gang member and leader, who was acquitted of charges of murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and leading a criminal organization. Why? Because of the inability to have a court trial resolved in a short period of time, according to the 2016 Jordan decision. All Canadians find that unacceptable.

The question that must be asked is whether this bill helps address that problem head-on. The argument from many is that it remains a serious problem. For example, in its position paper, the Criminal Lawyers' Association states:

Mandatory minimum sentences frustrate the process of resolving cases by limiting the crown's discretion to offer a penalty that will limit the crown's ability to take a position that will foster resolution before trial.

•(1620)

Here is what happens. Defence lawyers have this mandatory minimum sentence, so they are not going to take a chance on the court's discretion, because the Harper Conservatives essentially took away the discretion that our trial judges had. The result is that we have people going to trial who, in the past, would not have chosen a trial; they would have pleaded to a lower charge. It is inexcusable that this issue did not even get addressed in this bill.

Another thing, which my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith has spoken about numerous times, is that we have a crisis in Canada with the overrepresentation of indigenous women, in particular. My colleague has done that work as a member of the status of women committee. During testimony at that committee, Jonathan Rudin, of Aboriginal Legal Services, highlighted the government's inaction with regard to abolishing mandatory minimum sentencing and its effect on indigenous women. He said:

[W]e have to look at the fact that there are still mandatory minimum sentences that take away from judges the ability to sentence indigenous women the way [the judges] would like [them] to be sentenced. There are still provisions that restrict judges from using conditional sentences, which can keep women out of prison.

Government Orders

The first thing that he urged the committee to recommend was to bring in legislation to give judges that discretion, which the Liberals promised to do. The elephant in the room is that they did no such thing. In 2015, and it is probably worse now, the proportion of indigenous adults in custody relative to their percentage of the population was eight times higher for indigenous men and 12 times higher for indigenous women. Any measure that could address that problem head-on has to be looked at seriously, and the government's failure to address what the mandate letter by the Prime Minister told it to is a serious missed opportunity.

I promised I would focus on some of the positives in this bill, from the perspective of the NDP.

First, the elimination of so-called zombie provisions of the Criminal Code is a good thing. For example, the criminalization that has existed for anal intercourse could have been removed long ago, so we are pleased that finally the government has done it. I wish it had done that with other zombie provisions, such as water skiing at night, which remains an offence in the Criminal Code. Maybe the government will look at that one later.

Second, it is a good thing that the bill would restore the discretion of judges to impose fewer victim fine surcharges or not to impose victim fine surcharges at all. I commend the government for doing that. As I believe my Conservative colleague has also pointed out, broadening the definition of intimate partner violence is also a good step. Creating an alternate process for dealing with some of the alleged breaches of bail is another good step. Codifying the so-called ladder principle, requiring that the least onerous form of release be imposed, is a good thing.

I personally think that abolishing peremptory challenges is a good thing. Although I recognize there is disagreement among many on that, I think it is a good thing. I want to put that on the record.

On the other hand, here are some of the negative things.

Absolutely every single person we talked to said that the provision on admissibility of so-called routine police evidence is overly broad and could be problematic to marginalized people in particular. Everyone agreed that routine police evidence language has to be fixed. Many people were happy that the time of day when the offence occurred, the weather, or routine lab results would be made available. However, the way it is drafted, it could even include the ability of the crown to not have a police officer come and provide eyewitness testimony. I do not think this was intended by the government, but it is an example of what appears to be a hastily drafted bill that needs to be fixed. The irony is that most judges are going to allow cross-examination of police officers, so Sergeant Brown will have to be brought back at some later time, with more delay as a result. That is surely unintended. It is surely something we can work together to fix.

Professor Peter Sankoff of the University of Alberta went so far as to call this measure extremely dangerous and ineffective. It is not just we who are saying this.

• (1625)

We have heard a lot about hybrid offences today. I am sure the government would agree that there seems to be a need to change the hybridization offences aspect. As colleagues have pointed out, the

downloading to provincial courts of many offences is only going to move the problem of clogged courts at the superior court level to the provincial courts because more cases will be dealt with as summary conviction matters. I wonder if the consultation with the provincial and territorial ministers has made that point clear. The provincial court in British Columbia already hears 95% of all criminal matters. I am sure it is not that much different elsewhere, so I would invite the government to consider how we can work together to address that problem of obvious downloading.

Another area of concern, perhaps a sleeper, is that the government intends to increase the maximum penalties for summary convictions. In practical terms, what that means is that agents like law students and paralegals, who are currently able to represent people accused of an offence with a maximum penalty of six months or less, will not be able to do so for a whole range of offences if these changes go forward. It is an unintended consequence, but it certainly has to be addressed, because we not only have a problem already with unrepresented people in the provincial courts and judges bending over backwards, appropriately, to help those people who cannot afford or obtain the services of a lawyer, but now they will also not be able to get paralegals or law students to represent them in some cases. That again is something that I would have thought the government did not want to occur, but it appears to be something that would occur.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that increased funding was provided for legal aid in budget 2018. I think that is something everyone agrees was long overdue. I commend the government for doing it. However, in the province of British Columbia, as we saw in yesterday's *Vancouver Sun*, it is simply too little, too late. It is a gigantic increase compared to the past, but now, according to Mark Benton, the CEO of the Legal Services Society, "Many lawyers providing services to the poor are doing it at a loss—the tariffs too low for most to earn a living, and so low that LSS is having trouble attracting and retaining lawyers." We have got to deal with that.

I talked earlier about the preliminary inquiry issue with my friend from Niagara Falls and I understand that there is a difference of opinion on this issue. However, the facts are that these proposed changes would only save about 3% of court time. While the government proudly said the legislation will reduce the use by 87%, which sounds great, it did not tell us that it is not going to save a lot of time. Then why do it? Why do it when there is a risk, according to the chair of the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers, Bill Trudell, that there will be more wrongful convictions? Why would we take away a right? The government says we have the Stinchcombe disclosure and it is a different world from when we started with preliminary inquiries, but what is the risk-benefit equation here? We are saving 3% of court time and we are causing perhaps a wrongful conviction. I do not think that lines up. It is overbroad. Therefore, I think it is something we need to worry about.

I commented on intimate partner violence and bail; in the interest of time, I will not say any more.

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There is a concern about the impact of this bill on those who have suffered the legacy of residential schools and the like, such as in the sixties scoop. For example, the Criminal Lawyers' Association said as follows:

Sadly, intimate partner violence is one of the recognized legacies of residential schools and the 60s scoop. Creating a reverse onus at the bail stage and increasing the sentence on conviction will likely aggravate the crisis of the over-representation of indigenous people in our prisons.

A similar concern was echoed by Professor Elizabeth Sheehy, as well as Professor Isabel Grant, so I think we need to get our hands around this issue and figure out whether we can find another way, despite the fact that I believe it was well intentioned.

In conclusion, what I want to point out now are some of the things we think could be used to address some of these problems.

First, the government claims it has made judicial appointments, which we heard the Conservatives say as well, but there still appears to be a problem with judicial vacancies. I am not saying that is a singular solution, but it needs to be addressed as part of a comprehensive solution.

Second, as I have said, we wish the government would reconsider the failure to review mandatory minimum sentences.

• (1630)

Third, the NDP believes that decriminalizing small amounts of drugs in this opioid crisis that we are experiencing would definitely have an impact on the clogged courts that we face. Who are the people in our provincial courts often unrepresented? Disproportionately, they are people with mental health challenges, people with addictions, people who are poor and simply cannot afford a lawyer, and legal aid does not have the ability to look after them. That is what is clogging up the system.

If we look at it from that end of the telescope, we would make truly important reform efforts. Jagmeet Singh has made a bold statement that decriminalizing small quantities of drugs is something we need to give serious thought to as part of the solution to our clogged-up courts. Not criminalizing these issues, but treating them as mental health issues and health issues generally is the way to go. We have to find a better way.

In Vancouver and Victoria we have drug courts and some creative ways to address this problem, but they have not been adequate. We still have serious problems.

By criminalizing people, we give them criminal records. What does having a criminal record mean? It means people cannot get a job in many cases. Are we thinking about that? It is really important.

I have talked in the House many times about the injustice of thousands of Canadians having criminal records for possession of small quantities of cannabis. There are still people who are unable to find a job because they are still being charged under the current law, which is about to change. I commend the member of Parliament for Hull—Aylmer for his intention to implement a bill that would see these records expunged. I do not think that goes far enough, but I will certainly join with him in that initiative.

Finally, we would offer greater social supports. They are at the core of this issue. We need greater funding for legal aid, which

would surely cut down on the number of unrepresented individuals and ensure that more accused people would have access to much-needed resources.

Earlier today, I referred to an excellent summary about the consultations that the government undertook in this regard, a March 2018 report of the Department of Justice entitled “What we Heard—Transforming Canada’s Criminal Justice System”. I want to read into the record its fundamental conclusion and ask the House whether the bill does the job.

It says:

Almost all roundtable participants stressed the same major concern. They said that most people who come in contact with the criminal justice system are vulnerable or marginalized individuals. They are struggling with mental health and addiction issues, poverty, homelessness, and prior victimization. Most felt the criminal justice system is not equipped to address the issues that cause criminal behaviour in these groups, nor should it be. Participants felt these issues are worsened by an over-reliance on incarceration.

We are very much in agreement, and I hope that my hon. colleagues will consider these concerns and work with us at the justice committee to make the kinds of changes to our criminal justice system that are so obviously needed.

• (1635)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my hon. colleague for his comments, which I found to be very constructive, and for his recognition of the fact that Bill C-75 is about addressing systemic barriers for marginalized people, for vulnerable people, and for victims.

To build on that, with regard to the comments he made about preliminary inquiries, I hope on reflection he will acknowledge that by reducing the eligibility of offences for preliminary inquiries, what we are trying to do is avoid unnecessary retraumatization of victims of intimate partner violence.

I would also encourage him to reflect on the fact that when he cites one particular statistic with regard to 3% of charges, it is charges, not court time. It may be 3% of charges, but it represents disproportionately much more expenditure of court time and resources.

The last thing I would like him to do is to expand on his personal support for the abolishment of peremptory challenges, which are inexorably linked the difficulties and the challenges that we have had around under-representation of indigenous peoples and other marginalized peoples on our juries. It is very important that we move closer to a more open and transparent jury selection process. I hope he will take the time and effort to expand on why he supports the abolishment of peremptory challenges.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, there are two points.

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First of all, my understanding on the preliminary hearings is that they account “for only about three per cent of all court time.” Maybe we have a difference in terms of the statistics here, but if that is all preliminary hearings do, then I think most people would agree that on a benefit-cost analysis, they are not effective. I would point out that there is still the ability to have preliminary inquiries on some of the more serious matters.

In terms of re-victimization and the trauma of having to testify, I completely agree that there are cases in which that aspect is indeed relevant. We heard in the justice committee about human trafficking and some of the trauma that victims face when they have to testify not once but twice. I am sensitive to that, but I think drafting can provide better discretion to deal with that problem head-on. It is an issue, and I acknowledge that issue, but in terms of a time saver, it troubles me greatly, and it should trouble all members of the House, when an experienced criminal justice lawyer like William Trudell, head of the association, says that it is going to result in more wrongful convictions. I have to say that I find that very troubling.

I understand that greater disclosure is possible now, unlike when we first brought preliminary inquiries into our system, but that is not a sufficient answer to look the witness in the eye, recognize that they are going to be a terrible witness in trial, and in fact not have a trial because we realize that it would never stand up with that witness.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend for Victoria for his speech. It perhaps would not surprise many that as a Conservative member, I would not agree with the member on everything, but nonetheless I think he raised a number of good points in his speech.

The member raised the issue of hybridization of offences and the fact that it would download cases onto the provincial court and onto the provinces. However, one of the purported objectives of Bill C-75 is to deal with the Jordan decision, which imposes strict timelines before delay is deemed to be presumptively unreasonable. It is 30 months for matters in Superior Court and 18 months for matters in provincial court.

How does downloading cases to provincial court by making them prosecutable by way of summary conviction address the issue of Jordan? It seems that instead of reducing the number of cases that could potentially be thrown out, it might increase the number.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question, because I think he is absolutely right. I would love to know what the record of consultation of which the minister spoke earlier would say about this point.

I consulted with a former deputy attorney general for one of our provinces, who told me in no uncertain terms that it was inextricable, that this would lead to further clogging of the provincial courts where most of the our criminal matters are dealt with already. To make it worse by adding more of these offences to be dealt with summarily in the provincial court is deeply problematic.

If the Government of Canada is serious about dealing with Jordan head-on rather than simply making it more efficient for the superior courts, it must figure out a way to work with the provincial courts to fix this problem.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member could expand a little on some of his concerns. He drew on some examples that we have issues with and are problematic in the bill. Perhaps he could discuss a little about the implications of the poorly drafted section on routine police evidence being able to be admitted by way of affidavit.

● (1640)

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for the question and for the opportunity to elaborate on this subsection.

It is subsection 657.01(1), for anybody listening, which would allow “routine police evidence” to be brought in by an affidavit rather than having, usually, the police officer come and testify. However, “routine” is left completely to our imagination. Many people have pointed out that it could include eyewitness testimony, and in that case we would not have the ability to cross-examine a police officer, look them in the eye, and see if we conclude that they are telling the truth. Not being able to face one’s accuser is a very serious problem. Putting it all on paper and pretending that is all we need to do is deeply disturbing.

I ask the government to think about the consequences. It is only going to add to further delay, because I cannot imagine a judge, when a defence lawyer wants to cross-examine a police officer and it is not routine evidence, ever denying that request. If a judge is never going to deny it, then it will require a subsequent trial where the police officer may come back in two weeks and we do it all again. How on earth does that address the stated objective of the bill, which is to deal with the Jordan decision and the consequences of overburdened courts?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, during an exchange with one of the Conservative members, my colleague asked what the record is with regard to consultations on Bill C-75 and the overall criminal justice review process.

I thought it would be helpful to inform the member that we have conducted over 20 round tables across the country; have received 11,400 written online submissions; and have engaged with our federal, provincial, and territorial partners, and with members of the judiciary at every level. It is on the basis of those engagements that we decided to put forward this historic, bold legislation, which is going to cure delay. With that now on the record in the chamber, I am hoping that the member will join us in addressing the culture of complacency that was identified as one of the great challenges by the Supreme Court of Canada in its Jordan decision.

I also encourage my hon. colleague to address the question that I put to him earlier about his support for the abolishment of peremptory challenges.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Speaker, given the time constraints imposed upon me, it will be difficult to do justice to the two questions put.

Government Orders

I am not denying that there was consultation with thousands of Canadians. I am sure that judges were involved. At least one important and very experienced deputy attorney general from the past says this is nothing but downloading. I would be interested in what others have to say about that.

I personally support the provision on peremptory challenges. It would mean that the colour of a person's skin would not be sufficient reason for someone to simply stand in a courtroom and challenge a proposed juror because the person does not think that juror would do justice as an indigenous person. We know cases where that has occurred recently, and that is why I thought this was useful, but on the condition that we have a more robust ability to challenge for cause. The Americans do that much better, much longer, and with much more gravitas than we do. We need to put that out there as well: the quid pro quo for not having that historic right.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. 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 Regina—Lewvan, Natural Resources; the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, Veterans Affairs; and the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, Pensions.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a follow-up to my seeking consent for a motion earlier today. I understand there have been discussions among all parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to ensure expeditious debate, study, and a vote on Bill S-245. I move that notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-245, an act to declare the Trans Mountain pipeline project and related works to be for the general advantage of Canada, be deemed votable.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-75, another omnibus bill introduced by a government that said it would never introduce an omnibus bill, but here we are again with another 300-page bill.

Quite frankly, there are some provisions in Bill C-75 that I support, but on the whole I believe this legislation to be deeply problematic.

Before I address the substance of Bill C-75, I want to talk a bit about the process surrounding Bill C-75.

This omnibus legislation reintroduces four government bills currently before the House of Commons: Bill C-28, Bill C-32, Bill C-38 and Bill C-39. This is the third piece of legislation the government has introduced to repeal section 159 of the Criminal Code, the unconstitutional section related to anal sex.

With much fanfare, the Liberals introduced Bill C-32. They wanted to take tremendous credit for introducing that bill that proposes to repeal section 159. It was such a priority for the government that a year and a half later, Bill C-32 remains stuck at first reading.

Not to be outdone, they proceeded to introduce Bill C-39, which would remove unconstitutional sections of the Criminal Code, also known as zombie laws. That included section 159 of the Criminal Code. It was introduced on March 8, 2017, and it was such a priority of the government that more than a year later, Bill C-39 remains stuck at first reading.

Now, for the third time, the government has introduced, with Bill C-75, another attempt to remove section 159 of the Criminal Code.

How many bills is it going to take the Liberal government to repeal one simple section of the Criminal Code? It speaks to the utter incompetence of the government and its complete inability to move justice legislation forward. In light of that record of incompetence and failure, Canadians should be left to ask the question: how is it that the government can be trusted to address delay in our courts when it cannot even manage its own legislative agenda?

The purported objective of Bill C-75 is to deal with the backlog in our courts. It arises from the Jordan decision that was issued by the Supreme Court almost two years ago. The Supreme Court of Canada determined that there would be strict limits before delay would become presumptively unreasonable. The remedy that the Supreme Court provided in the case of delay was that the charges against the accused person would be stayed, in other words, thrown out of court. The strict timeline that the Supreme Court provided was 30 months between the laying of charges and the anticipated or actual conclusion of a trial for matters before superior courts, and 18 months for matters before provincial courts.

It has been almost two years since the Jordan decision and in those nearly two years, the Minister of Justice has sat on her hands and done absolutely nothing to deal with delay and backlog. The minister is so incompetent that she could not get around to doing the simplest and easiest thing, which is to fill judicial vacancies in a timely manner.

• (1650)

Under this Minister of Justice's watch, we have seen a record number of judicial vacancies. Indeed, the average number of vacancies has consistently been between 50 to 60. In the province of Alberta, where the issues of backlog and delay are most acute, the provincial government tried to respond in 2016, by way of order in council, establishing 10 new judicial positions, nine Court of Queen's Bench positions and one Alberta Court of Appeal position. The government, to its credit, in budget 2017, provided funding for additional judicial positions. All the minister had to do was fill them.

Do members know how long it took the minister to appoint a new judge in Alberta?

An hon. member: How long?

Government Orders

Mr. Michael Cooper: More than a year, Madam Speaker. It was not until December 2017 that Justice Grant Dunlop—my former colleague by the way—was appointed as a justice of the Court of Queen's Bench. He is a very good appointment, but, unfortunately, it is only one. Now that we are in May 2018, the government still has not filled most of those new judicial spots.

Thus, while the minister talks about taking action, her record demonstrates otherwise. This is not just an academic or abstract issue. There are real and serious consequences to the minister's inaction. We have seen hundreds of cases thrown out of court due to delay, and thousands more are at risk. Some of these cases involve the most serious of charges, including murder and sexual assault. We are talking about cases that are stayed or thrown out. The accused person, even when there is overwhelming evidence that he or she did the crime, are free to walk our streets.

In his speech, the hon. member for Victoria alluded to Nick Chan, whose case was recently thrown out in Calgary. Who is Nick Chan? He is someone who was facing first degree murder charges. He is someone who was charged with directing a criminal organization. Nick Chan is the head of the so-called "Fresh off the Boat" gang, a gang that is linked to more than a dozen murders. Some have called Nick Chan one of the most dangerous, if not the most dangerous, men in Calgary. Today, Nick Chan is a free man.

The minister does bear some responsibility for that outcome by her failure to get judges appointed in Alberta and across Canada. Nick Chan is not the first dangerous criminal who is now a free man or woman. Unfortunately, because of the government's inaction he will not be the last.

After two years of doing nothing, the government has now come forward with Bill C-75. This is really a ramshackle piece of legislation. One of the things the government has touted as doing a lot to reduce delay is the limiting of preliminary inquiries. Indeed, the Supreme Court in the Jordan decision said that in light of the Stinchcombe decision, which is more than a quarter of a century old, that perhaps it is time for Parliament to reconsider the utility of preliminary inquiries. Since the Stinchcombe decision, defence counsel have a constitutional right to full disclosure, and preliminary inquiries are a form of disclosure.

However, at the same time, to the degree that it makes sense to limit preliminary inquiries, and to the degree that it will speed things up, it is important, I think, to know what the hon. member for Victoria stated in his speech, which was that preliminary inquiries account for a very small number of cases.

•(1655)

The Canadian Bar Association has indicated that the proportion of cases that involve preliminary inquiries is less than 5% of cases, and takes no more than 2% of court time.

Perhaps this is a good measure, one measure in this massive bill that is a positive. However, with respect to the larger scheme of dealing with the backlog and the delay, at best, it is a very small step in the right direction.

Then there are aspects of the bill that instead of actually reducing the delays and backlog, they will likely contribute to the backlog. Again, I did not agree with everything the hon. member for Victoria

said, but I thought he raised a good point about routine police evidence in the bill, which more than likely will result in defence counsel having to bring forward an application, which will cause delay, an application that in all likelihood will be granted.

With respect to the issue of routine police evidence, it seems that it provides a solution in search of a problem that does not exist, and in so doing has created another problem, a problem that will contribute to delay.

Then there is the hybridization of offences. This the part of the legislation that I, and I think most of my colleagues on the Conservative side, have the biggest issue with, and that is the watering down of sentences.

Before I address how Bill C-75 waters down sentences for some very serious crimes, I want to comment on what this impact would be from the standpoint of the Jordan decision. After all, that is why we are debating Bill C-75.

The hybridization of offences means that indictable offences that are currently prosecuted in superior courts now will be prosecutable in provincial courts by way of summary conviction. The timeline that the Supreme Court provides in Jordan is 30 months in which a case must be concluded, successfully prosecuted or a determination made about the guilt or innocence of the accused person, before a delay is deemed presumptively unreasonable, upon which it is at risk of being thrown out of court. By contrast, there is only an 18-month timeline in provincial court. It is reducing the time by almost half before the case is at risk of being thrown out.

How does that help address Jordan? It does not. It is a matter of simply downloading cases onto the provinces. It is similar to what the government did with the marijuana legislation. It said that it would throw legislation together, take some political credit, but when it would come to sorting out all the issues, when it would come to the costs related to implementation and enforcement, the provinces could deal with it. The government washed its hands clean.

That is what the government is doing with respect to the hybridization, the watering down of sentences for serious indictable sentences. It is downloading them onto the provinces, onto provincial courts, which already have and deal with the bulk of criminal cases that go before courts across Canada.

•(1700)

It will not solve Jordan, but what will it actually do? Under the guise of creating efficiencies in our justice system, the government is watering down sentences for serious crimes. By introducing this just before Easter, it hoped Canadians would not notice.

Government Orders

What sorts of offences are being watered down? We are talking about participating in a terrorist organization, impaired driving causing bodily harm, kidnapping a minor, forced marriage, polygamy, or arson for fraudulent purposes. Do those not sound like serious offences? The minister said that she was doing this so the serious cases could go to superior courts. I have news for the minister. Kidnappers, terrorists, child abductors, arsonists, and impaired drivers are serious criminals who deserve serious time for serious crime, which the government is taking away, or opening the door to not happening. Instead, it is opening the door to these serious criminals getting away with a fine instead of up to 10 years in prison, which is currently provided for in the Criminal Code for those offences.

The government talks about the discretion of judges. It makes a big deal about the discretion of judges. Under Bill C-75, the government would be taking away the discretion of a judge, under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, to lift the publication ban of a young offender to protect public safety, when the judge determines there is evidence that young offender will commit another serious offence.

The government is always talking about judicial discretion when it helps criminals, but when it comes to protecting the public, the government does not want them to have that discretion. It speaks to a government which time and again works hard to reward criminals, makes life more difficult for victims, and has no regard for the public safety of Canadians. This is evidenced by taking away the discretion from judges, failing to appoint judges, and watering down sentences for kidnappers, arsonists, terrorists, among other offenders.

In short, Bill C-75 would make it easier for criminals and would download cases onto the provinces. It contains measures that would increase the delay in our justice system instead of decreasing it, resulting in more criminal cases potentially being thrown out of court as a result of Jordan. In so doing, it undermines public confidence in the administration of justice. It is an absolutely terrible bill that needs to be defeated.

With that, I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding the following:

“and (e) potentially reducing penalties for very serious crimes by proposing to make them hybrid offences, including the abduction of a child under 14, material benefit from trafficking, breach of prison, participation in activity of a terrorist group or criminal organization, advocating genocide, amongst many others.”

• (1705)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment to the amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened attentively to my hon. colleague across the aisle. He spoke at length about this government's record on judicial appointments. The irony is that when put to him what the precise record was, he acknowledged that one of the most recent appointments in his home province of Alberta was Justice Grant Dunlop, who he said was a very good appointment. I encourage my hon. colleague to not divorce himself from the facts when he speaks about the criminal justice system in our country.

To that one very good appointment, which my hon. colleague acknowledges was a strong one, we have made 32 other appointments in the province of Alberta, bringing to a total of 80 federal judges in the province of Alberta, five more than at any point in time under the Harper Conservative administration.

If the hon. colleague was concerned about victims and about ensuring there were not miscarriages of justice, then he would have supported the historic investments to provide additional judges to the court and to provide training and resources to the members of the judiciary. He chose not to do that. He chose to oppose those investments. Now he has an opportunity to redeem himself by supporting Bill C-75. I hope on reflection he and his colleagues will do just that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the record of the government when it comes to filling judicial vacancies is a lesson in exactly what not to do. It was very nice that Justice Dunlop was appointed. Yes, he is a very good judge. However, why did it take the government more than a year to fill one out of the 10 new judicial spots created by the provincial Government of Alberta? Why is it that only in May of 2018, more than a year and a half later, they still have not gotten around to filling most of them, and the only other new judges they have appointed, other than Justice Dunlop, were appointed in the last month. That is hardly a record of action. That is hardly a record of taking judicial vacancies seriously.

What else is not a record of taking judicial vacancies seriously when it comes to the Minister of Justice and her record? How long did it take the minister to appoint a single judge? It took her six months into the job before she got around to appointing a single judge. The Minister of Justice bears a lot of responsibility for the serious criminal cases being thrown out of court because of her inaction, which rises to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. Unfortunately, I do have to allow for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

As the member for Victoria indicated in his speech, we oppose the bill simply because it is far too flawed. Yes, it does contain some measures that have been lacking for a long time, but it also fails to include an extremely important measure, the review of mandatory minimum sentences, even though that was included in the minister's mandate letter. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that because the previous government is the one that established those minimum sentences.

It has been proven that mandatory minimum sentences do not reduce the crime rate in our communities. On the contrary, taking away the discretionary power of judges does nothing to keep the public safe. Republican legislators in the United States came to the same conclusion, even though they, like the previous government, were strong supporters of this policy.

Does the member agree that the minister should deal with this important issue, which is part of her mandate, once and for all?

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● (1710)

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I would respectfully disagree with the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly. Mandatory sentences have always been in the Criminal Code. They play an important role in our criminal justice system. What they simply do is to ensure that serious criminals are held accountable for the seriousness of the offences they have committed and were convicted of. Therefore, no, I would not be in favour of rolling back and reducing sentences. Indeed, victims of crime have been very clear that what they want is mandatory sentences. They want tougher sentences, not lesser ones. However, given the current government's track record, it would not surprise me if the next thing the Liberals do is introduce legislation to roll back mandatory sentences.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that yet again the Conservatives are opposing what I believe is good, sound legislation. The New Democrats recognize the value of this and how it would make our system that much more robust, but yet again the Conservatives are feeling that this is not the way to go and are coming up with some extreme circumstances to try to downplay the importance of passage of this legislation.

My question is related to the amendments. An hour or so ago, one Conservative member stood up and moved an amendment, and now my colleague across the way moved an amendment. What is the real purpose of the amendments? Is it try to improve something or to delay a potential vote? I do not quite understand the real purpose behind the two Conservative amendments to the same piece of legislation. I do not think that happens very often.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, we are going to use every tool in the book as the official opposition to defeat this terrible piece of legislation. That is what we are going to do. I do not want to speak for the NDP, but the member's characterization of the NDP shows that he must not have listened to the speech by the hon. member for Victoria, who was very critical of major components of this bill. Perhaps the member should listen to the speeches before he gets up and speaks.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have listened to my hon. colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton, who really understands this issue so much better than most of us here.

They say they are not really changing the sentencing, but if we are talking about going down to two-year sentences, that would result in a significant download onto the provincial jail system. Would the member like to respond to that?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, it is downloading onto the provinces, both the provincial courts and provincial jails. Of course, the maximum for a summary conviction offence is two years less a day. Many of these offences could be punishable by way of a mere fine. About an hour ago, the Minister of Justice stood in her place and claimed that watering down these sentences had nothing to do with changing sentencing for these serious offences. I could not believe my ears when the minister said that. It is 10 years under the current Criminal Code for indictable offences, and two years less a day in their watered down proposals. If that does not have to do with sentencing, I do not know what does.

● (1715)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, there we have it laid bare for all Canadians to see, that the Conservatives are not interested in debate. They are not interested in having a dialogue about how we can improve the criminal justice system. They are interested in blocking and obstructing the passage of a bill that would bring to justice those offenders who have committed serious crimes, a bill that would reduce barriers and encourage victims to come forward. In the last 15 minutes, we have seen two amendments and subamendments put forward. That is the type of trickery that Canadians have come to see and expect from the Conservative Party of Canada. They have learned no lessons in the last two years. We are going to continue to debate Bill C-75 because we know it is good, evidence-based legislation.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I have to say, Madam Speaker, that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice has some nerve. He stood in his place talking about impaired driving and how the government is so committed to cracking down on impaired driving. I brought forward an amendment at the justice committee to increase sentences for impaired drivers, and Liberals voted against it.

Now, instead of strengthening penalties and holding impaired drivers accountable, the Liberals want to water down sentencing for impaired driving causing bodily harm to a summary conviction. What an insult to victims.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I know this is a passionate issue. I also know that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton is able to answer questions very well and does not really need any assistance prior to responding to questions, so I would ask members not to heckle while somebody else has the floor.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly am pleased to stand on behalf of the constituents of Red Deer—Lacombe. If many of them actually knew what the Liberal government was proposing through Bill C-75, they would be up in arms about it. This is why.

Much like my colleagues from St. Albert—Edmonton and Bow River said, Alberta right now is going through some tough times. We are not just going through tough times economically as a result of low oil prices and abysmal policies federally and provincially when it comes to our energy sector, but also as a result of crime, especially in the central Alberta region right now.

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The City of Red Deer and the central Alberta area are among the most dangerous areas and communities in Canada to live. Rural crime in Alberta has been an ongoing issue of great magnitude for the past several years. In fact, my colleagues and I who have rural components in our ridings in Alberta have worked with our provincial colleagues to have a rural crime task force over the last six months. We have consulted widely with stakeholders. We have consulted with Albertans. I had three town halls in January. I had influenza and pneumonia at the time, but I still made it to those meetings, where hundreds of people filled halls in our community. I know this would be the same for my colleagues.

I met with the RCMP, law enforcement officers, and virtually every stakeholder impacted by this, including victim services organizations, rural crime watch organizations, and citizens on patrol. All of these organizations gave us clear direction of where they wanted their government to go. If they read and knew about the contents of Bill C-75, they would realize that on virtually everything they advised us to do, the bill does the exact opposite. This is the problem.

Here are some of the things I heard loud and clear from the constituents I represent, and from police officers as well. I met with every detachment, including Rimbey, Sylvan Lake, Blackfalds. I met with city police in Lacombe and the Red Deer city police, who are RCMP as well. I met with Ponoka. I met with everyone I possibly could on this issue.

The problem they face is what happens after police catch criminals. Here I am talking about the current laws we have today, not the watered down version that Canadians are going to get. This is about the current legislation today.

A police officer can arrest someone who is in possession of stolen property from at least 10 different break and enters for theft. They hold these people in cells and take them to their hearings, where they will get bail. Part of the bail provisions these people get is an instruction that they not associate with any of the people who have also been charged with these crimes, and that they not participate in any more illegal activity. They are given a slap on the wrist and off they go.

Five days later, the RCMP or police will pick up these same individuals in the same area. They will find them in possession of stolen property from other illegal break and enters. The value of that property is in the thousands of dollars, and usually motor vehicles are involved either as a tool or to get to a crime scene, or to be stolen. These individuals will be held in cells and will go back before the judge again. Now they are there facing charges from the previous break and enters, now breach of bail conditions, and now more theft and break and enter charges. What does the judge do again? It is a slap on the wrist and away the criminal goes.

I spent a lot of time as a fisheries technician, an angler, and a fishing guide. I understand the value of catch-and-release, but when it comes to crime, catch-and-release is bad policy. This is not working for the people I represent, and it is only going to get worse. It is called the revolving door on crime. The police and the people in the communities know this. It is the same people doing the same things over and over again without consequence. This is a critical problem.

I have a private member's slot coming up and I was going to present a bill to the House that would have created an escalating clause for theft over \$5,000 because of the magnitude, cost, and impact that is having on the communities I represent. There seem to be no ongoing consequences for this, but if there were an escalator on a second, third, or subsequent charges of theft over \$5,000, or for stealing motor vehicles, there would be consequences for the more crimes someone commits. It should cost them more.

• (1720)

Here is the problem. In Alberta, the current federal government has been negligent in appointing judges. The government cannot say that there are not good, qualified candidates in Alberta. It might have trouble finding good, qualified Liberal candidates to fill some of these vacancies, because there are not a whole lot of Liberals left in Alberta. There is no shortage of qualified people in Alberta to fill these vacancies.

As a result of the Jordan decision, a number of these crimes are pleaded down to bare minimums to advance the court docket.

We hear words from the minister like "efficiency". Efficiency simply means that they are going to get these people before the judge, slap them on the wrist more quickly, and send them through that revolving door faster. The only thing this bill is going to do for thieves in central Alberta is make them dizzy from how fast the revolving door is going to go around as they go in and out of the justice system. This would be an absolute abomination for the law-abiding property owners in my constituency, should this bill come to pass. To me, it is absolutely mind-boggling.

I will get back to the rural crime task force. They want more provisions to be able to look after themselves to protect themselves and their property in rural areas. They want more serious consequences. They want more police on the roads able to do the work that needs to be done.

There are people who live 45 minutes to an hour away from the police. In fact, I have heard of instances when the police did not show up for three or four days after the actual crime to just catalogue and log what was actually stolen. This is how serious and how far behind the system actually is.

Rather than providing resources, more resources for police, more resources for our prosecutorial services, more resources for the bench, and more resources for our penal system, the government has its own agenda and is spending a lot of money on other things. This is money that is actually taken out Canadian taxpayers' pockets.

The primary ordinance of any government ought to be the safety and security of its law-abiding citizens. That does not appear to be the case with this piece of legislation. The people I represent would be very frustrated to know this.

I will get to a couple of the details. I think most of my constituents would be deeply offended to find out the direction the government is going on some of these things.

Private Members' Business

First is theft over \$5,000. Right now there are basically two different categories of theft in the Criminal Code. If someone steals something with a net value or a deemed value or an instrumental value of over \$5,000, that is currently an indictable offence. What that means is that the crown must go ahead and pursue that as a criminal matter, as an indictable offence, before the court, with a mandatory prison sentence of some sort involved, with a maximum penalty of up to 10 years.

Should Bill C-75 pass in its current form, that provision will now basically have the same type of penalties that theft under \$5,000 has. Theft under \$5,000 right now actually proceeds by way of summary conviction, or potentially as an indictable offence, or as a hybrid offence.

Basically, what the Liberal government is proposing is to treat theft over \$5,000 the same as theft under \$5,000. In fact, after the changes go through, there is going to be little to distinguish theft over \$5,000 from theft under \$5,000, which means that a judge could hand out the same penalty to someone who stole a car as to someone who shoplifted a pack of Hubba Bubba. That is where this is going. It is really unfortunate.

We want to give our judges a little discretion. I understand that, but why would we water down the legislation so much, to the point where they actually would not even have that discretion anymore. I would argue that instead of doing this kind of work, we should have provisions in the bill for theft over \$20,000, if someone is going to start stealing expensive motor vehicles, or theft over \$100,000, if someone has run a string of thefts and has stolen a welding truck, an RV, and a trailer, and so on. Why these things are not being taken any more seriously than shoplifting a package of gum is beyond me. We are heading absolutely in the wrong direction.

I did take a bit of offence. I know that not everyone who ends up in the criminal system has had an easy life, but the justice minister categorized the changes in the Criminal Code to take into consideration a lot of factors, and one of those factors is the result of previous victimization. Let us take a look at what these charges are.

● (1725)

First is participation in the activity of a terrorist group. This does not sound like someone who does not know what he or she is doing and is underprivileged or is having trouble on the street. Second is a prison breach. That does not sound like someone who is underprivileged. Third is municipal corruption or influencing municipal officials. I do not see the homeless people in my riding having a lot of influence on the mayor or the reeve or anyone to that effect. Fourth is influencing or negotiating appointments or dealings in offices. That does not sound like a crime of the underprivileged or of those who were previously victimized.

I could go through most of these: extortion by libel, advocating genocide, possession of property obtained by crime, prohibited insider trading. Yes, these are the crimes of the poor and unfortunate the Liberal justice minister characterized when she made her speech. These are well-organized crimes that are perpetrated by people who know darn well what they are doing, and they are doing it on purpose. This brings me to my point on organized crime.

Right now the current government has two bills in the House: Bill C-71, which proposes to crack down on law-abiding firearms owners and make their lives intensely more miserable; and Bill C-75, which would actually make life far easier for criminals. The hypocrisy and juxtaposition of these two pieces of legislation is absolutely astonishing.

For example, the Liberal public safety minister said that the government is using Bill C-71 to crack down on guns and gangs, yet the justice minister is proposing a bill that says that we are going to hybridize offences in the Criminal Code for participation in the activities of a criminal organization. If we are not living in freaking upside-down land, I do not know what is going on.

The Liberal government is going to penalize law-abiding firearms owners with Bill C-71. Meanwhile, it is going to change the Criminal Code and say that if members of a gang are using guns, we are going to proceed by way of hybridization, potentially a summary conviction offence and a mere fine, for being involved in that criminal organization. This makes absolutely no sense. It makes no sense to the law-abiding firearms community in my riding. It makes no sense to the law-abiding community in my riding.

The criminals and thieves who are operating in my riding are looking at today's legislative agenda and saying to themselves, "My goodness, the smorgasbord just got bigger and better. We are now going to have shopping lists for firearms, because the government is requiring business owners to keep those shopping lists available for us. We are going to be able to go to all the homes we want to and get the property we want." They will get a slap on the wrist and a trip through the revolving door. Bada bing bada boom. They will thank the Liberals. We know who supports the Liberals. It is the criminals in this country. It is not the law-abiding citizens.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe will have seven minutes remaining in his time for his remarks on the bill, and of course, the usual 10 minutes for questions and comments.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

RURAL CRIME

The House resumed from March 28 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Lakeland for presenting this motion to the House today, and I am glad to be able to contribute the voices of those in my riding of Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River. My riding is one of the largest rural ridings in Canada, and I know first-hand how important it is back home to have strong, enforceable laws that protect the potential victims of crime and the people who are vulnerable to the failings of the justice system.

Private Members' Business

Before I begin, I will address one concern I have with the language of the motion. When we use phrases like “rural crime”, it is important to be aware that the words we are saying have a history and a meaning behind them, even though we may not intend them that way. As a Dene woman who grew up with and lives with first nations and Métis people, I know that for many across Canada, the phrase “rural crime” does not mean crime in rural Canada. Rather, to many it means crime by indigenous people committed against non-indigenous people. Therefore, motions and debates like this one can be quite scary and isolating to indigenous people, and I would ask that when members of this House consider this bill and talk about it in caucus and with their constituents, they keep in mind the history and meaning of terms like “rural crime”. Even though my colleagues may not intend the language to be perceived in this way, Canada does have a history of injustice toward first nations, Métis, and Inuit people. The language and practice of colonialism is still a reality for far too many people, and we have an obligation to recognize that fact.

That being said, I want to speak about this bill, because I know just how important it is to make improvements to the justice system in rural Canada. My experience as the mayor of La Loche taught me that working with the RCMP, elders, band councils, northern municipalities, and youth is crucial to improving the lives of people in rural Canada, and my experience as an MP has taught me that not all decisions about justice and community development can be decided in the big cities by people who do not know the first thing about the lives and ways of those in small communities. Therefore, today I would like to share some of the experiences I have had, in the hope that they will shed light on this issue for members of the House.

Last week my staff and I had the opportunity to travel to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, to attend the New North Northern Justice Symposium. New North represents the 34 municipalities in Saskatchewan's north. This event included elders, youth, RCMP, representatives from the Department of Justice in Saskatchewan, and band councils from across the province. It was an honour to listen to and learn about the programs and initiatives that elders, youth, municipalities, and bands have started to make their communities and reserves peaceful and prosperous.

We had the chance to hear from Angie Merasty and Shawna Bear about their northeast youth violence reduction partnership. Donna Partridge told us about Big Island's soup and bannock initiatives. We also heard from several constables and sergeants in the RCMP about bootlegging, crime reduction, gangs, and other programs, like Crime Stoppers. Each of them shared their knowledge, and I am thankful that they all shared their time with us.

The most important thing I took away from the symposium was how important the relationships between people are. The communities in my riding are small, so small that neighbours become your family, and a lot of the time they already are. Despite how small we feel, our hearts and spirit are big. We look out for one another. We look out for each other when we are in crisis. We celebrate our milestones and successes and mourn our tragedies together, because we know that our communities are stronger when we are all looking out for one another.

This is especially true when it comes to our relationship with local police and the RCMP. It is crucial for local governments and

community members to trust their police, but that trust can only be established if the police have enough resources to respond to the needs of the community. That means making sure that the police have the equipment and training to de-escalate situations and respond to emergencies. That means making sure that law enforcement has the time to listen and engage with their communities in meaningfully positive ways.

● (1735)

When police are short on time and compassion, and when they do not understand the generational trauma that people face, it creates a recipe for overly aggressive arrests, and a fear of police and law enforcement. We know that the RCMP are there to look out for us. However, when all we see is violence, or the police's absence, there can be no positive relationship. I know that the RCMP are there to look out for us, and will be there, regardless of how they are perceived.

When I was the mayor of La Loche and made the decision to evacuate our town of 3,000 people, the RCMP volunteered to stay behind to make sure folks got to safety. They could have easily left to look out for their own families. There was no professional obligation to stay. They were some of the last people in La Loche that day, just as they are the last people to give up on us in any crisis. Therefore, I think it is important to keep in mind that it is not due to a lack of will that we discuss crime in rural Canada; rather, we are talking about it because of a lack of support on our side of things, and we should be discussing what steps we can take to live up to our responsibilities in this relationship.

I also do not mean to suggest there is a lack of ideas on what we can do to support our communities, because while the police have their role in responding to crime, our communities also have a responsibility to prevent crime. As I mentioned earlier, just last week I heard many ideas from community organizers and concerned citizens on how we can strengthen our social networks and supports so that crimes do not happen in the first place. Some of the most powerful moments of the week came from the intensely personal stories that were shared. There were stories of trauma, stories of resilience, and stories of survival. There were stories of what could have been, stories of what was lost, and stories of moving on.

Many of my fellow MPs have participated in what is called a “blanket exercise”, which serves as a visual reminder of the systemic oppression and attempted elimination of indigenous people. Stories like these remind us of how indigenous people and northern communities experience and relate to the justice system. These are the stories that we as leaders, the police, and the RCMP must know to better understand rural communities. I am encouraged to see the progress being made in northern Saskatchewan. However, I am alarmed at how much more needs to be done to strengthen the powerful community dynamics that are already in place.

Private Members' Business

Therefore, when we hear the statistics that are being discussed about crime in rural Canada, they seem to paint an inaccurate picture of imagined chaos and lawlessness in our small towns. That sentiment empowers vigilance in the name of self-defence. These statistics highlight isolation under the guise of abandonment, and they create division when there is so much effort for the sake of unity.

We should not take these feelings for granted and dismiss them as inaccurate, for that is, after all, the lived experience of many people in rural Canada. Our response needs to reconcile that feeling of abandonment with the reality of progress that is being made by our communities. It is our duty to do what we can to bridge that gap between the feelings of our constituents and the efforts of our municipalities, band councils, the police, and the RCMP.

I believe that we can make progress on building that bridge not only by listening to the lived experiences of those who are victimized by crime, but also by giving our time to the forces of justice and to the leaders of our communities who are doing the work on the ground to reduce crime and sustain healthy, peaceful communities. When we as parliamentarians know the issues and understand what life is like in our rural constituencies, only then can we truly advocate on their behalf and know what resources we can provide to help in building these communities.

• (1740)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Motion No. 167, the motion on rural crime that was introduced by my colleague from Lakeland, a motion that I and many others had the privilege of seconding.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize and thank my colleague for her tireless work on behalf of her constituents and for bringing forward this motion, which, as members will come to understand, addresses a growing issue in both my riding and the province of Saskatchewan.

Motion No. 167 instructs the Standing Committee on Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness to undertake a detailed review of rural crime throughout Canada and to make recommendations to address the problems on a national level. This review, and the report that will follow, are not only welcome and required, but I believe long overdue. They will help us identify the scope of the problems, as well as the difficulties, facing the RCMP regarding staffing, officer health, and allocation of resources.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of visiting with constituents during my annual winter and spring riding tours. At nearly 30,000 square kilometres, Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek is a large, mostly rural, riding. It is half the size of the province of Nova Scotia, with approximately 60 hamlets, villages, towns, and three small cities, numerous Hutterite colonies, and two first nation communities, and a whole lot of geography in-between, with rural municipalities, which are home to our farmers, ranchers, and acreage owners. While it is difficult to get to all of those communities, I believe it is important to make every effort to hear the concerns of my constituents directly. At the top of mind for many is rural crime.

At the same time, local RCMP detachments held community meetings throughout the province where this same issue was raised

over and over again. Without fail, I heard constituents voice a deep commitment to finding solutions to ensure that the tragedy that took place in 2016 on the Stanley farm, located in my riding, never happens again. They are calling on all orders of government to pass and enforce laws that ensure the protection of all.

Every Canadian should feel safe in their home, in their community, and in their daily life. That is why I chose to second this motion. It is vital that we provide levels of policing in our rural communities comparable to those that Canadians enjoy in our cities.

An effective, responsive, and empowered police force is capable of heading off crime and confrontation simply by being present and accessible. The most effective means of ensuring that unfortunate situations do not escalate to tragedies is to prevent those situations from happening at all.

On the Prairies, and especially in my riding, many family farms are isolated, kilometres away from other farms or communities, and often more than an hour away from the nearest RCMP detachment. This is far from a modern concern.

Throughout Canada's history, vast distances have always proven to be a challenge for the enforcement of federal laws. The North-West Mounted Police was founded in 1873 for this very reason, to bring order to the frontier. One hundred and forty-five years later, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police continues to provide protection to communities and individuals in those same isolated areas of our country. I believe it is time to review how the government and the RCMP, as well as provincial and local police forces, provide those services.

According to the RCMP, rural crime in Canada is on the rise. For example, after dropping from 2012 to 2014, property crimes rose in 2015 and 2016. This is cause for concern, especially in Saskatchewan.

Unfortunately, my province currently leads the country in per capita rural crime, with 13,080 criminal convictions per 100,000 rural residents. This is nearly double the national average of 6,609 per 100,000. Thankfully, the Government of Saskatchewan is taking action on this file. It created a caucus committee to study the issue, and has since invested over \$5 million and created the protection and response team program aimed at empowering officers to reduce rural crime through, for instance, faster response times.

• (1745)

However, this is only a first step. The province is working with a limited data set and without the support of a national program. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, also known as SARM, understands the gargantuan task the RCMP faces. For that reason it has endorsed Motion No. 167, which reads: "Rural crime and policing have long been a concern for Saskatchewan's rural municipalities. SARM very much supports the creation of a strategy to improve rural crime prevention and address emerging crime rates."

Private Members' Business

I would like to be clear, however, that this is not merely a Saskatchewan issue. The RCMP serves as the primary rural police force in every province and territory, except Ontario and Quebec. While those provinces have their own provincial police forces, the OPP and the SQ respectively, those forces are faced with the same daunting task of providing effective enforcement over vast rural areas. That task would be made simpler by the additional information that a national review would provide as far as raw data is concerned, but also by any policy and procedure recommendations that would arise.

The little data we do have paints a picture that is growing more concerning. I mentioned Saskatchewan's rural crime numbers earlier, and how they increased in both 2015 and 2016. The same is true in Manitoba, British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. Rural property crimes, including thefts of property and motor vehicles, mischief, break and enter, and arson, increased over the last two years as well. These increases must be addressed quickly and effectively. If passed, Motion No. 167 and the information and recommendations resulting from the review could provide invaluable support not only for Saskatchewan but also for the entirety of Canada.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight and commend the excellent work of the members of the RCMP. Faced with immensely difficult tasks, officers work professionally and with great dedication to ensure the safety of their fellow Canadians. Unfortunately, the resources that our officers need are often unavailable or lacking. In many cases, divisions are severely understaffed due to retirements and recruiting difficulties. Often this leads to operational gaps that stretch current members thin, resulting in health issues, both physical and mental, arising.

Undertaking this review will help shed light on the full extent of these realities. Identifying the RCMP's full resources, including personnel, and their policies in relation to population density, geographic area, and the handling of staff shortages would allow the government to reassess current programs and reallocate resources as needed.

Last week, I held round tables in my riding, together with my colleague from Lakeland, to hear from community leaders, the RCMP, and those organizations like Rural Crime Watch to hear their thoughts on this motion. While there is frustration and apprehension, our protective services are committed to doing the best with what they have, and community leaders and those working in partnership with them are committed to ensuring that their communities are safe.

A national review is not only a necessary next step to combat rural crime but, as I noted earlier, past due. Motion No. 167 would help clarify problems and identify solutions.

So far, we have heard two members of the governing party speak to this motion, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader. Canadians living in rural and remote areas of our country need to know that the Liberal government is taking their concerns, as well as this motion, seriously. Skating around the issue and paying it lip service is not enough. Rural Canadians need to know that the Liberal members in this place support the motion.

● (1750)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak this evening to Motion No. 167, which is focused on the study of rural crime in Canada. I certainly want to commend the member for Lakeland for the motion and for bringing it forward to the House of Commons.

The issue of rural crime is certainly worthy of a committee study, and we support that. It is important that it be brought to our attention in the House, but also to the attention all Canadians.

While rural crime has declined overall since 2014 in most regions of Canada, there are exceptions in some provinces where there has been a notable increase in property crime. We know that as much as 30% of violent gun crimes in Canada happen outside of a major city. Overall, the territories and Saskatchewan have the highest rates of firearm-related violent crime within the country. I say all of this with the caveat that data comparing urban and rural crime statistics tends to be outdated in the country. That alone is one reason why a detailed study of the issue by the committee would be most welcome.

During the first hour of debate, we heard that one of the fundamental challenges facing rural areas was the lack of current data. Rising rates of property crime, home invasions, and thefts are problems often compounded by isolation, distance from police, and unreliable cellular service. Motion No. 167 stipulates that the committee should consider these factors and trends, and should look at policing resources and policies in developing recommendations to curb rural crime.

The government has indicated its support, and I am here to reconfirm our support for the motion. Should the committee undertake this study, it is my hope that it does so in a way that complements Bill C-71, an act to amend certain acts and regulations in relation to firearms, which is currently being studied within the Commons.

That legislation proposes practical and sensible measures to address growing rates of firearm-related crimes, keeping guns out of the wrong hands, and ensuring the safety of all Canadian communities, from coast to coast to coast.

It is truly all about protecting Canadians. Whether in urban or rural Canada, I know that during a study members will have the chance to hear important testimony that will reflect the needs and challenges facing rural communities specifically.

Canadians expect the government to be smart on crime, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Private Members' Business

The government announced major new federal funding in 2017, committing up to \$327 million over five years, and \$100 million annually thereafter, to help support a variety of initiatives to reduce gun crime and gang activities. Close to \$43 million was committed to projects to support the national crime prevention strategy, a strategy that we all know has been working well in so many communities across the country.

That funding allows the government to support the development of cost-effective ways to prevent and reduce crime among at-risk populations and vulnerable communities, rural and urban, by intervening to mitigate the underlying factors that put them at risk. It provides support to programs that reach out to young people to help steer them away from problem behaviours, like drugs and gangs, with additional funding programs supporting crime prevention in northern and indigenous communities, as well as other communities across Canada. It is a plan that is working.

In fact, Public Safety Canada's aboriginal community safety planning initiative continues to support indigenous communities in developing community-specific plans that address their unique vulnerabilities and circumstances.

• (1755)

As has been the case on so many important issues, the government continues to reach out to Canadians to get information and to get their opinions on the way forward when it comes to important issues like this that impact our lives.

In March, the Minister of Public Safety hosted a Summit on gun and gang violence, with the goal of hearing from and engaging both urban and rural representatives on a range of issues and best practices to combat guns and gangs. The government heard from over 180 experts at this summit, from law enforcement to indigenous to youth and community organizations to mayors from large municipalities and representatives from most provinces and territories. Rural crime was an important topic of discussion at that summit.

The government confirmed that funding would support communities, law enforcement, and border operation efforts to crack down on crime. The views heard at the summit will help target that funding to best reflect local realities.

The funding includes initiatives addressing prevention, enforcement, and the disruption of crime. It is on top of investments we have already made over the next five years for policing on first nations and in Inuit communities. This investment, which is nearly \$292 million over that period of time, will be under the first nations policing program to ensure that both first nations and Inuit communities have the policing services they require.

There are up to \$144 million to support priorities including salaries, policing equipment, and addressing officer safety. There is an additional nearly \$45 million, starting in 2019, for up to 110 additional officers in existing agreements with these particular groups and governments. That means continued support for professional, dedicated, and culturally responsive policing in over 450 first nations and Inuit communities across Canada.

These are policing investments in indigenous communities both on reserve and off in Inuit and first nations regions, which we are

very proud of as a government. We are very proud of the fact that it will help us in addressing the issues around guns and gangs, but also in increasing the human resources and additional resources for policing in many of these areas.

Some areas are looking at reduced crime in a proactive way, for example, through the crime reduction strategy in Alberta, the rural crime watch, the community safety officers, and the community constable program. The RCMP has developed strong relationships with communities and rural associations. There are now 55 communities in Saskatchewan participating in that program, and 80 more have shown an interest in joining.

These are the reasons our government welcomes the motion from the member today. We know much more needs to be done, and we are determined to do it. For example, in 2018-19, the RCMP plans to increase its enrolment in the cadet program by nearly 1,300 cadets, depending on operational needs and the ability to support the efforts we are outlining today to combat rural crime.

At this time, I want to acknowledge the work of the RCMP and the critical role its members play in protecting and providing for the safety of all Canadians. We need to ensure they have the resources and the staffing to do their jobs and to do them properly.

I talked to RCMP officers in Saskatchewan just recently. They are dealing with a lot of gun and gang violence in the regions they serve. They are very happy to know that our government is investing money to increase policing on reserve, to provide them with additional resources in those regions, and to ensure we allow them to do their jobs and do it properly, providing for their own safety and protection as well.

• (1800)

I want to thank all of those officers out there who go above and beyond to serve and protect us as Canadians. We want to do what is necessary to ensure they are safe in their jobs in keeping Canadians safe.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend and colleague from Lakeland for introducing this private member's motion, Motion No. 167, calling on the committee for public safety and national security to conduct an assessment on the pressing issue of rural crime in Canada.

According to Statistics Canada, in 2015, Canada's crime index rose for the first time in 12 years, with the highest increase in western Canada. In 2015, the gain in the national non-violent crime severity index was partly the result of an increase in property crime.

In 2016, the index increased for a second year in a row, with approximately 27,700 more police-reported incidents. In 2016, the CSI increased 2% over 2015, nationally.

The rise in rural crime is an issue across Canada, and today I want to focus my comments on the challenges facing my home province of Saskatchewan.

Private Members' Business

Saskatchewan is a vast province, with a size of 651,900 square kilometres and a population of 1,100,000 people. Our communities are spread out and our police officers are spread thin. Since 2011, the province has had a 4.2% increase in reported property crime violations.

To ensure my presentation in support of the need for rural crime Motion No. 167 was accurate and timely, I invited the member for Lakeland to participate in a round table discussion in my riding of Yorkton—Melville. I had heard a great deal about this when travelling around my riding, but I knew I was about to be broadly informed on this issue from every perspective on the basis of the overwhelming response to the invitation to participate.

Representatives from 10 villages, from rural municipalities, and from towns shared the real current levels of property crime, property theft, and vehicle theft taking place in our riding.

Farm families that have lived for many years with minimal threats and a sense of safety and security have become more and more anxious in the last few years about the safety of their children playing in the yard in broad daylight, or being woken in the dead of night by an intruder in the yard or in their home or business. The stress of constantly losing equipment and supplies cost them to such an extent that many are seriously considering that carrying on the rural lifestyle they toil through and love is becoming more of an impossibility.

Beyond personal safety, our rural communities are concerned about business retention, as many businesses have been victims of multiple crimes. Loss of businesses and employment in communities will only further escalate rural crime issues. Concerns over rural security are increasing as they are seeing repeat offences becoming more frequent and brazen.

Rural businesses and families are not reporting crimes because they have given up hope on anything being done. This causes the problem to compound. Crime is going unreported, so statistics on rural crime are unreliable. This is alarming because the number of RCMP officers who are deployed to an area is based on crime statistics.

Statistics are needed that accurately reflect the severity of this issue. We need to look into what resources the RCMP has in order to protect our communities effectively and to ensure it has the manpower it needs so officers can respond to calls faster, investigate these crimes, and not have to work such dangerously long and stressful hours to make up for shortages.

Citizens in my riding are concerned about the safety of our RCMP men and women, and the safety of the communities in which they work. Nationally, more than one in 10 RCMP positions are currently vacant. Of those vacancies, 6.6% are not filled, 3.9% are reported to be on long-term sick leave, and 1.6% are reported to be maternity/paternity leave.

In Saskatchewan, the RCMP has approximately 925 members working out of 87 rural detachments under community policing agreements. Another 250 officers are based at larger municipal RCMP detachments, and 33 officers are involved in community tripartite policing arrangements with Saskatchewan first nations.

At our Yorkton—Melville round table, the RCMP was well represented by F Division Commanding Officer Curtis Zablocki; Staff Sergeant Devin Pugh, RCMP South District; and Sergeant Travis Adams of the RCMP Yorkton Rural Detachment. It was such an honour to have them participate, as they listened intently and contributed significantly to the discussion.

● (1805)

Rural crime in Canada has dominated Facebook forums, online chat rooms, and local media across the country. I was fortunate to have the creator of Farmers Against Rural Crime participate in our rural crime round tables as well. The closed Facebook group site has garnered over 17,000 members from across Canada in very short order. The site is well monitored by its creator Nick, a young farmer in Saskatchewan with a young family, who sees the issue of rural crime as very serious and wants to provide a place for those impacted to tell their stories and to have sensible, honest conversations about how to work with government, RCMP, communities, and individuals to better combat and eradicate rural crime in Canada. Nick shared a stack of emails with me, which was only a portion of those from the site, describing current rural crimes that have caused undue hardship physically, financially, and emotionally in the lives of rural Canadians and their families. I look forward to Nick and Farmers Against Rural Crime being called as witnesses when this motion is passed and the committee work begins.

Motion No. 167 is a multi-faceted tool that would serve the federal government well to respond to rural citizens, communities, and RCMP and community constables, whose experiences and recommendations are critical to ending this rural crime crisis.

At this point, I believe it is important to mention that as I travel extensively throughout my riding, there is a deep appreciation for our police force and the first responders who serve the citizens of rural Canada. Those who populate our cities and leave the city to travel, visit family and friends, or vacation in the pristine natural environment of Canada's rural countryside need to comprehend the need and lobby for government investment in rural infrastructure. They, too, need to highly value our rural police force and first-line responders, such as STARS, which is expensive but was so crucial in dealing with the horrific crash that claimed so many lives in the tragedy of the Humboldt Broncos.

Again, there is a deep concern for our RCMP officers as they simply do not have the capacity and resources necessary to find criminals and bring them to justice in rural Canada. They are understaffed and overworked. There is significant concern for their safety, their mental and physical welfare, as well as their families.

Private Members' Business

This shortage of policing support is well known to the criminal element, as well, and is playing a role in increased violence attached to rural crime. The rise in rural crime has coincided with the escalating opiate crisis in Canada. Since the first major bust, in April 2013, police across Canada have shut down 20 fentanyl labs, mostly operated by organized crime groups. The biggest raids were in B.C., Alberta, and Saskatchewan.

Multiple first nations communities have declared a state of emergency in response to the uptick in opioid overdoses, during which crime rates began to soar. The member of Parliament for Lakeland and I heard from multiple participants that limited front-line law enforcement resources and long response times have made rural communities and properties ideal targets for theft and vandalism, gang activity, and organized crime operations and expansion. First nation reserves also face reduced safety and protection and increased crime due to reduced policing services in rural and indigenous communities.

I heard an encouraging report of co-operation between two neighbouring communities, one a rural town and the other a first nation reserve, which want to see healing circles used when children as young as 11 years old are committing crimes being led by 13- and 14-year-olds, who know there are no real consequences for them. They would have to stand before their elders to answer for their actions, as well as hear from the business or property owners they have robbed to learn about the cascading harm and negative impact on victims of rural crime.

The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, SARM, also contributed greatly to the round table discussion on rural crime and is very engaged in assisting our police forces.

Motion No. 167 is precisely what our communities need, and I believe that the government needs to engage in combatting rural crime. There needs to be a study that looks at the real numbers to get accurate statistics so we can base our recommendations on the reality that our communities are up against.

• (1810)

I am pleased to hear that this is a non-partisan issue. We can all agree that the escalation needs to end. We need to bring our communities together. We need to find comprehensive solutions, from determining exactly how bad this problem is to determining what the RCMP needs, and also the critical underlying causes of rural crime.

That is exactly what Motion No. 167 would do, and that is why I stand in support of it today on behalf of my rural riding and all rural Canadians.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand tonight and talk about the issue of rural crime. I appreciate my colleague from Lakeland bringing forward Motion No. 167. This is an important issue, and we have already heard several of my colleagues speak to it tonight.

Rural MPs from Alberta started talking about this issue in the last couple of years as they heard about it from their constituents. We held many town hall meetings in our ridings over the last year. We visited with staff sergeants and their detachments. We visited with RCMP commanding officers for the province. We talked to a lot of

people. It was not hard to get people to come to town halls to talk about rural crime.

My riding, Bow River, is about the size of New Brunswick. It has 60 large and small rural communities. These are not city people who expect the RCMP or the metropolitan police to show up quickly. These people do not expect to see the RCMP very quickly because of the distance. It is very hard to get to them.

There are two groups I am very concerned about: the rural residents and the fear they are living with, and the RCMP members and the professional job they do. RCMP officers know that it is hard to get to reported crimes because of the distance. They want to get there, but there are some issues that are really creating problems.

We are glad that RCMP members have sick leave, maternity leave, and paternity leave. These are rights they should have. However, there is a strong shortage of staff, and they cannot backfill these positions. One detachment has seven members, but it really has only four because the positions cannot be filled, so the detachment is left short. If a detachment that supposedly has seven members but really has only four provides 24-7 coverage and has many miles to cover, that leaves the officers very much at risk. It is not only the stress of the job and the long hours, but the risk they may face being out in places far removed from any backup or support. The RCMP is caught in a vicious cycle.

The province did respond, in a sense, to this growing concern by saying that it would hire 59 more RCMP officers for rural detachments, but the soonest it can possibly get those is in two years, if it gets them at all.

We really have a problem with our professional police service, a service we really appreciate. The RCMP has a long-standing history of service to our country, but barriers are being put up in front of them and the work they need to do to respond to crimes. Upholding the law in our constituencies has become very difficult for them.

Then we get to the justice system. When the RCMP officers go out to investigate crimes, the people are often long gone before the officers can get there. When they do catch them, they appear in court, receive bail hearings, and are gone. The joke among RCMP officers is that they need to watch their vehicles when individuals are released on bail because they will probably steal one to go home. They know it is a slap on the wrist. The RCMP officers are very frustrated when doing their jobs because they will probably catch the repeat offenders another time doing the same crime. It is very hard for the RCMP.

Private Members' Business

They coach people at town hall meetings to get the citizens on patrol, on active crime watch. They are asking people to go out and help them in the middle of the night. We are talking about seniors on their properties in rural communities. They want them to go out and try to secure their property in the evening, and that is a challenging task.

This leads me to the second thing I am going to talk about, the fear among the citizens. I heard from a mother with a three-year-old child. At three o'clock in the morning, she heard people in her yard, and before long they were banging on her door. She locked herself in a room and phoned the RCMP. There was no chance the RCMP would get there.

In a community, two nights ago, two people attempted to steal a truck, and the resident came out. He is now in critical condition in the hospital, as he was severely beaten by them. They were long gone before somebody discovered this person, who was severely beaten, and called the police. The distances make it very tough.

• (1815)

Living in fear is a severe problem for our people in rural areas. The RCMP cannot get there. As other people have mentioned, reporting crimes is really important, yet people are giving up on reporting crimes because the RCMP cannot get there. Sometimes it has been days later when the RCMP can get there to try to investigate what is occurring. The dissatisfaction that is growing among residents toward their police force makes no sense. The frustration that is occurring among the residents in rural areas because of fear is wrong. We need to be able to provide better service in our rural communities.

We need to fundamentally restructure how we look at the RCMP and its service. Because of the way it is structured, there need to be more officers. They need more support. They should not fear going out at two in the morning on a call 30 miles out from where they live or where their detachment is, because they will be out there on their own with no backup from the unit behind them. They should not fear for their jobs to be able to do that. There needs to be backup. We need to look at how the RCMP works in rural areas. There is a serious shortage, and it is cyclical in what it causes them.

Someone mentioned Bill C-75. This could make it worse, in the sense that it is a revolving door with lesser penalties and fines for stealing things over \$5,000. These are crimes of opportunity. These people know that the police are not going to get there. The vehicles found in rural communities are often very expensive. These are farming communities. They have expensive four-wheel drive trucks. These are \$50,000 or \$60,000 vehicles, and people are out there stealing them. If they know that under the new legislation they would get a slap on the wrist and maybe a fine, that would really exacerbate the situation in rural areas. Bill C-75 may cause this to become a more severe problem. The RCMP will be more frustrated and less likely to solve crimes if people are only fined for this.

Rural crime is a severe issue. In town halls, I see the fear on people's faces, their anger and frustration about the country they live in and should be safe in. This is not right. They have beautiful homes and great properties.

I am glad that this bill is here. We can collect data and information so that Canadians can feel safe in their homes, no matter where they live. This is a really important piece to do.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I will just let the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock know that, allowing time for the right of reply, we will have roughly five to six minutes for his remarks before we have to cut that off and finish up with the end of the hour.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak to this issue. Highway robbery is something we use as a pejorative a lot of the time. However, yesterday I saw on Facebook that some folks were, in fact, stopped on the highway. Someone thought that people were in distress, and it turned out that they actually wanted to rob equipment out of his trailer, right on the highway near Clyde, Alberta, in the southern part of my riding. We think of highway robbery as something that is unreal, yet it is happening in rural Canada right now.

I have gone throughout my riding and have held round tables. I have met with multiple municipalities on the rural crime issue. It only seems to be getting worse lately. Therefore, this study my fellow member for Lakeland is calling for could not be more timely at this point, and I commend her for that.

One of the things that was brought up by a number of people I met with that I thought was interesting is that this is not an RCMP issue, per se. We need to give them all the tools they need to solve these crimes. We need to make sure that they are properly resourced. We need to make sure that all of this happens. However, at the end of the day, this is not an RCMP issue; this is a societal issue that we have to deal with at all levels. Canada is our country. Every one of us who lives here makes up Canada. We have to decide how we want this to work out.

One of the guys I met with asked what we are doing at an educational level to reduce crime. We are not going to fix this problem overnight, but we ought to be thinking about the carrots and the sticks in our system. Are the sticks big enough? Are the carrots in the right place? It was interesting to have that discussion with a lot of people. A lot of people are feeling that the carrots are definitely in the wrong place when it comes to incentives in our system, and they really feel that there is no stick whatsoever in our system.

Private Members' Business

We watch folks drive through our communities or come through our communities with reckless abandon, in some cases. For example, I recently heard of a gentleman who moved into the old folks home in town and came back to his farm a couple of weeks later. If it were not for the fact that the dishwasher would not fit through the door, it would have been gone. Everything else was gone. The fridge and the freezer were gone. His furniture was gone. His firearms collection was gone. Everything was gone. The house was clear, as if someone had moved out. This is the kind of impunity with which rural crime is happening.

Beyond that, vehicles going missing is a daily occurrence. In some cases, particular families will have their entire fleet of vehicles stolen. One gentleman who came to visit me told me that within six weeks, he had three vehicles stolen, two out of his yard and one right out of his own garage. One was at the mechanic's shop and was stolen right out of the yard there.

This particular study could not have come at a more timely time. I hope we not only look at what the police response is going to be but also at what the whole societal response will be, because Canada is our country, and we do not want to turn it over to criminals.

• (1820)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank and acknowledge the Liberals stating their intention to support Motion No. 167. This may be a rare moment when we are all working together to do the right thing on behalf of the people we represent in every corner of the country, despite our passionate, or otherwise, regular disagreements.

I want to thank the NDP for proposing amendments that improved the motion overall and brought focus to additional important issues. I also thank all Conservative colleagues for their encouragement and steadfast advocacy to put the rights of law-abiding Canadians first. I thank the members for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek and Yorkton—Melville for their work and support for Motion No. 167.

At round tables in Saskatchewan last week, rural Canadians and RCMP members shared their experiences with us. I heard concerns similar to those of my constituents: that they feel like sitting ducks; that being robbed is inevitable; and that they feel vulnerable because of long response times and the lack of a visible law enforcement presence, due to unique rural policing challenges and understaffed detachments.

The reality is that rural crime is escalating and must be combatted in joint efforts by all governments. That is why my motion directs the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to immediately undertake a comprehensive current assessment of crime rates and trends; RCMP, policing, and staff resources; provincial and municipal partnerships in rural, remote, and indigenous communities; measures to increase the tactical and operational effectiveness of indigenous police forces; strategies and resources for rural judicial and rehabilitation systems; and improved support for rural crime victims across Canada.

It is a first step, at least, toward concrete recommendations within six months, because it is urgent. Federal, provincial, and municipal governments and policing agencies have made various announcements in recent months, which does not negate the need for this

analysis but demands it by enabling the timely measurement of outcomes and impacts. The appropriate committee will take responsibility and prioritize combatting rural crime, which, frankly, has not yet been done, since police-reported crime in Canada increased in 2015 for the first time in 12 years.

Here is why it matters.

From Lakeland, Caroline says, “I had a neighbour who was at home with her five children. There were people in the yard, and all she could do was let them snoop. They had a vehicle waiting on the other side of the tree line. How unnerving! This sort of thing has been and (in my opinion) will continue to escalate so long as 1) the perpetrators know the average person is defenceless, 2) the perpetrators know the RCMP will not pursue them over 130 km/hr, and 3) the slap-on-the wrist sentencing doesn't leave a memorable mark. What is our government's first job it should perform if not to protect its citizens?”

Michele says, “I have called the police to my farm before and do not expect them to arrive any sooner than 25 minutes. A lot of bad things can happen... I believe that the message thieves and thugs have received is that they are welcome to steal, injure, and destroy with impunity and without fear, because property owners have been told to give them what they want. They are bolder and more dangerous than ever before.”

From Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, Jess says, “My husband is a pilot in the Canadian military, and in a one-year span, we have had our truck stolen twice out of our driveway, once while he was deployed. Please help in any way you can. We are upstanding citizens who do what we can for the community, but the crime here is making us want to release from the military just so we can live somewhere safer.”

Bob, who has had many break-ins over the last year, says, “Our community had to start a WhatsApp group in our area, where members alert members of suspicious vehicles and events so that we can respond to help each other, since there is effectively no RCMP response.”

As a rural MP, I suggest that no urban resident would or should accept this situation. Rural Canadians deserve the same safety and security. Rural RCMP and police members must be able to protect their communities with sufficient resources, like their urban counterparts.

Nick Cornea, who set up Farmers Against Rural Crime, with more than 17,000 members, points out the need for bolstering rural law enforcement, because, of course, “locks only keep honest people out.”

Motion No. 167 has 101 endorsements from local crime watch groups, provincial MLAs, municipalities, and major municipal associations in seven provinces, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and hundreds more Canadians have contacted me in support. I want to thank them for all of their work and advocacy in asking members of this House to take responsibility to pass this motion so we can start this urgent work to combat rural crime in Canada.

From B.C. to P.E.I. and the north, rural crime is a major challenge, with many factors, including gangs and the opioid crisis, harming families, businesses, and communities. Given all the government expenditures and initiatives, and sometimes waste, taking action against rural crime is clearly a core responsibility and a top priority.

I thank all members of the House for coming together to help rural Canadians feel safe in their homes again.

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment 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, May 30, 2018, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1830)

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, the province of Saskatchewan is currently struggling with a weak economy and a lagging job market. Earlier this week, Statistics Canada reported that over the past year, Saskatchewan was the only province other than Newfoundland and Labrador to suffer from a drop in wholesale trade. A major component of wholesale trade in Saskatchewan and of employment in Regina is steel production.

Since being elected, I have advocated strongly for the use of Canadian-made steel in public infrastructure projects as well as in pipeline projects over which the federal government has regulatory

authority. Canadian-made steel is much cleaner and safer than steel imported from offshore.

Thanks in part to political pressure, Kinder Morgan decided to build most of the Trans Mountain expansion using steel pipe manufactured in Regina. Of course, that project is now in doubt, which has put in doubt the largest contract that would keep Regina's steel mill operating for the coming months and years.

The federal government has tried to support that project by offering an indemnity for the Trans Mountain expansion, not just to Kinder Morgan but also to other potential investors in the project. A concern I have is that those other investors might try to cut costs and corners by instead building the Trans Mountain expansion with pipe imported from offshore. This would, of course, increase safety concerns about the project. It is also the case that manufacturing a tonne of steel and shipping it here from China emits five times as much carbon as manufacturing it in Regina.

For those environmental and safety reasons, as well as to support Canadian jobs, I have suggested that the federal government make its indemnity for the Trans Mountain expansion conditional upon any potential investor in the project honouring the existing commitment to use Canadian-made steel. When I put that question to the Minister of Natural Resources earlier this week, his response was to say, "Well, the contract for steel has already been signed, and that's a good thing for Regina."

That answer certainly is correct if Kinder Morgan continues to complete the Trans Mountain expansion, but that answer does not address the scenario that the government itself has raised of other investors coming in and taking over the project. It is for that reason that I would like to see the federal government use its indemnity as leverage to try to ensure that any prospective investor in the Trans Mountain expansion would honour the existing contract with Evraz to build the pipeline expansion using steel manufactured in Canada, which of course supports Canadian jobs, gives us assurance about safety, and also emits far less carbon than bringing in the material from offshore.

I and the people of Regina are very curious to hear from the Minister of Natural Resources as to whether, in fact, he is prepared to use the indemnity in that way.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is both timely and important because, as the Minister of Natural Resources noted earlier this week, the contracts for this pipeline expansion have already been awarded, and the economic development benefits for the project will be felt right across the country, including in the member opposite's home province of Saskatchewan, which I'm sure he is very pleased to hear this evening.

It will include a contract that ensures that almost 75% of the steel, or about 250,000 tonnes of pipe, will come from Regina. This is one of the reasons this government decided that the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline is in Canada's national interest, as it will create thousands of good jobs.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, this is not the only reason. As the Minister of Natural Resources has outlined on more than one occasion, by moving more Canadian oil to export markets, our producers will have greater access to new global markets and higher prices. That could add billions annually to the value of our oil exports.

In addition, the construction and operation of the pipeline is expected to generate billions in new federal government and provincial government revenues. Those are new tax dollars to pay for our hospitals and schools, to build new roads and safe bridges in our communities, and to fund our cherished social programs that extend to every Canadian in this country.

This is all while our government is also making unprecedented investments to enhance environmental protection and indigenous participation, investments that include the historic world-leading \$1.5-billion oceans protection plan, which will strengthen the eyes and ears of the Canadian Coast Guard, enhance our response capabilities, and build meaningful partnerships with indigenous people.

The Prime Minister has called the TMX project a “vital strategic interest to Canada”, and he instructed the Minister of Finance to initiate formal financial discussions with the pipeline’s proponent, Kinder Morgan.

Last week the finance minister updated Canadians on the status of those discussions by noting that our government is “prepared to indemnify the project against any financial loss that derives from [B.C.] Premier Horgan’s attempts to delay or obstruct the project.” The finance minister also said that “The indemnification would allow Kinder Morgan to finish what they started, what they received federal and B.C. approval to do.” Furthermore, our government is prepared to extend the indemnification to another interested party should Kinder Morgan decide not to proceed with the expansion, and we will make sure that the support we provide is sound, fair, and beneficial to all Canadians.

We want and expect to see this pipeline built, and we are doing so with an approach that is sound and sensible for Canada and for all Canadians.

I want to thank the member for his question and I certainly want to thank the members of our government, who have worked very hard in leading this initiative to where it is today.

• (1835)

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the response from the parliamentary secretary. She made the point that the government views the Trans Mountain expansion as a major source of jobs in Canada and that it will create jobs in Regina to the extent that it is built with steel pipe manufactured at Evraz.

That is exactly what I am trying to ensure. The parliamentary secretary repeats the answer that the contract has already been signed for Regina steel, and that is true if we are talking about Kinder Morgan completing the project. However, the parliamentary secretary also raised the possibility of extending the indemnity to other investors that might take over the project.

In that scenario, would the government make the indemnity conditional on those other investors honouring the existing commitment to use Canadian-made steel?

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, as has already been indicated and as the member opposite knows, the contract for the pipeline expansion has been awarded, and it has included provisions that almost 75% of the steel, which I believe is equivalent to about 800 kilometres of pipe, will be produced right in Regina. I know that is good news for him, just as it is for us, and we share his enthusiasm in seeing the project proceed.

The Trans Mountain expansion pipeline is in Canada’s national interest, and it is part of the sensible approach that includes diversifying our energy market, improving environmental safety, and creating thousands of good middle-class jobs, including good jobs in indigenous communities as well.

What I would say to the member is that regardless of who develops this pipeline, we will always maintain that it will be done in the interest of Canadians and it will be done to the benefit of Canadians.

• (1840)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise tonight to speak on behalf of thousands of homeless veterans in Canada.

In February, veterans gathered in Ottawa for the “Left in the Cold” protest to raise awareness about growing levels of homelessness among Canada’s veterans.

Just down the street, veterans Trevor Sanderson and Dick Groot, who drove all the way from Winnipeg, were protesting by sleeping outside in the cold. In testimony at committee, the co-founder of VETS Canada said the number of homeless veterans had grown to 5,000.

In fact, we just heard from Danny Lafontaine, a public relations officer with the aboriginal veterans’ association, that when he was in Montreal one day in 2015, they met with 3,200 homeless people, and 6% of them were veterans. We need to bring that number to zero. It is totally unacceptable for any veteran who risked their life for our country to be left to fend for themselves on the streets.

Last November, 29,000 veterans were waiting for their applications for disability benefits to be processed. Nearly one-third of these applicants have been waiting for a response for four months or longer. According to Scott Maxwell, the executive director of Wounded Warriors Canada, the backlog “can mean the difference between being a homeless veteran and not.” These wait times are unacceptable, and they only continue to grow.

The government has now committed \$42.8 million over two years to address the backlog in processing the increased number of claims but has not told us what it would cost to get that number to zero. It has to get to zero. That is what veterans deserve. The men and women who risked their lives on behalf of our country should be assured of economic security and assured that their needs, including the needs of their families, will be taken care of.

Adjournment Proceedings

Many veterans are falling through the cracks because they are not aware of the various services that are available. In a recent news article, the same Trevor Sanderson, who also suffers from PTSD as well as physical injuries, said that he was unaware for two decades that he qualified for a payout. Unfortunately, he is not alone. He said that many veterans are unaware of the services that they qualify for and then face long wait times.

Why do they not know about their programs? The government that campaigned on doing more for veterans has failed at the most basic level. Clearly its actions are just for show and not for change. The government must do better to inform veterans of the available services and benefits they are entitled to.

Both Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to address the problem of homeless veterans. If veterans do not know about these services, it is impossible for them to take advantage of these opportunities. We must break this terrible cycle today.

This morning, Trevor Sanderson told me that he is going to Saskatchewan on Saturday to repair a roof for a secluded veteran. On June 27, he plans to go to Nova Scotia to help fix a PTSD retreat that was damaged by storms last year. This is the type of sacrifice our veterans continue to exhibit. Now it is our turn to do the same for them.

He told me, “The homeless vets that are living in Canada are the forgotten brothers and sisters that need to be found and that together as a country we should not forget the promise that we made to them for the service that they did and only working together can we find a way to help them find a place again to call home.”

To show veterans the respect that they deserve, we must address the root problem. The government continues to promise that veterans will be treated better, but its promises are falling short. The Prime Minister said veterans are “asking for more than we are able to give right now.” Veterans risked everything, and we need to make sure that we follow the sacred obligation we have for them.

•(1845)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for Courtenay—Alberni is very passionate about this issue, as I have heard him speak to it many times in the House.

Homelessness is unacceptable in any state or form in this country, and one veteran being homeless is one too many. I would like to reassure this House that the government is taking action against the tragedy of homelessness. The people at Veterans Affairs Canada believe that veterans homelessness should be avoided wherever possible and that it is our responsibility to ensure that when veterans do find themselves homeless, they have the supports to ensure that it is a brief and non-recurring situation. We have heard the Minister of Veterans Affairs express that on more than one occasion. Through our increased focus on outreach, we are also identifying more homeless veterans and getting them the mental and financial supports they need. That shows serious action by the minister and his department to ensure that wherever possible, we are able to identify homeless veterans in this country and get them the supports they need.

Veterans Affairs Canada works alongside community organizations, local shelters, transition homes, and first responders. Our partnerships with organizations like these greatly enhance our ability to provide services to homeless veterans, as well as raise awareness about the services and programs that are currently out there. However, we also know that we need to continue to build on that community capacity at every level and that we have to continue to strengthen our partnerships with all of those groups who work on the front lines and are critical in providing for and addressing veterans homelessness in this country. Therefore, on June 7, the Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a round table on homelessness with organizations from right across the country to discuss how it can continue to better help Canadian veterans. The round table will bring together local, regional, and national organizations that work to reduce veterans homelessness. This conversation will inform the development of a national approach to veterans homelessness through exchanging information and coordinating outreach activities with all of those groups that are involved. We are proud to be taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing this issue on homelessness in Canada, and Veterans Affairs Canada is working closely with CMHC and Employment and Social Development Canada, which both have the federal mandate to address homelessness, to ensure that veterans remain a priority within our population.

As well, on April 1, new initiatives were specifically announced addressing the well-being of veterans and their families in Canada. The veterans emergency fund will help them address urgent circumstances that may put veterans at risk of becoming homeless. The fund will also support veterans and their families and survivors by providing them with short-term relief while they work to identify long-term needs and possible solutions. As well, the education and training benefit will provide up to \$40,000 for veterans with six or more years of service, and up to \$80,000 for those with 12 or more years of service to put toward post-secondary education and professional training.

We are taking concrete action to deal with this problem, and we will continue to work with all of those who want to work with us to ensure that no veteran is left without a home.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, I know my friend and colleague cares, and I appreciate her roll-out of programs that are going to help veterans. However, if veterans cannot access these services, they are no good to them. Veterans fall through the cracks. They get their hopes up, and when they cannot access these services, they get disappointed and then lose hope. We cannot have that happen anymore. It is our duty to help veterans succeed now. Now that they are home, we must take action to ensure that no veterans are left homeless. At the very least, they deserve a home.

Adjournment Proceedings

The third annual VETS Canada Coast to Coast Tour of Duty walk for homeless veterans is scheduled to take place in 17 cities across Canada on June 3. I encourage Canadians and members of Parliament to participate to convey their gratitude to the veterans who served by supporting them, standing alongside them, and bringing attention to this issue. However, it is extremely important to recognize that we should not have to have a walk to draw attention to this issue. Our veterans, as well as their dependants and survivors, should be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. There should be no homeless veterans.

• (1850)

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, members on this side of the House walk with veterans every day in our ridings and in many other regions across Canada. We walk with them and support them. We do so because we firmly believe that no veteran should be left homeless in Canada. We also believe that the programs and the supports we have brought forward as a government are done with the intention of helping veterans through what have been difficult times for them in this country, whether supporting those with mental health issues like PTSD, or supporting them and their families with living arrangements and financial support.

These are the programs and initiatives that we have implemented, and we have done so with their input and participation. We are going to continue on that path of supporting those in the country who have committed themselves to Canadians, who have served in uniform not only in Canada but all around the world. We will do what we need to do to ensure that no veteran in our country is left homeless and no veteran is left alone.

PENSIONS

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House of Commons tonight on behalf of the over 3,000 employees of Canadian Nuclear Laboratories who are concerned about their pensions. These are skilled employees. They used to be employees of Atomic Energy of Canada, but under the former Harper government, a decision was made to privatize the management and operations of AECL assets, so that the employees are now employees of CNL.

In September, a three-year grace period in which they have continued to be included in the public service pension plan will end, and they will be thrown into some new plan, as yet undefined at the time the contract was signed, under the private operator. It has been of great concern to them that they are going to end up with an inferior pension plan.

I have asked in the House before if the government would intervene. The unions representing these workers and the workers themselves have asked the government to intervene and essentially just extend the arrangement that has been going on now for the last three years, wherein the employees would be able to continue contributing to that plan and the private contractor that has been hired to manage it would make the employer contribution. There would be very little cost to government to continue this arrangement, but the consequences for workers are potentially quite severe if they are kicked out of this plan.

It is not just the consequences for the workers. I have heard from the CNL employees who work in Manitoba at the Pinawa site, which

some members may know is going to be decommissioned in the coming years. As employees realize they are going to be kicked out of this pension plan and will no longer be contributing to a good pension, and that extra years of service will not matter with respect to their pension, they are starting to look for employment elsewhere. These are highly qualified employees. In the case of Pinawa, these employees know that site very well, which is important for the decommissioning process. To have the people with the knowledge of that site looking at either retiring earlier than they otherwise would, or seeking employment elsewhere at this pivotal moment for the Pinawa site is a real mistake.

Those employees were surveyed just this past September. The survey indicated that 91.6% of the respondents felt that the changes to the pension plan had or would cause uncertainty for their future career at CNL. This is what I am talking about when I refer to people leaving. Ninety-two point three per cent said that the defined benefit pension plan of the public service was one of the motivating factors that attracted them to work at AECL.

An actuarial report commissioned by one of the unions representing these workers stated that staying in the public service pension plan for these workers would be the least expensive long-term solution for the employees and the employer. It provides superior benefits to CNL employees. It has the best human resource management for CNL or its successors, and it would provide better benefits to current mid-career employees, all else being equal. It would facilitate any future transactions involving CNL or AECL employees. It would eliminate the scheduled unfair reduction in the value of the accrued benefits for affected employees. It would reduce the pension plan's administrative and governance expenses for CNL. It would have the lowest immediate transaction costs for CNL and AECL, and would allow the employees of CNL to concentrate on their important work.

I have asked the government before if it has evaluated the cost to government of keeping those employees in the plan. It has not produced the numbers, despite a commitment by the Treasury Board president at committee in November. I want to know now if the government has those numbers and would share them in the House tonight.

• (1855)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say that our government has great respect for the workers of Canada's nuclear industry. We are committed to doing everything we can to support the workers of our country's nuclear industry.

These employees do crucial work, helping to develop and deliver innovative applications for Canada's nuclear technology. They are nuclear scientists, operators, and engineers, just to name a few of their important roles. They deliver a range of nuclear services, from design and engineering, to research and development.

Business of Supply

The Harper Conservatives' decision to outsource the running of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited's nuclear laboratories has had a lasting effect on these employees.

I should note that this is only one of a long list of ideologically driven decisions by the previous Conservative government that our government inherited. Conservative cuts led to the Phoenix pay system debacle, and were done just to create an illusory surplus on the eve of an election. Conservative cuts caused the closure of veterans' offices across the country, denying veterans access to important government services. They led to an under-equipped Canadian Coast Guard, and much more.

Our government continues to be committed to a new way of doing things, to treating Canadians fairly and with respect, making decisions based on facts and on evidence.

In terms of the situation at Canadian Nuclear Laboratories, the public service pension plan is not open to, nor intended for, people who are not employees of the federal government. Due to the action the Conservatives took to outsource the operations at CNL, those employees are not federal government employees.

In 2015, the Conservatives entered into a contract with a private company, and that contract stipulates that the private company will operate the nuclear facilities and will employ and provide pension benefits for the people who work at those facilities. Employees of private companies, such as CNL, are not and have never been eligible to participate in the public service pension plan.

I will note that we continue to be engaged with the employees and their unions on this issue, and we are committed to doing everything we can to offer pension protection for the impacted employees. As I said, our government has great respect for the workers of the nuclear industry. We are committed to supporting them.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, those workers have continued to be in the plan, despite working for CNL, for the last three years. It is also a fact that the government, in this year's main estimates, is requesting over \$1 billion to fund the operations of CNL. Effectively, that money will go to AECL and then be transferred to CNL for the management and operations of those facilities, including paying those employees.

The fact is the government continues to pay the salaries of these employees. They are effectively working for the government. The government is asking for over \$1 billion to pay those workers to do the good work they do. They deserve to be able to continue to have their pension.

What is the new way of doing things that the government is talking about? Instead of giving them a flat "no" on their pension, will it lead them on for over a year, with meetings with the Minister of Natural Resources, the President of the Treasury Board, and the PMO, just to to reach the same conclusion ultimately? If that is what a new way of doing business is, no thanks, we will wait for a new government that would actually do something for these workers instead of drowning them in platitudes when they are concerned about their pensions.

It is shameful that the government does not even have the decency to report what it believes it would cost to keep them in the plan. That means the government is making the decision without even

bothering to have the information. We deserve to have that information here in the House. Those workers deserve to have that information. They deserve to get the pension they signed up for when they started working for AECL and the nuclear industry.

• (1900)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his intervention and his compassion on this issue.

As I have said, we are continuing to engage with unions and employees on this matter. As the member noted, the employees have been able to remain in the public service pension plan for the longest period allowable.

The Harper Conservatives decided to outsource the operations of AECL's nuclear laboratories. To do this, they established a long-term contract with CNL. A consequence of this contract is that these employees are not able to remain in the public service pension plan, as they are not employed by the federal government itself. As I said, we are committed to doing everything we can to offer pension protection for the impacted employees.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn, and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION—MAIN ESTIMATES,
2018-19

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Citizenship and Immigration in the main estimates, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

The Chair: I have a few preliminary comments, a preamble, before we begin tonight's debate.

This will be a general debate on votes under the Department of Citizen and Immigration. The first round will begin with the official opposition, which will be followed by the government, and thereafter the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual rotation in proportion, as is usually the convention.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used for both debate or for posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least 5 minutes for questions to the minister.

When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, in other words, how much time will be spent on the speech and how much time will be used for questions and answers. Members should also note that they will need the unanimous consent of the committee to split their time with another member. When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, as that time counts toward the time allocated to the party.

● (1905)

[English]

On this point, while we generally recognize that the time taken to pose the question will generally be expected to see a response in around the same time, we will not accept that scenario with a question of complexity that may only take 10 seconds to pose. We will certainly allow sufficient time to address the complexity that is applicable to the question that has been put to the minister.

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair in the usual fashion. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language, and behaviour. In summary, we follow the same debate conventions that we follow in the House.

I will remind members that they are invited to use the seats in the chamber of their choice. They are not required to be in their own seat in the House to be recognized.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The House in committee of the whole pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), consideration in committee of the whole of votes under the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2019.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, I intend to use my full time for questions.

Does the minister believe that once people have reached the United States of America, they are fleeing from persecution?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, under the safe third country agreement with the United States and the expert opinion of the UNHCR in Canada as well as our own analysis, the United States continues to meet its international obligations with respect to its domestic asylum policy.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, will the minister take the Conservative Party's advice and ask the Americans to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement and concurrently explore legislation that would deem the entire Canadian border a technical official point of entry for the purposes of enforcing that agreement?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, transforming the whole border into a port of entry would be impractical in terms of providing border and immigration services along its entire length, which is 9,000 kilometres.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: All right, Mr. Chair, perhaps we should talk about impracticalities. Given the minister's responses, will the minister take responsibility for overflowing Toronto homeless shelters with illegal border crossers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we work very closely with the provinces and municipalities through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration as well as non-governmental organizations. That is the forum in which we address emerging issues. We are aware of the challenge faced by Toronto. I have spoken numerous times with the mayor of Toronto. We are working together with Ontario and Quebec on a triage system that is meant to relieve pressure from Toronto and Montreal with respect to the temporary housing capacity for asylum seekers.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, will the minister take responsibility for the women who froze to death when illegally crossing the border into Manitoba last winter or for any illegal border crossers who might injure themselves from here on in?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, this is precisely why we have embarked, since last year, on a very aggressive and sustained outreach plan to diaspora communities in the United States and beyond to ensure people are aware of the potential dangers of crossing our borders irregularly, to ensure they understand our asylum and immigration system, and to ensure they are not victims to misinformation by other parties.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yet, Mr. Chair, the minister continues to refuse to close the loophole on the safe third country agreement, and the numbers of people illegally crossing the border into Canada continue to increase.

Therefore, will the minister take responsibility for spending billions of dollars to peddle false hope for tens of thousands of people who are illegally entering Canada from the United States, who have failed asylum claims in Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we are proud of the fact that we are making the necessary investments in more border security operations as well as making the necessary investments into the Immigration and Refugee Board to have faster processing of asylum claims so asylum claimants can have finality to their decisions. Those who are deemed to need Canada's protection get to stay and those who do not are removed from Canada.

● (1910)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, there certainly is one stream that has instant access into Canada for processing. Therefore, will the minister take responsibility for creating a two-tiered immigration system for Canada of preferential instant access for illegal border crossers and seven and a half year wait times for those who want to enter legally?

Business of Supply

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I would assume that as the immigration critic, the hon. member would know that refugee claimants are processed by the Immigration and Refugee Board, which is an entirely separate stream as compared to all the other immigration streams that are processed through our Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada department. Those two streams are separate and one does not affect the other. I would expect the hon. member to be aware of those two separate streams not affecting each other.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, about 35,000 people have had instant access to the country and hundreds of thousands of people are waiting for many years to come into the country. Therefore, we effectively now have a two-tiered access into Canada's immigration system because the minister is refusing to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement.

Given his insistence on this, will the minister take responsibility for the protests that are occurring at the U.S.–Canada border?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I am proud of the fact that our government is the government that addressed the long wait times and the backlogs that we inherited from the previous government. We have made the necessary investments to ensure that processing times come down in the spousal program, in the live-in caregiver program, and in the privately sponsored refugee program. We are proud of that fact. We are continuing that work. It has not been affected by our response to irregular migration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the Liberal government has created a backlog of 108,000 for parents and grandparents. It increased wait times for parents and grandparents to 64 months, created a total immigration backlog of 830,000, and imposed a right-of-landing fee of \$975 for new immigrants.

However, the immigration minister's legacy is to accelerate, or fast-track, one group of people into the country, which is the illegal border crossers. Will the minister take responsibility for the hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, he will personally spend to track and remove illegal border crossers who have their asylum claims rejected over the next 10 years?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I am proud of the fact that we are the party that has reduced processing times for immigrants in all areas of immigration processing. In fact, the numbers prove the case.

Refugee claimants are processed separately from all other immigration streams. We are proud of that. We are proud of the record in which we have fulfilled our campaign commitment to double the number of spots for parents and grandparents. We are working very hard to reduce processing times in the parent and grandparent stream, as well as eliminate the backlog in the parent and grandparent stream.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, it was actually under the previous Conservative government that we saw many more parents and grandparents welcomed as permanent residents to Canada. From 2006 to 2014, 171,276 parents and grandparents were admitted versus a significantly lower under the Liberal government. However, again, people waiting in the queue to be admitted as parents and grandparents will now have to wait, given that the minister has personally redirected over 80 staff to process illegal border crossers.

Given that the minister will not close the loophole in the safe third country agreement and will need to continue to redirect citizenship and immigration officials to processing illegal border crossers, and that demand will increase, will the minister take responsibility for having to load illegal border crossers onto buses or other forms of transport to take them from Quebec and Toronto to parts unknown to fill his promises to the leaders of those places?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we doubled the admissions cap for parents and grandparents from 5,000 to 10,000. In addition to that, we replaced the former unfair application intake process under the previous government, with a much fairer process of random selection. This year, our government aims to admit 20,000 parents and grandparents, with increases in 2019 and 2020. We are proud of that record. We are reuniting more families than ever.

● (1915)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, there is certainly one category of immigration that the minister has blown out of the water under his tenure, given that he will not close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, and that is illegal border crossers. We are on track for approximately 75,000 this year, which means his immigration plan will be blown out of the water.

Therefore, I am wondering, since the minister has introduced the concept of pride into his remarks, if he is proud that he has tabled one of the most inaccurate, ill-advised immigration levels plan ever seen in Canadian history.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we are proud of our immigration levels plan. It will meet Canada's labour market and skills shortages, reunite more families than ever before, and ensure that the benefits of immigration are felt throughout the country, with the provincial nominee program increase of 33%. We will see more numbers coming in through the federal skilled worker program. This is a program that allows the best and the brightest in the world to be attracted to Canada. We have seen a doubling of the number of francophone applicants, under the express entry system, who have been invited to come to Canada through permanent residency. We are proud of that record.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, that sounds really good, except for the fact that those people cannot be processed because he is reallocating staff from the streams that would process those applications to illegal border crossers.

I am wondering, given that the minister will not take responsibility and close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, if he will take responsibility for using people at the heart of the global migrant crisis for props, photo ops, and propaganda for UN speeches, as opposed to treating them like human beings.

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Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact is that we are the party and the government that has invested in more border security operations and faster processing of asylum claims. We have ensured that we have an aggressive outreach campaign, which we have sustained over the last number of months, to ensure people are not misinformed about Canada's immigration and asylum processes.

We will ensure that immigration continues to be a great tool for economic growth for Canada. We will work hard on these processing times and eliminate the backlogs that have kept families apart for years. We have a record that is second to none in the world.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, we are certainly allowing record numbers of illegal border crossers into the country this year. I am glad the minister is proud of that fact, as opposed to managing a plan for an orderly migration system.

The minister talked about facts. The fact is that people who are illegally entering the country from the United States this year will not have their asylum claims heard for many years. They will have priority access for job permits and health care. We will continue to see the social programs increase. I am sure we will have many other municipalities ask for billions and billions of dollars.

I am wondering if the minister will take responsibility for one thing, since he talked about information. Will he take responsibility for the pamphlets that are being distributed in New York state, telling migrants to exploit the loophole that he personally refuses to close?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I am proud of the fact that because of the budget 2018 investments in further border security operations, as well as in the Immigration and Refugee Board, more claims will be heard faster and in a fairer and final manner so that those who are deserving of Canada's protection get to stay, and those who are not will know that their cases are final and will be asked to leave Canada and will be removed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, those people will not have their claim heard for many years and it will be a long time before they are removed, costing us hundreds of millions of dollars to do so.

The minister talked about investments at the border. We know that the minister has spent Canadian tax dollars on a tent refugee camp at the U.S.-Canada border. Is he going to take responsibility for not closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement and the fact that there is now a refugee camp at the U.S.-Canada border?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, our government is committed to a robust, fair, and efficient asylum system. Adding more decision-makers and making the necessary efficiencies has resulted in a 40% increase in claim finalization and productivity last year by the IRB. In addition to that, the \$74 million investment we will make in the IRB as a result of budget 2018 will result in faster processing of asylum claims by the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, 40% of one per cent of 50,000 cases because the minister has refused to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement is not good enough. In fact, that is a perversion of Canada's asylum claim system. The loophole in the safe third country agreement needs to be closed.

Will the minister take responsibility for the erosion of social licence for immigration in this country because of his inability to maintain a planned, orderly migration system?

● (1920)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we are making sure that all Canadian laws are respected and that we are meeting our international obligations with respect to providing safe haven for legitimate refugees.

The fact of the matter is that once someone claims asylum in Canada, we have to accord them due process and a fair hearing at the Immigration and Refugee Board. Those who are determined to need Canada's protection get to stay, and those who do not will be removed by Canadian authorities.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, somebody who has reached the United States of America is no longer fleeing persecution and the minister's refusal to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement completely ignores that fact.

Will the minister take responsibility for allowing tens of thousands of people who could be prioritized for access to Canada but are languishing in UNHCR camps because staff have been redirected to process illegal border crossers? Will he take responsibility for that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that the hon. member knows that under her government and her party, refugees languished for years in refugee camps. We are the party that addressed this issue. We have brought down processing times for privately sponsored refugees by 25 months. We have made the necessary investments to almost quadruple the number of privately sponsored refugees. We have doubled the number of resettled refugees. We are making the necessary investments to increase the money available for resettlement and integration programs. That is a record the Conservatives simply cannot match.

The Chair: We are now going to resume debate with the hon. Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. I will point out, though, that in this one and only speaking slot that we have this evening, the minister has 15 minutes, but can only speak for 10 minutes and then would normally have to pose questions. However, he cannot pose questions to himself, so we will invite other members of his party to pose questions in that remaining five minutes.

As I said, this will be the only variation this evening. On other occasions when it is a government member speaking, at the end of their speaking time they will pose questions to the minister or his parliamentary secretary.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is an honour to be here with my colleagues and to address the committee of the whole with respect to the votes under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in the main estimates. I am pleased that my department was chosen to participate in this year's meeting of the committee of the whole, giving me the opportunity to highlight all that we have accomplished, to outline our current and future priorities, and to address some of the important questions raised by my colleagues.

I am pleased with the changes made by the government to ensure that our immigration system is functioning well and in the interest of Canada. To that end, we have made considerable progress in improving our economic immigration programs, which attract talented newcomers, people who will boost our economy, stimulate innovation, increase market opportunities, and create jobs for Canada's middle class.

[English]

At the same time, we have made the immigration system more compassionate and client centric. We are reuniting families more quickly, offering protection to the world's most vulnerable people, and reducing application backlogs and processing times across the board.

Allow me to spend a few moments addressing the subject of this evening's debate, my department's main estimates. In recognition of the important role that immigration plays in shaping our economy and contributing to our country's prosperity, a total of \$236.6 million will go to support the immigration levels plan. This multi-year plan will gradually increase our immigration levels, beginning this year, with admissions of 310,000 permanent residents, moving to 330,000 permanent resident admissions in 2019, and 340,000 permanent admissions in 2020.

As numerous economists have pointed out, increased immigration will allow us to expand our workforce, address our skills shortages, grow our economy, support our health care and pension programs, and allow other social programs to thrive in the decades to come.

Another significant part of our estimates is a \$89.8 million increase in funding for incremental costs to the interim federal health program. I am very proud that our government fulfilled our commitment to Canadians to fully restore this program, as it provides essential services to the most vulnerable people in our society. For example, the program is being used to support newly arrived Yazidi and other survivors of Daesh atrocities. These women and girls, as well as their families, have lived through unimaginable trauma and horrific conditions. It is our responsibility not only to provide them with a new home but also to make sure they have the necessary wraparound supports and are supported every step of the way toward rebuilding their lives in Canada.

While we continue to pursue our objectives of growing Canada's economy through immigration, reuniting families, and fulfilling our humanitarian obligations, we must also respond quickly and efficiently to emerging issues. Irregular migration is increasing globally, and Canada is not immune to this. In my international travel and meetings with counterparts from around the world, it has been clear that many countries, including Canada, are experiencing

significant challenges associated with the fact of irregular migration, the result of 62 million persons currently displaced by wars, persecution, and natural disasters.

Having said that, our government takes this issue extremely seriously, and our primary responsibility has always been and remains the safety and security of Canadians.

• (1925)

[Translation]

Anyone who crosses the border between official ports of entry is arrested and detained until security agencies can verify their identity and conduct a thorough background check.

[English]

Make no mistake, law enforcement officers do not release anyone into our community unless they have cleared background checks, and if someone is found to pose a risk, they remain in detention and are deported without being able to make a refugee claim.

In order to ensure the safety and security of Canadians, it is imperative that we make the necessary investments in our front-line agencies. That is why budget 2018 invests \$173.2 million to support security operations at the Canada-U.S. border, including \$74 million for the Immigration and Refugee Board to process asylum claimants faster.

Entering into Canada irregularly is not a free ticket, and it does not give anyone an advantage. To ensure that potential migrants are aware of Canada's laws and are not driven by misinformation, we have implemented an extensive and aggressive outreach strategy targeting key communities in the U.S. and beyond, as well as in Canada. In fact, over the last few months, we have engaged almost 600 community leaders, diplomatic representatives, non-profit organizations, and government officials in the U.S. and beyond.

I know there have been questions about the safe third country agreement under which Canada and the United States co-operate in the orderly handling of asylum claims across our joint border. We have raised the subject of modernizing the agreement with the United States, and they are aware of our concerns. This has not matured into formal negotiations, but we continue to engage with the U.S. closely.

We are also working with the United States to prevent the abuse of U.S. visas, and these efforts have already shown results. Canadian officials, for example, have been stationed on the ground in Nigeria. Just last week I travelled to Nigeria to meet with senior government representatives, community leaders, and civil society to enlist their co-operation on this issue.

At the same time, we will continue to respect Canada's international obligations to provide safety and security and sanctuary to those who are legitimately fleeing persecution, and who also have a right to claim asylum.

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To support this, we are making the necessary investments and adding staff to ensure that asylum claims are decided in a timely manner, and that unsuccessful claimants are promptly removed from Canada. We are working closely and collaboratively with provincial partners, particularly Quebec, Ontario, and Manitoba, to resolve emerging pressure points and to address issues such as housing and contingency planning.

While we continue to address the issue of irregular migration, we have not slowed our progress in advancing all of our other priorities. We have made changes, for example, to the express entry system to award extra points to applicants who demonstrate strong French language skills, as well as those who have family in Canada. These changes are proving successful and are having the desired effects. More French-speaking immigrants are going to francophone minority communities.

Moreover, the global skills strategy is bringing more talented people to Canada to create jobs in Canada. We have made the start-up visa program permanent. We have created the Atlantic immigration pilot program, the first-ever employer-led program, to attract more skilled immigrants and grow the Atlantic region's economy.

Over the past year, we have made the spousal sponsorship process faster and easier. We have doubled the number of parent and grandparent applications. We have reduced the backlog in the live-in caregiver program. We have removed unnecessary barriers to citizenship for newcomers. We have eliminated the conditional permanent residents measure that put vulnerable women at risk. We have raised the age limit for dependent children to keep more families together. We are re-establishing Canada as a global leader on immigration.

• (1930)

[Translation]

People who come to Canada are much more than newcomers to this country. They are nation-builders. That fundamental belief informs all of our actions.

I am proud of what we have accomplished so far. The government will continue to work very hard for Canadians.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for that excellent speech, for providing clarification on a number of issues, and for mentioning the department's and our government's accomplishments on the immigration front. The minister left out one accomplishment, however. I would like to highlight his much-improved French. I am very proud of him for that. I have practised with him on numerous occasions, and I congratulate him on working so hard to learn French.

In his speech, the minister spoke of the challenges we have had to address since last summer. Of course, I am referring to the asylum seekers, the irregular migrants who show up at our border, especially in Quebec. As the minister also noted, the trend is growing. There have always been irregular border crossings, but more and more people are now opting for that approach. This situation is new, and we are managing it as diligently as possible. Last summer, many

Haitians crossed the border. This year, we are seeing more members of the Nigerian community crossing the border.

There is a lot of misinformation out there. We have a duty to ensure that people coming to Canada, from the United States or elsewhere, are familiar with our laws and know that they do not have a free ticket to Canada.

Could the minister give us a little more information on what the government, the department, and our partners are doing to ensure that the people who irregularly cross the border get the correct information and know our laws before coming to Canada, and that they know that there is no free ticket to Canada?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for his really important question.

We have been very aggressive in terms of outreach and engaging with the diaspora communities as well as with service-provider organizations in the United States and beyond. This is important, because, as we discovered last year, there is a lot of misinformation being given to diaspora communities in terms of the scope and nature of Canada's immigration system, and more specifically, its asylum system.

We made sure, through town halls, engagement with community media, and engagement with service-provider organizations, as well as government officials, that people were aware. We were able to dispute misinformation at its source through the use of social media, strategically placed advertisements, our 12 consulates, and our embassy in Washington. We have been very successful in reaching those communities and answering questions.

This is the right thing to do, not only as a deterrent message but also as a humanitarian message, because we do not want people to uproot themselves and their families based on misinformation. We want people to know exactly what they are embarking on when they try to make their journey to Canada.

If people want to come and study or work in Canada, there are regular immigration streams to enable them to do so. The asylum system we have is only meant to be accessed by those who have legitimate grounds for refugee protection. That is why the outreach program is extremely important to us.

• (1935)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his clarifications.

In his speech, the minister said several times that family reunification was very important and that it was a big immigration priority for our government. This seems logical to me, since the families that come to Canada are key to growing our economy and filling our country's labour needs.

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It is not necessarily easy to move to Canada, and it is important to reunite families. When someone wants to bring their family to Canada, it is very important. I think we have taken concrete measures in this direction. Canadians who have a spouse or partner abroad should not have to wait many years before reuniting with their families. This uncertainty creates a great deal of anguish. In his speech, the minister mentioned a number of solutions and methods that we have used over the past two years, since we came to power.

Could the minister tell me what the government is doing to support families and what we will be doing in the future, in light of the new plans to reunite as many families as possible, as quickly as possible?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for that really important question. Reuniting families has always been a priority in our immigration system, and one of the first things we tackled was to reduce the processing time for spousal sponsorship applications and to eliminate the backlog in that immigration stream.

When we took office, spousal sponsorships took 26 months or more. Sometimes it would take many years, depending on the country the spouse and the children were being sponsored from. We made it a point to dedicate resources and created a tiger team to attack that backlog and make it a priority to reduce that processing time. I am proud of the fact that we have eliminated the backlog in the spousal sponsorship program and have brought down the processing time from 26 months to 12 months for the vast majority of cases.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Chair, to build on the issue of the safe third country agreement, the minister said that they are looking at modernizing the agreement, although official discussions have not yet taken place. His officials at committee actually confirmed that suspending the safe third country agreement is off the table. Will he confirm that applying the safe third country agreement to the entire border of Canada is also off the table?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the safe third country agreement is an agreement based on a principle, supported by the UN Refugee Agency, that asylum seekers should claim asylum in the first safe country they land in. This is a principle the UNHCR supports. It is a principle that we believe in, and that is the principle that underlies the agreement.

The agreement, I must say, is really good for Canada as well as for the United States.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the minister did not answer my question. My question was this. Will he also confirm that at unofficial discussions with his U.S. counterpart, applying the safe third country agreement to the entire border of Canada is off the table?

● (1940)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, transforming the whole border into a port of entry would be impractical in terms of providing border and immigration services along its entire length of 9,000 kilometres.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, will he confirm, yes or no, that it is off the table?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, Canada continues to monitor developments in the United States, and not only Canada but also the UNHCR has determined that the United States' domestic asylum policy remains in place and is a safe country for asylum claimants to seek protection.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the minister refuses to answer the question. Does he not realize that when he does that, he is only fuelling the fire the Conservatives are trying to spread, and that is that somehow, applying this safe third country agreement to the entire border is a feasible idea? Will he simply just say that it is off the table?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that the UNHCR is the UN refugee agency that has the expert knowledge for monitoring the domestic asylum systems of both Canada and the United States. The UNHCR, as well as our own analysis, continues to indicate that the domestic asylum policy of the United States continues to offer opportunities for asylum seekers to claim asylum and continues to offer due process, fair hearings, and appeal processes for asylum seekers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I ask that we monitor the responses to be equivalent to the time of the question asked. The minister refuses to answer the question. He needs to take responsibility, then, for the fallout that will happen from the misinformation being spread by the Conservatives.

I am going to move on. A number of community groups and NGOs are challenging the government. In fact, they are taking the government to court on the constitutionality of the safe third country agreement. What resources are being used to fight this court case?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the safe third country agreement is based on the principle that is supported by the UN Refugee Agency. The UN Refugee Agency supports the principle that asylum seekers should seek asylum in the first safe country they land in. They also conduct analyses on both Canada's and the United States' domestic asylum policy. We do the same thing. Both those analyses indicate that the U.S. domestic asylum system will accord due process to asylum seekers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, my question for the minister is, what resources are being used to fight this court case?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the government will defend its position in court cases on all issues brought before the Federal Court, and this is no exception.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, this is a budget debate. My question is, what resources are being used?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the government is in the early stages of engaging in litigation. The government will, of course, vigorously defend its position in these cases.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, does the minister not know what the cost and the budget for it is?

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Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the litigation is in its early stages. The government will defend its position. No figures are available at this time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the government does not know and the minister does not know.

What staff resources have been assigned to it from IRCC?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, we are engaged in the early stages of litigation on this issue. The government will, of course, vigorously defend its position. No figures are available at this time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, so the minister does not know how much it costs, and he does not know which staff have been assigned to it. Does he know anything?

Let me just ask this, then. On the asylum seekers issue, we have seen the influx in Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia. How much money has been provided to Quebec for measures regarding the asylum seekers crossing irregularly into that province?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as the hon. member would know, asylum seekers access provincial social services, which are funded through the Canada social transfer. Those are the transfer payments that deal with those costs. The federal government provided \$13.7 billion to provinces and territories in 2017-18 under the Canada social transfer for post-secondary education, social assistance, social services, and early childhood programming.

• (1945)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, after the most recent negotiations with Quebec, is the minister saying that no additional dollars are being provided to Quebec?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we engaged with Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and NGOs through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration. Quebec has put forward a figure for our government's consideration. We asked for a detailed breakdown of those numbers, and our officials are actually discussing those numbers as we speak.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, what is that figure?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the Government of Quebec has proposed to us that it has incurred costs in the amount of \$146 million, and it has asked the federal government to reimburse some, if not all, of that figure. We have asked for a breakdown of those costs to ensure that we know the different lines of costs associated with that number.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, will the minister table the documents on the breakdown once he receives them?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we are engaged with Quebec in discussions on the figure Quebec has provided to us. We have asked Quebec to work with us to provide us with a breakdown of that number, and those discussions are ongoing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I see the tactic. The minister refuses to answer any questions. My question was whether he will table the figures, and he will not answer that question.

How much has been provided to Manitoba, given the influx they first experienced?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I am proud of the fact that we have a good working relationship with the Province of Manitoba. A few weeks ago, I met with the premier of Manitoba, Premier Pallister. He is on record as applauding our government's response to Manitoba and our working relationship. Of course, we continue to work with Manitoba to address any pressure points that are emerging out of this issue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, has the ministry or the government provided any additional dollars to Manitoba to deal with the first influx?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as I said, the Canada social transfer is responsible for assisting provinces with social service costs being provided to all residents of those provinces, including asylum seekers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, so the answer is no.

What triggers federal support for provinces with asylum seekers when there is a large influx?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the hon. member knows, or should know, that asylum seekers access provincial social services. The federal government is responsible for providing settlement services to permanent residents, overseas resettled refugees, and family class and economic immigrants, while asylum seekers come under the responsibility of provincial governments. However, we do assist provinces with social service costs through the Canada social transfer.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, these are extraordinary times. That is why Quebec is coming to the federal government asking for additional dollars above and beyond the transfer payments. That is why the government is engaging in negotiations with them. My question was fairly straight up about whether or not the government provided any money to Manitoba, but the minister will not answer that question. There is a formula that triggers that support, but the minister will not provide that information either. So much for openness and transparency.

In light of the issue around the fearmongering that is going on with the Conservatives, can the minister confirm that there is no queue-jumping going on with asylum seekers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for this question. That is a really important point. There is absolutely no queue-jumping when it comes to processing of asylum claims, and she is absolutely right that the Conservatives are muddying the waters. They are creating fear by pitting one group of people who are accessing our immigration system against another. That is the politics of fear and division that we have abandoned and that Canadians resolutely rejected in 2015. I congratulate the hon. member for raising that point.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I know that the minister has now changed his word. He is no longer using the word "illegal" to describe asylum seekers. He is now using the word "irregular", which I acknowledge as well. Is it not the case that inland asylum seekers are under the protected persons stream and that their applications do not impact other immigration streams?

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•(1950)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, yes, the hon. member is correct. We have allocations in our multi-year levels plan for protected persons, and that is the stream that processes successful refugee claims from people who have been found to have genuine refugee cases. Those who are not found to have genuine refugee cases are then removed from Canada and therefore do not affect the permanent residence numbers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, could the minister confirm if any levels in these other streams have been impacted or changed as the result of asylum seekers? The Conservatives would like us to think that somehow immigration streams are being impacted. Just a yes-or-no answer will do.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I join the hon. member in agreeing with her on the fact that the Conservatives are deliberately misleading Canadians on this so-called queue-jumping. That is not happening. There is no queue-jumping.

Refugee claimants are processed by the independent quasi-judicial Immigration and Refugee Board. All other immigrants, whether they are family class, overseas resettled refugees, or economic immigrants, are processed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, could the minister confirm if any funding for the processing of other immigration streams has been diverted to process inland asylum claims?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have been able to respond to the unusual increase in asylum claims last year by being nimble, by reallocating resources and staff to make sure that we address pressure points. We were successful in doing that. I congratulate the IRCC, CBSA, RCMP, and all the other agencies that were able to handle professionally the extraordinary situation that we faced last year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, with respect to the realignment, where did the staff come from and what are the implications of this realignment?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as announced in budget 2018, we are investing \$173.2 million in further border security operations as well as faster processing of asylum claims by putting \$74 million of that into the IRB for faster processing of refugee claims.

The fact of the matter is that the department spent in 2017-18 a total of \$23.9 million on irregular migration.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, the realignment that the minister speaks of is an additional funding of \$76 million. Is that correct?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, what I said was that as part of budget 2018, we are allocating \$173.2 million on the issue of irregular migration and that \$74 million of that \$173.2 million will go to the Immigration and Refugee Board so that refugee claims can be processed faster. Those who are found to have a legitimate claim for refugee status get to stay; those who do not have a legitimate claim for protection get to be removed from Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, clearly I am not going to get a clear answer on that. Okay.

The minister and the government committed to expediting the work permit approvals for asylum claimants entering into Canada via

Roxham Road. Will the government adopt this as a standard for processing times for all work permits?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have reduced the processing time for work permits from three months to three weeks and we have issued over 13,000 work permits to asylum seekers in Quebec alone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is my pleasure to lend my voice to this important discussion on the Department of Citizenship and Immigration's main estimates for 2018-19. I am especially pleased to be doing so on this side of the House, since I normally sit on the other side.

As we know, generations of newcomers have come from other places in the world and helped to shape and strengthen our prosperity and our nation's social and cultural fabric. Immigrants support the growth of Canada's labour force, contributing new skills. They bring to Canada an entrepreneurial spirit, creating jobs and boosting innovation through new perspectives and diverse insights. They also open new trade markets and investment networks to Canadians.

It goes without saying that immigration benefits our economic and demographic growth, innovation, prosperity, and our efforts at nation building. Throughout our history, immigrants have made significant contributions to our economy, creating new businesses and jobs and helping to enhance Canada's competitiveness globally. With their strong work ethic and drive to succeed, immigrants have started many of our country's successful small and medium-sized businesses. Immigrants also represent the founders of some of Canada's most successful enterprises. In fact, recent immigrants now surpass Canadians in self-employment and private business ownership.

Also, businesses owned by recent immigrants are more likely to sell their products to other countries, helping Canada to open up markets beyond the United States. While many Canadians often think about immigration as a way to fill jobs that already exist, there is no doubt that some of our most creative and successful innovators and entrepreneurs are immigrants. Quite simply, our economy needs immigrants.

•(1955)

[*English*]

According to the Conference Board of Canada, without immigration, Canada's potential economic growth would slow from 1.9% annually to an average of 1.3% annually.

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In their report, “Canada 2040: No Immigration Versus More Immigration”, the Conference Board of Canada shows that Canada's population would age much more rapidly without immigration. This would mean that our labour force would be drastically reduced, making it even more difficult for us to pay for social services such as health care.

Canada would need to increase taxes to compensate for fewer workers, meaning many businesses would likely forgo operations in Canada. This would ultimately result in lower levels of business investment.

[*Translation*]

In recognition of the important role that immigration plays in shaping our economy and contributing to our country's future prosperity, budget 2018 will provide ongoing funding to support our government's increased immigration levels.

As members know, under this plan we will increase our immigration levels to nearly 1% of the population. This increase is necessary in order to sustain a healthy level of economic growth across the country. Beginning with an increase of 310,000 permanent residents per year in 2018, annual admissions will reach 340,000 in 2020.

Increased immigration will not only ensure that we are able to continue increasing the size of our labour force and grow our economy. It will also help to support our health care system, public pensions, and other social programs in the decades to come. That is why 60% of the growth in immigration levels over the next three years will come through our economic programs.

[*English*]

Prominent among these, of course, is our provincial nominee program, which helps meet regional labour needs and distributes the benefits of immigration across the country. Immigration plays a key role in driving Canada's economic success and will continue to fuel our economic growth for many years to come. That is why the government is focused on tailoring our immigration programs to better address our labour market skills shortages and to help drive our economy forward. We are introducing new programs, testing new ideas, and instituting faster processing that will help Canada to attract the talent we need to ensure our economic prosperity.

Another element is the start-up visa program. Under Canada's start-up visa program, we are strengthening the Canadian economy through innovation. The program makes it easier for foreign entrepreneurs actively pursuing new business ventures in Canada to become permanent residents. The start-up visa program was initially launched as a pilot project. When it first started, the start-up visa was a small, low-volume program, but in recent years it has seen increased interest from global entrepreneurs eager to come to Canada and grow their businesses. Unlike similar programs in other countries, by granting permanent residence status up front, the start-up visa allows immigrant entrepreneurs to take bigger risks to build successful companies right here in Canada.

Eligible entrepreneurs with viable business proposals can become Canadian permanent residents once they have secured the support of a Canadian venture capital fund, angel investor group, or business

incubator, and once their immigration application has been approved.

After much success, I am pleased that this program has become a permanent feature of our immigration system, as announced in budget 2018. Under the start-up visa program, Canada will be able to continue attracting more talented innovators who have the ability to drive economic growth and help create more jobs for Canadians.

● (2000)

[*Translation*]

The global skills strategy is also designed to help attract the best minds from other countries.

As members know, the global skills strategy is meant to help employers in Canada bring in the high-skilled talent that they need, when they need it.

We know that Canada is an attractive place for companies to set up or scale up operations, but ensuring they can access the talented workers they need quickly can be a concern.

By facilitating the faster entry of top talent with unique skill sets and global experience, we will help innovative companies in Canada grow, flourish, and create more jobs for Canadians.

To that end, the global skills strategy has set an ambitious two-week standard for processing visas and work permits for low-risk, high-skill talent for companies doing business in Canada.

[*English*]

In a nutshell, the global skills strategy can help companies to bring in senior management, trainers from other locations, and the highly skilled talent they will need to get off the ground in Canada or expand their operations and grow their companies. In the longer term, many highly skilled workers who come to Canada temporarily as a result of the global skills strategy may also seek to immigrate to Canada on a permanent basis.

Something that is close to my heart is a third project, the Atlantic immigration pilot. While our entire country is faced with looming demographic challenges, we know that these challenges have already presented themselves and are more pronounced in the Atlantic Canada region. Immigration is vital to sustaining Atlantic Canada's workforce and economy, and its future success will largely depend on our ability to attract and retain more newcomers to our region.

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As part of our government's Atlantic growth strategy, the Atlantic immigration pilot program has tremendous potential to not only help employers meet their labour needs but to also fuel economic growth in all of Atlantic Canada. This is an employer-driven program, which means that businesses can find skilled immigrants with the specific skills they need. It also allows those employers to bring the families of the workers.

Another key element of the Atlantic immigration pilot is the targeting of international students as excellent candidates to become skilled permanent immigrants. Under the AIP, employers in the Atlantic provinces can hire international students and endorse them for permanent residence. The Atlantic immigration pilot is also a great example of how we are working with the broader community, employers in particular, to ensure newcomers stay in Atlantic Canada once they are settled.

An innovative part of this program is that with the help of settlement service providers, all immigrants who arrive under the Atlantic immigration pilot will have a settlement plan in place. In order to ensure that newcomers can integrate and succeed, we absolutely must ensure that they feel supported in their new communities so that they will stay in Atlantic Canada and help it grow.

As Canadians, we believe that welcoming immigrants to Canada and helping them settle and integrate into our society provides our country with great opportunities and a competitive advantage.

[Translation]

In fact, we do not simply believe these things, we have witnessed the benefits of welcoming newcomers over and over again throughout Canadian history.

Through our government's multi-year immigration levels plan and our innovative economic immigration programs, I think we are well placed to ensure that Canada can attract high-skilled workers who can support our economic growth for many years to come.

Mr. Chair, I would like to ask a few questions. Can I do that now?

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Questions and comments, the hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Chair, we know there are well-designed economic immigration programs in place, and from time to time we hear success stories. It could be an enterprising immigrant entrepreneur or a successful start-up. How important are economic immigration programs to the future of our country?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague from St. John's East for his question and the excellent work he does at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The arrival of newcomers to Canada is very important, especially when it comes to economic immigration, since we have to meet our labour needs. Our goal is to bring skilled workers into Canada as quickly as possibly so that they may contribute to the economy as quickly as possible.

It has been proven that businesses founded by immigrants have a higher success rate and they contribute to creating countless jobs and generating trade and investment. That is why our government created the start-up visa program, which helps these economic immigrants to create wealth in Canada, support our economy, and meet our need for skilled labour. That is why this program is one of our priorities, just like other sectors of economic immigration.

● (2005)

[English]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Chair, I had mentioned the Atlantic immigration pilot in my remarks. It is really popular with businesses in my riding. They are reaching out to me all the time. They want to know how they can become designated as employers in their areas and attract the very specialized talent that companies like Kraken Robotics, Bluedrop, or a number of other companies need for their very particular and high-tech workforce. Verafin is another.

Now that this program has been under operation for one year, could the parliamentary secretary give us an update on how the Atlantic immigration pilot is driving immigration to our region?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, as is the case for my colleague, this program is close to my heart because I also represent the Atlantic region. This program is excellent for Atlantic Canada and will make it possible for us to welcome to Canada 2,000 immigrants a year for the next three years.

The Atlantic provinces have an aging population and we need the Atlantic immigration pilot initiative to address these challenges. This program focuses on businesses in key sectors of our economy that need workers, and it has been very successful. More than 1,000 employers are participating at present and there are more than 1,500 candidates.

Once again, this is a program that specifically targets Atlantic Canada. Atlantic businesses and provincial governments are very grateful for it. I am certain that this program will be very successful. In the past year alone, we have seen more employers and candidates participating in this program.

[English]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Chair, as a final follow-up question to the areas of interest and the different programs I highlighted in my remarks, I am hoping the parliamentary secretary can provide us some of the results so far with respect to the global skills strategy. How many individuals have come to Canada under the program since it was launched?

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[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, the strategy is working well.

As of December 31, 2017, more than 4,400 applications had been approved under the global skills strategy, which was launched in June. Applications are processed in two weeks for highly skilled employees. Clearly, this program is working very well and we are proud of it.

[English]

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will spend my complete 15 minutes asking questions.

Why is the minister being so unfair? He is sending his staff to process illegal border crossers instead of bringing the children of live-in caregivers to come to Canada, over 80 of his staff.

Live-in caregivers care for so many of our children, yet their own children have to wait to come to Canada, while the minister sends over 80 of his staff away to process work permits for illegal border crossers.

Why is he being so unfair?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact is that we have reduced the backlog by 63% in the live-in caregiver program and we have significantly cut processing times for caregivers, from five to seven years under the Conservatives down to 12 months under this government.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, why did the minister unfairly reallocate staff from processing family reunification cases to deal with the illegal border crossers? It is so sad that these grandmothers and grandfathers will not be able to come to care for their families.

● (2010)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, under the Conservatives, spousal sponsorships used to take 26 months or more, depending on the country of origin the spouse was coming from. We have made that a priority. We have put extra resources and staff to process spousal sponsorships. We have cut the processing time from 26 months down to 12 months. We have eliminated the backlog in the spousal sponsorship program.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, why did the minister unfairly send staff to process illegal border crossers instead of helping process all the people who were trying to come to Canada as economic migrants, who want to start businesses in Canada? He sent over 80 staff to Montreal to process illegal border crossers while these business owners waited. Why?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have dramatically improved the processing times for all streams of immigration, whether it is spousal sponsorship or live-in caregiver programs. We have a really good track record when it comes to economic immigration. Our federal skilled worker program is working really well to attract the best and the brightest from around the world. We will see an increase by 33% in the provincial nominee program.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, veterans who fought for Canada are homeless. Right now there are only 20 open spots in Toronto homeless shelters because that unfair minister is helping people illegally cross the border from the United States into Canada.

Why has he filled Toronto homeless shelters with illegal border crossers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the hon. member knows that asylum claimants are processed in a separate stream of immigration by the Immigration and Refugee Board. All the other streams of immigrants are processed by IRCC. The two are separate and do not affect each other.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, the problem is that the minister sent 80 staffers to do the processing. It takes seven and a half years to come to Canada as a privately sponsored refugee from Djibouti. This is crazy. This is because the minister is sending his staff to process refugees from the United States of America. This is also crazy. We go to the United States to vacation. It is safe there.

Why is the minister making the world's most vulnerable wait for seven years? Why is he being so unfair?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is actually speaking about the record of her party when it was in office. It was the Harper Conservatives who had really bad wait times for refugees. It was the Harper Conservatives who had really bad wait times on allocations for privately sponsored refugees. It was the Harper Conservatives who cut refugee health care. It was the Harper Conservatives who really did not put a priority on immigration processing.

I am really amazed at this newfound passion for refugee processing. This is quite the spectacle.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I want to remind hon. members that this is a team sport, but the team gets together in the lobby or quietly, not during the discussion.

Hon. Alice Wong: Imagine, Mr. Chair, there are zero days for illegal border crossers, while so many Iranians have been waiting for many years to get their applications processed. Why is the minister being so unfair and sending his staff to personally process illegal border crossers while Iranians have to wait a very long time? Does he not know that Iran is not safe? Does he think that the United States is the same as Iran?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, it is the record that our government has with respect to refugee processing. Not only that, we have doubled the number of resettled refugees under our plan. We have more than quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees compared to the party opposite. Therefore, we have a good track record, not only in increasing the number of refugees that we resettle into Canada, but also in the processing time.

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The fact is that the Harper Conservatives had unlimited intake but very limited output, which resulted in huge backlogs that we inherited. We are working very hard to eliminate that. We have already reduced the processing time of privately sponsored refugees by 25 months.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, it is one million times faster for the illegal border crossers.

I have a constituent who is sponsoring her spouse to come to Canada. Guess what. She has to wait, and wait a long time. She is watching all the people illegally crossing the border from the United States, and she says that it is not fair.

Why is the minister sending staff to process illegal border crossers, while my constituent's spouse has to wait? Why is he being so unfair?

● (2015)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I wish the member opposite and her party brought the same passion to immigration processing when they were in power. Spouses waited longer under their watch. Spouses and children waited longer. Refugees waited longer. Live-in caregivers waited five to seven years under the Conservatives' watch.

We have improved processing times for privately sponsored refugees by 25 months, spouses by 14 months, live-in caregivers from five to seven years under the Conservatives' watch to 12 months under our watch.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, the minister himself is only passionate about illegal border crossers. I have constituents from India who are trying to get their auntie to come to Canada for a visit. However, the unfair minister is sending his staff to process illegal border crossers instead of their aunt. Why is this minister so unfair?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, repeating something that is an underlying inaccuracy does not make it real.

The fact is that the processing of asylum claimants is done separately from all the other immigration streams. We are proud of the work that we have done to reduce the processing times that were left to us by the Harper Conservatives. We understand the importance of reuniting families, which is why we have brought down the processing times for spouses and live-in caregivers.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, the fact is that the minister moved the other resources into just processing the illegal border crossers. There are so many people who want to come to Canada to start businesses, but the unfair minister is sending his staff to process people who are illegally crossing the border from the United States of America.

The United States of America is a place where people go to be safe. What is he thinking? Why is he making people who want to start businesses in Canada wait while he processes illegal border crossers? Why is he so unfair?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I will repeat this for the nth time. Refugee claimants are processed separately from all the other streams of immigration. The fact is that one does not affect the other. I hope the hon. member understands that.

The fact is that we are the government that has reduced processing times. We are the government that continues to reunite families. We

are the government that has eliminated backlogs left to us by the Harper Conservatives.

We understand that investment follows talent. We have redoubled the number of resettled refugees from overseas. We have quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, the illegal border crossers are using our regular resources. The 80 people all came from other resources. I do not understand. I do not understand why the minister is prioritizing illegal people coming into Canada from the United States. This is one of the most free countries in the world.

Now, talking about money, he is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to let illegal border crossers get work permits while people in my riding are unemployed.

He is doing a really bad job. Why is he being so unfair?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, if spending more money on border security operations and faster processing of refugee claims is doing a bad job, then I am guilty as charged.

The fact is that we are making the necessary investments, after the horrendous cuts made by the Harper Conservatives, in border security operations and in faster processing of refugee claims. We are reuniting more families than ever. We are providing refuge to those who are persecuted around the world. We are bringing talent to Canada.

We understand, unlike the Harper Conservatives, that investment follows talent, to grow our economy and create jobs for Canadians. That is why we are seeing a growth in the express entry system. That is why we are seeing a 33% growth in the provincial nominee program, which spreads the benefits of immigration all across the country.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, he is spending more money, but doing much worse. That is a job done badly. There are so many Ukrainians being persecuted. It is so bad for them, they need to come to Canada, too.

Why is the unfair minister sending his staff and all other resources to process illegal border crossers from the safe United States instead of helping persecuted Ukrainians?

● (2020)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that we have doubled the number of resettled refugees compared to the Harper Conservatives. We have quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees compared to the Conservatives' numbers. We have reduced the processing time of privately sponsored refugees by 25 months. We are reuniting more families than ever under our spousal sponsorship program. We have doubled the number of spaces available for parents and grandparents because we value family reunification.

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Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, there are so many international students from China who want to come to Canada for their education, but the unfair minister is sending his staff to process illegal border crossers from the United States. This is crazy.

Toronto mayor John Tory says illegal border crossers are filling Toronto homeless shelters. Why is the unfair minister prioritizing illegal border crossers over students and the homeless?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have welcomed more international students than ever before. Every year, we see growth in the number of international students coming to Canada. We have opened more pathways for international students to become permanent residents and are giving international students more points under the express entry system because we value their talents, skills, and keenness to become future Canadian citizens. We are the first government in Canadian history that is not only telling international students to come to study in Canada, but also telling as many as possible to stay.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, so many people who have legally come to Canada through the temporary foreign worker program are waiting such a long time to become permanent residents. Then they see the unfair minister sending staff to give work permits and benefits to illegal border crossers. This unfair minister is not being fair to the people who run our farms. Why is the unfair minister being so unfair?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I want to remind hon. members that this is between the hon. minister and the hon. member for Richmond Centre. There are a couple of people getting involved. The only people who are to give advice are the people in front of the minister. If members want to go outside to talk, that is fine.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we are proud of the fact that we have an immigration system that welcomes the best and the brightest from around the world. That is why we prioritize client service and faster processing of applications. We have made it a priority to eliminate backlogs. We are proud of having the best record in terms of family reunification. We have doubled the number of resettled refugees and provided a home for the most vulnerable people in the world, including Yazidi women and girls and other survivors of Daesh, something that the party opposite could not do in 10 years in power.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, the system should be planned and orderly. This unfair minister has broken the system. Is he proud of allowing illegal immigrants to cross the border easily and illegal immigrants to wait?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that it is the long processing times and huge backlogs that frustrate potential immigrants, which is precisely what we inherited from the Harper Conservatives. The fact of the matter is that we have made faster processing of immigration cases our priority and have delivered with respect to the spousal program. I will give an example. The live-in caregiver program went from five to seven years to 12 months under our government.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am glad to add my voice to the ongoing debate in this House on Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's main estimates

for 2018-19. I am going to deliver a 10-minute speech and then ask a few questions.

One of the most important and notable responsibilities of this department, particularly over the past few years, lies in supporting Canada's strong and long-standing humanitarian tradition of resettling vulnerable people from around the world who have been persecuted and displaced, and who seek our country's protection. Indeed, maintaining that humanitarian tradition and ensuring that Canada continues to provide protection to those in need around the world is one of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's central mandates.

This mandate is particularly prominent at a time when record numbers of people around the world are being displaced, be they refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced persons. In fact, there are more than 62 million displaced people in the world right now. Although the ultimate objective of these displaced people may be to return home in peace and safety, unfortunately, that is all too frequently not an option. The objectives of Canada's resettlement program are to save lives, to offer protection to the displaced and persecuted, to meet our country's international legal obligations with respect to refugees, and to respond to international crises by providing assistance to those in need.

Canada's commitment to providing protection to the world's most vulnerable people is fundamental to our country's identity, as well as our international reputation. In that spirit, Canada's private sponsorship of refugees program was recently identified as a model for other countries, and a potential key element in an international effort to address migration crises and situations of conflict around the world.

Through this program, refugees are sponsored privately by civil society groups and groups of ordinary Canadians. These refugees are supported in addition to those supported by the government. Since it was established in the late 1970s during the crisis faced by the Vietnamese boat people, the program has allowed Canada to offer protection to many more people than we could have otherwise helped. In fact, more than a third of the 51,000 Syrian refugees resettled to Canada since November 2015 were privately sponsored, and last year, more than two-thirds of refugees of all nationalities resettled in Canada were privately sponsored.

I was pleased to play a small part in sponsoring a family through Terra Firma Halton, and to get to know Ranim, Sidra and Tarek, welcoming them to their new home in Oakville and watching them grow and succeed in their adopted country.

I was encouraged to see that the government, in collaboration with several partners, launched a new initiative aimed at helping interested countries study and adopt Canada's private sponsorship model. The Canadian model of resettlement works, at least in part because it mobilizes citizens in direct support of refugees, and those who sponsor and welcome refugees become advocates for diversity and understanding. These sponsors are also invaluable resources for ensuring that refugees integrate successfully to Canadian society.

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Canada's humanitarian commitment to protecting vulnerable people, including women and girls, sometimes extends beyond refugees and asylum seekers. A significant example of this lies in our country's recent attempts to help Yazidis, one of Iraq's oldest minorities, who are mostly concentrated in northern Iraq. Almost two years ago, a United Nations commission report concluded that abuses of Yazidis by Daesh amounted to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Several months later, in October of 2016, the House of Commons voted unanimously in support of a motion that the Government of Canada provide protection to Yazidi women and girls who are fleeing genocide. The Government of Canada committed to resettling 1,200 survivors of Daesh, including vulnerable Yazidi women and children, as government-sponsored refugees, by the end of 2017.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada worked closely with the United Nations Refugee Agency, the International Organization for Migration, and resettlement assistance program service provider organizations, and other partners to meet this commitment.

The UNHCR helped to identify vulnerable Yazidi women and children and other survivors of Daesh and their family members both inside and outside of Iraq. With the help and advice of German and Kurdish authorities, as well as Yazidi leaders, the government determined that the focus of these efforts should be on helping the most vulnerable individuals, rather than on a large-scale resettlement. The government also facilitated the private sponsorship of individuals who fall within this vulnerable group, so more Yazidi women and girls, as well as other survivors of Daesh, could arrive in Canada as privately sponsored refugees.

• (2025)

As of March 30, 2018, Canada has welcomed more than 1,300 survivors of Daesh, including 1,216 government-supported and 88 privately sponsored refugees. Of those who have arrived, close to 85% are Yazidi. Once in Canada, these survivors of Daesh continue to receive the necessary supports required, through both private and public organizations. The government has committed to continue to accept and even fast-track the private sponsorship of refugees who are survivors of Daesh. That is why I am shocked and disappointed to hear members of the official opposition continually accuse the government of failing to support Yazidi women and girls. This government has demonstrated its commitment to these survivors time and again, and we will continue to do so. We know that many survivors have experienced significant mental and physical trauma. To assist service-provider organizations with the settlement and integration needs of this population, migration officers and physicians with the International Organization for Migration have identified the specific medical and resettlement needs of each individual. As well, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has developed and circulated a Yazidi population profile, detailing demographic and health characteristics, as well as cultural considerations, for this vulnerable population.

To support their successful settlement and integration, all government-assisted refugees, including the survivors of Daesh, receive settlement services pre- and post-arrival. As such, the

International Organization for Migration delivered orientation-to-Canada training to all survivors of Daesh before their departure from the Middle East. Coordination with the settlement community in Canada continues to ensure that their settlement services, including psychosocial and mental health supports, are available to meet the very acute needs of the survivors of Daesh as we resettle and welcome them to Canada. Like all resettled refugees, these individuals receive coverage for physician services and mental health supports, including clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, and counselling therapists as well as prescription-drug coverage. In addition, given the unimaginable trauma that many survivors of Daesh may have experienced, some individuals may have unique medical needs. As such, an assessment has been conducted for each individual to identify their needs and to connect survivors with medical and psychosocial support services post-arrival. Officials meet regularly to discuss how these individuals are adapting and to ensure that the appropriate settlement services are in place.

The Government of Canada's efforts to resettle survivors of Daesh, including vulnerable Yazidi women and girls, is just the latest example of our country's long-standing humanitarian approach to the world's most vulnerable groups. Canadians can continue to take pride in this great tradition.

We know that these women and children have suffered severe trauma from Daesh in their countries of origin, and we know that they need a great deal of support when they arrive here in Canada, which I know is a priority for our government despite of what some members of the opposition have claimed. Once again, today at the status of women committee, the plight of these women was politicized with claims being made that we are doing nothing to support them, when in fact the very program being used to provide mental health supports is one that the Harper Conservatives cut and our government reinstated. Can the minister expand on what Canada is doing to help them once they are here?

• (2030)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the hon. member's question with respect to Yazidis is an important one.

[*Translation*]

Our government has proven itself to be a world leader in welcoming refugees fleeing war and persecution.

[*English*]

We have now provided a new home to over 1,300 women and their families who endured the brutality of Daesh, 85% of whom are Yazidis. We are not stopping there. We will continue to expedite the privately sponsored applications of survivors of Daesh and support family reunification.

Business of Supply

These women and girls have endured and survived unimaginable trauma and face long journeys toward healing and rebuilding their lives right here in Canada. Make no mistake; we will support them every step of the way. We have mobilized settlement organizations and community partners to provide extensive specialized services tailored to their specific needs. These supports include counselling and mental health services provided through the very refugee health care program the Conservatives cut when they were in power.

We made sure that we paced the arrivals of the survivors of Daesh, learning from the German example and advice, to make sure that each group of about 50 survivors would have supports in place before their arrival so they could be assisted in their long journey of restarting their lives in Canada. Second, we have ensured that there are enough translators and community representatives to assist them in their integration. We have ensured that survivors of Daesh atrocities are spread across many communities in Canada, which have more than welcomed them with open arms.

Our government's commitment to supporting vulnerable women and girls is unwavering, and we are continuing down the road with further funding of \$20 million, announced in budget 2018, to expand our refugee program to target vulnerable women and girls. In addition to that, we are proud of the fact that our global leadership in resettling women and girls and other survivors of Daesh led to Canada being recognized by the United Nations for this great work. In addition, we will, of course, continue to expedite privately sponsored applications for survivors of Daesh atrocities and facilitate family reunification.

There are no caps on group of five sponsorships. That is why Canadians can continue to exercise their generosity in welcoming these highly vulnerable individuals into our communities so that we can assist them to re-establish their lives in Canada, recover from the unimaginable trauma they have been exposed to, and contribute to Canadian society in the short and long term. In fact, to achieve those outcomes, we have more than quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees. This is because we value and support Canadians' generosity and are committed to upholding Canada's humanitarian tradition. We would not have been able to meet these targets had it not been for the overwhelming outpouring of generosity by Canadians.

In keeping with our humanitarian tradition, keeping family members together is very important for our government, and when separation occurs, due to whatever reason, every effort is made by our government to facilitate family reunification as soon as possible. For example, when a family member is released from captivity when the rest of the family has already settled in Canada, we facilitate that reunification. We will continue to facilitate, specifically in this case, family reunification for those whose family members are still in Daesh captivity.

In addition to that, we have ensured that we keep working and engaging with the Kurdish Regional Government, as well as the UNHCR and neighbouring countries that have populations of survivors of Daesh atrocities, including Yazidi women and girls, to highlight their plight, to make sure we prioritize their cases, to refer them from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and also to refer them to private sponsors right here in Canada.

The interim federal health program, which we restored as a government, and which we will continue to fund, is exactly the program that is providing mental health and other health care supports to this highly vulnerable group of people, as well as other refugees.

I am most proud, as are all members in the House, of the response Canada had in responding to create a new home for the 1,300 women and their families who endured the brutality of Daesh atrocities, 85% of whom are Yazidis. We learned from the German example, which advised us to make sure we paced the arrivals. We made sure that we expedited family reunification privately sponsored applications, and we made sure that we had the necessary wraparound supports once these individuals got here.

From the lessons we have learned through this experience, we have made sure to provide further funding in our immigration levels planning. As part of budget 2018, the government announced an additional \$20 million so we can respond quickly again to make sure that we provide a home for other vulnerable women and girls.

• (2035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will use all my speaking time for questions. Before I begin, I would like to ask the minister the following question.

[*English*]

He keeps saying “Under our watch, we did all this, we did all that.”

[*Translation*]

He says the Liberals are doing excellent work, so why does he need to go to Nigeria to tell Nigerians not to come to Canada through the United States?

• (2040)

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that our outreach program is critical to the work we are doing to address the issue of irregular migration. We have outreached to communities in the United States and beyond, including Nigeria. I am proud of the work we are doing to engage with senior officials and civil society in places like the United States, but also in Nigeria and domestically, to make sure that people understand our immigration system and our asylum system. Senior government officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, have assured me that Nigeria will work closely with Canada to address the issue of irregular migration to Canada in co-operation with our government.

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[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, the images people see on television really affect them. People in my riding talk to me about this all the time. Instead of fixing the problem with the safe third country agreement, the minister is recasting the RCMP as hotel porters to welcome illegal immigrants pulling their suitcases up Roxham Road. Recently they even set up a shuttle service to transport people from Quebec to Ontario or any other Canadian province of their choice.

Why is the minister wasting so much money encouraging people to enter Canada illegally while other people in other countries are waiting their turn to come here?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, that is simply inaccurate. We have not spent money to encourage people to cross our border irregularly. That is simply not the case. What we have done is engage in a very aggressive and sustained outreach program to diaspora communities in the United States and beyond to make sure that we engage with diaspora communities, stakeholders, officials, diplomatic representatives, and non-governmental organizations so we can educate people on the extent of our immigration system and our asylum system. Those who are determined to need Canada's protection are allowed to stay in Canada, and those who are not deemed to need Canada's protection are removed from Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, the minister is giving people who enter this country illegally access to health services across Canada and is fast-tracking their claims. That is the reality. That is what we are currently dealing with every day. Illegal migrants know that they have access to free health care in Canada while they await their asylum hearing, no matter what the outcome of their hearing may be.

Why is the minister using taxpayers' money to encourage people to enter Canada illegally to access treatment, while others are waiting abroad with no care?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, again I want to correct the record. We are not spending taxpayer money to encourage people to cross the border irregularly. That is simply not true. Even though the member opposite continues to repeat that, it is inaccurate. What we are doing is engaging in a very aggressive and sustained outreach program to educate people in diaspora communities, as well as non-governmental organizations, about the extent of Canada's immigration program and so they have a true understanding of our asylum policies.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, the minister said that he is expediting work permits for people who illegally enter Canada. Migrants know that they will have a work permit if they enter Canada illegally, no matter the outcome of their hearing. For example, if a claim takes two years to process, a migrant from Nigeria will have potentially earned more money in Canada, in just two years, than he or she would have earned after a lifetime of work in his or her home country.

Why is the minister still wasting money to encourage people to enter Canada illegally, while others must wait?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, on the issue of work permits, the Province of Quebec approached the federal government through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration and asked us to expedite work permits for asylum seekers as a way to minimize pressure on provincial social services. We responded positively to that request, reducing the processing time for work permits for asylum seekers from three months to three weeks, and we have issued over 13,000 work permits to asylum seekers in Quebec. This is important, because they can then support themselves while they await their hearings and therefore minimize pressure on provincial social services.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, that leads me to my next question. What about people who are already here and have had to wait two, three, or sometimes four years for a work permit? I regularly get people coming to my office who entered Canada legally but cannot secure a work permit. Why are people who came here illegally being bumped to the front of the line for work permits?

• (2045)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that asylum seekers are processed separately, in a separate stream, through the Immigration and Refugee Board, whereas all the other immigration processes are done by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. I want to keep repeating that point, because the party opposite keeps trying to connect the two and is muddying the waters. The fact of the matter is that the processing in one stream does not affect the other.

On the issue of work permits, it is something that was brought forward by the Province of Quebec. The province asked us to deal with the issue of work permits and to expedite the issue of work permits to allow asylum seekers to support themselves while they await their hearings.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, on May 8, the Minister of Transport said in Montreal that 90% of irregular migrants do not meet the criteria to claim asylum and must leave. However, that same day, Global News reported that of the 26,000 people who have entered Canada illegally since last year, only 1% have been removed. What happened to the other 89%? How much did it cost to remove them?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the Immigration and Refugee Board is responsible for hearing refugee claims. Those claimants who have a legitimate claim for refugee protection are granted refugee status, and they can stay in Canada, and those who are found not to have a legitimate claim for refugee protection are removed from Canada.

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Our government has invested \$74 million to ensure fast decision-making at the Immigration and Refugee Board so that refugee claimants can get decisions faster. That allows failed claimants to be removed from Canada quickly.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, my riding supports orderly immigration, since its aging population means we are dependent on immigration to grow our economy. Just this week and last week, I have been contacted by companies complaining about delays in processing applications submitted by foreign workers and legal immigrants.

First of all, how many Immigration and Citizenship Canada employees have been taken off their regular duties and reassigned to process applications from migrants who entered Canada illegally? Second, why is the minister using taxpayer money to let people who came here illegally jump in front of those who, need I remind you, are waiting their turn?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have a six-point plan on irregular migration, with outreach to diaspora communities and non-governmental organizations as well as community media and diplomatic representatives, and making sure that each and every person who crosses our border irregularly is arrested, and like all asylum claimants, is subjected to a thorough security screening.

We respect our international obligations, but those who are found not to need Canada's protection are promptly removed. We are co-operating closely with the provinces on the issue of irregular migration, specifically Quebec and Ontario, through the intergovernmental task force on irregular migration.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, since my riding borders the U.S., I have a question for the minister. Most of the migrants go to New York to board the Montreal-bound bus, then get off in Plattsburgh near Roxham Road.

Canada is already paying for full-time employees at the consulate in New York. Instead of spending money to go to Nigeria himself to address this immigration issue, why does the minister not ask his staff in New York to walk nine blocks to the bus terminal and provide accurate information to potential migrants?

Today we learn that people at the motels near Roxham Road are getting pamphlets from New York telling them how to enter Canada illegally. Why not use the Government of Canada's resources to properly inform these border crossers of Canada's legal immigration procedure or suggest to them that they seek asylum in the United States under the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the member opposite, in his previous question, spoke about his support for regular migration. I would urge the member opposite, in the effort to do that, not to muddy the waters by talking about fictional queue-jumping that does not exist.

One stream of immigration deals with refugee claimants through the Immigration and Refugee Board, and the other stream deals with

everything else in the immigration system through IRCC. That is a fact. The member opposite can keep repeating that assertion, but it is simply not true.

The fact of the matter is that we have made the necessary investments in more border security operations and faster processing of asylum claims at the Immigration and Refugee Board. We are meeting our international obligations. We have a very aggressive and effective outreach strategy to make sure that diaspora communities and non-governmental organizations, as well as community media, are informed about our immigration system.

• (2050)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, in 2016, 2,500 people came to Canada illegally. In 2017, 25,000 people came to Canada after a tweet from the Prime Minister stating that Canada is open to receiving anyone. He is talking about queue-jumping. All those people queue-jump everyone else who wants to come to Canada. What is he going to do about that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I will provide the member opposite with a statistic. In 2008, 30,000 people came to Canada to claim asylum. That is a fact.

The fact of the matter is that Canada is not immune to global migration patterns. That is a fact. The fact is that we have international obligations to provide fair hearings and due process to asylum seekers. Those who are found to have a legitimate claim for refugee status get to stay in Canada, and those who are found not to have a legitimate claim for refugee protection are removed from Canada. That is our law, and the law is being implemented and respected throughout this process.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, Canadians accept immigration when it is planned and orderly. The minister spent Canadian taxpayers' money to encourage people to enter Canada illegally. Canadians' goodwill toward immigration is wearing thin because of this minister and his boss who sent out a tweet to the entire world saying "Welcome to Canada".

Why is the minister wasting money to encourage people to enter Canada illegally when others are waiting abroad to enter Canada legally?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the member opposite's assertion that the Conservatives welcome immigration would have been believable if they had not left us with massive backlogs and long wait times for immigration.

The member opposite's claim that he cares about U.S.-Canada border operations would have been believable if the party opposite had not cut \$390 million from border security operations, therefore jeopardizing the ability of CBSA to enforce Canadian laws at the border.

We have made the necessary investments in border security operations and faster processing of refugee claims at the Immigration and Refugee Board. As part of budget 2018, we have made investments to the tune of \$173.2 million.

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[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship actually started paying his employees to share links on the IRCC's Twitter account and discourage migrants from crossing the border illegally. On May 3, they tweeted this:

There is misinformation online about the grounds for making an asylum claim... Don't enter Canada illegally [their terms, not the opposition's] based on false information and false promises.

The IRCC has just 163,000 followers on Twitter, but on January 27, 2017, the Prime Minister reached over 4.2 million Twitter followers with the tweet that set off this saga of false information and false promises.

Why did the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship not ask the Prime Minister to retweet the IRCC's tweets advising people against illegal crossings? The Prime Minister could even do that today, this very evening, if he wanted to. It would not cost the Prime Minister a penny to retweet the IRCC's tweets to his 4.2 million followers.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, IRCC's social media audience of over two million people is helping us expand the reach of our message. Facebook posts have driven most of the engagement with our content. Content has been viewed 2.1 million times, and it has been shared 3,000 times. It has driven 16,000 visits to our website.

Targeted messaging and advertising for the messaging by IRCC on irregular migration have been seen over 1.6 million times by those in the United States who are actively searching for asylum information, with 28% of IRCC website visits from the advertising campaign effectively resulting in users accessing additional information in the form of videos, infographics, audio messages, and additional web content. The 12 videos that IRCC produced in English, French, Creole, and Spanish have been viewed over 200,000 times.

• (2055)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Chair, it is appropriate that I begin today by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional lands of the Algonquin people, and also by thanking the minister and his team for the remarkable work he has done as minister since he took office in January 2016.

This is a very difficult conversation for me to listen to. It is very difficult because I have heard this debate before, and in fact I have carried the brunt of it for several years. I would even argue that I am here because I wanted to respond to this debate.

I want to put this in context. On August 31, 1983, my family took a plane from Ireland and landed here at Montreal's Mirabel Airport because we were unable to go to Sri Lanka, where my family is originally from. Based on the discussion we are hearing today, I would assume that this, too, would be irregular, illegal, and so on. I reflect on this because people do not do things or take extraordinary risks as refugees just because they want to. They do it because they have to.

As I hear the minister speak and respond to what are frankly some ridiculous questions, it should be shameful because, as members of

Parliament, we have an obligation to understand what the law is, what our process is, and how our government works. If we are simply unable to understand the difference between IRCC and IRB, we should take some lessons or the party needs to do some extra classes so that members actually understand how our process works.

As I sat here, I heard heckling. I heard a number of members across the aisle say that these people are jumping the queue, that they are illegals. I do not know if they said "terrorists" today, but I know they did at one point.

I will take members back to 2009-10 in Canada. In October 2009, the *Ocean Lady* arrived in Vancouver with 76 Tamil refugees. The initial outrage from the Harper government at that time was that these were terrorists, queue jumpers, illegals. Again, a year later, in Esquimalt, Victoria, British Columbia, we saw a boatload of asylum seekers, refugees, who braved the Pacific, took extraordinary risks, and came ashore. In the weeks leading up to it, we saw the outrageous attacks on refugees, outrageous attacks on people who were fleeing persecution. They set the stage so that as people got off the boat they were immediately deemed to be illegals.

I invite my colleagues to look at the pictures that initially came out as a six-year-old and a baby and families got off the boat and were essentially targeted and named as terrorists. That is the type of conversation we are having here today. Let us have an adult conversation about this.

There are two systems in place. There is a system that looks at immigration. That is the IRCC. It is a system that ensures that people who are coming to Canada sponsored by family members, or as investors, or under student visas and so on are administered. They are vetted and screened, and their applications are processed. That is one stream.

The other stream is a refugee stream comprised of asylum seekers. They go to what is called the Immigration and Refugee Board. The IRB is an independent body that is charged with adjudicating actual decisions on whether someone meets the criteria of a refugee.

• (2100)

That is the system we have. It is two independent systems. There is a bit of overlap, but for the most part they are two independent systems. For us to stand here and complicate the two, look at one over the other and say that they are the same, is ridiculous.

It is even richer when members say that we are creating a queue. Many people may recall that in 2011 one of the knee-jerk responses of the Harper government to the boats that were coming was to essentially create a new law that set new timelines. People in the actual queue who were to be heard by the Immigration and Refugee Board went to the back of the line. There were close to 7,000 applicants, in fact. These are called legacy cases, and they are one of the legacies of the Harper government. Thankfully, since taking office, our government has addressed that, to the point where all those backlogged applications will be processed by the end of this year. They will be heard and they will be adjudicated.

Business of Supply

We have a very strong, independent body called the Immigration and Refugee Board, which is the envy of the world. It was constantly underfunded by the previous government, and it lacked credible adjudicators. Now it stands as a beacon of hope around the world for refugee protection and adjudication. We should be very proud of that.

I have been working with people on the MV *Sun Sea* and the *Ocean Lady* for a number of years. I still monitor many of the cases that are going through the system. One thing that is very clear to me is the Harper government's complete failure to look at things in context, and that is the history we are hearing today. That is the history the questions point to. Do we want to choose refugees? Do we want to choose queue jumpers over family sponsorship, over family members of live-in caregivers, or over Ukrainian refugees? We cannot have this dichotomy. We can do both.

In Canada, what is very important for us as a government and as a people in 2018 is to understand what is happening around the world. There are 65 million displaced persons around the world, and 22.5 million of them are refugees. A country like Bangladesh took in 680,000 people in the last nine months alone. There is a grander context of refugees. As a country, Canada has done its part and continues to do its part, but, like other countries, we too need to do more.

With that, I would like to ask several questions of my colleagues here from IRCC.

First, I would like to ask the minister to clarify whether migration through non-ports of entry has had any impact on wait times in other immigration categories. Are asylum seekers jumping the refugee queue, as some members on the other side are suggesting?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge Park for his speech and for the excellent work he does on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I also thank him for the clarification he provided on a number of subjects.

Let us be clear. Asylum seekers are not taking the place of immigrants from other immigration sectors nor of the refugees that we resettled from abroad in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Canadians all know that there are two different systems. I think the only people who do not know that are the Conservative members. Even their leader said on a very popular Quebec television program that it was the same system.

I would therefore like to reiterate that there are two completely different systems. Asylum seekers are not taking the place of those who are immigrating through our various economic sectors. Those applications are dealt with by the Immigration and Refugee Board, which is independent.

I hope that these clarifications will help Canadians understand once and for all that we have two different systems.

• (2105)

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, Canada has international legal obligations. We have obligations under the refugee convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and many other international obligations.

Given Canada's agreement with the U.S. on the safe third country, can Canada actually designate the entire Canada-U.S. 9,000-kilometre border as an official crossing?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, as you know, there are a certain number of official ports of entry in Canada, ports of entry that were designated and established in partnership with the United States.

I think the Conservatives' idea of designating the entire 9,000-kilometre border as an official crossing is completely ridiculous, particularly since we know that it would require an enormous amount of additional resources and would be practically impossible to do. We know that the Conservatives made over \$400 million in cuts to those resources and now all of a sudden they want us to put more resources into the border. Their idea is completely ridiculous.

What we want is to have the resources needed to deal with cases of irregular border crossers as quickly as possible.

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, it is expected that more people will likely arrive through places that are not ports of entry. What provisions does Canada have in place to support and mitigate the effects of those who seek asylum?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, as we have repeated many times this evening, and as you know, we have developed a plan with our partners, including provinces, territories, municipalities, and non-governmental organizations, to manage these irregular border crossings.

We have also conducted awareness campaigns in the United States and overseas to teach people who want to come to Canada about our laws and give them the facts before they arrive and seek asylum.

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Just to pick up on the last comment, Madam Chair, can the minister elaborate on the engagements he has had with the diaspora groups with respect to potential arrivals?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, once again, a number of members from this side of the House went to the United States to talk to various communities about our laws before these individuals come to Canada.

Business of Supply

We also travelled abroad with various American counterparts, with whom we consulted. The minister also went to Nigeria to talk to our Nigerian counterparts and American officials in an attempt to stop such a large number of U.S. visas from being issued to Nigerians, who then cross into Canada.

We have conducted a number of awareness campaigns to teach people about our laws and to ensure that people are aware of them before they come to Canada.

• (2110)

[English]

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Chair, Canadians, including myself, strongly support immigration when it is done in a planned, orderly, and fair manner, but under the current government we have seen our once sound immigration system thrown into chaos. Will the minister admit that the Prime Minister's irresponsible #WelcometoCanada tweet caused much of this crisis?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, we as a country are proud of using immigration as a great tool for economic growth, but we also have a place in our hearts for humanitarian immigration that allows those who are fleeing persecution, war, and terrorism to seek sanctuary and safety in Canada. That is part of who we are and part of our Canadian tradition.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, the reality is that no one is fleeing persecution in the United States.

All the Prime Minister has done to try to fix the illegal border crossing crisis is throw money at it, but it has just gotten worse. National security experts, border officers, and law enforcement have all said that the lack of leadership by the government is endangering Canadians.

Why is the minister enabling people to illegally cross into Canada while he erodes public safety?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, this is completely inaccurate. Each and every irregular migrant entering Canada is immediately arrested and undergoes extensive background screening for national security, criminal, and safety risks. No one is released into our communities until security checks are completed. If it is determined that someone poses a risk, that person is detained and deported and cannot submit an asylum claim.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, what is interesting is that a lot of these background searches are based on Google and whatever information the illegal border crosser has provided. Such information is not always accurate.

The minister has continued to enable people to illegally enter Canada from the United States, even though law enforcement has warned him that violent gangs, such as MS-13, may use the loophole in the safe third country agreement to establish themselves in this country.

Why is the minister refusing to close the loophole in the safe third country agreement to stop people from illegally entering Canada and eroding public safety?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I hope the member opposite is not questioning the professionalism or the effectiveness of our security services when he speaks about them using Google searches.

Our number one priority is safeguarding the security and safety of Canadians in collaboration with our security partners. IRCC uses tools such as biometrics, international databases, and in-person interviews to ensure the safety and security of Canadians.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, I have spoken to Canadian border officials, front-line individuals, who advised me that the once eight-hour interview process for the initial interview of refugees has gone from eight hours down to less than two, so I do not think we are being as thorough as the minister would have us believe.

The minister has set up expensive housing facilities at the U.S.-Canada border, which to me is a signal that he expects more people to continue to cross illegally into Canada. The Liberal “no-free ticket” looks more like a welcome mat. The decision has caused a huge influx of asylum seekers and has caused the CBSA to hire summer students with limited training to screen people, which is not good for public safety.

Will the minister finally commit to closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, again I want to emphasize, despite the assertions of the member opposite, that each and every individual who crosses our border irregularly is immediately arrested and undergoes extensive background screening for national security and safety risks. No one is released into our communities until security checks are completed. If someone is found to pose a risk to our society, they are detained and deported and cannot submit an asylum claim.

While some are engaging in irresponsible fearmongering, the fact is that every asylum claimant is carefully screened and threats are effectively detected.

• (2115)

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, I go back to the Google search. Google is not the final authority on this. I would like to get an answer from the minister on exactly how many have been deported. Minister, how many individuals have been deported from the illegal border crossers—not ordered deported, but actually removed from the country?

The Deputy Chair: I will just remind the hon. member that questions are to be addressed to the Chair and not the minister himself.

Business of Supply

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the government has invested \$173.2 million in budget 2018 to support security operations at the border. This includes \$74 million that is being invested as part of budget 2018 into the Immigration and Refugee Board for faster processing of asylum claims so that those who require protection get to stay in Canada, move on with their lives, and contribute back to Canadian society, and those who are not legitimate refugees and who do not have a legitimate claim for refugee protection are removed from Canada.

Our record on investing in border security operations is clear. The Conservatives cut border operations by \$390 million.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, we heard from the minister that \$74 million has been allocated for CBSA to deal with this situation. My question for the minister remains this: of those illegal border crossers who have arrived in this country, how many have been deported—not just ordered deported, but actually removed from this country—over the last year and a half?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the government is committed to ensuring the integrity of the Canadian asylum system and ensuring that decisions have consequences. To that end, we are making removals of failed claimants a priority. That is why we made an investment of \$173.2 million for border security operations, faster processing at the IRB, and more investments in the CBSA. It was so that removals can be done faster.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, again my question is this: How many deportation orders have been issued, and how individuals who had been ordered deported by those orders have actually been removed from this country if they had come to this country as an illegal border crosser?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the hon. member should know that the CBSA is in charge of removals. About 8,000 individuals per year are deported if they are found ineligible to stay in Canada.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, the minister has advertised that he is expediting work permits for people who illegally enter Canada from the United States. This decision has meant that organized crime groups in countries like Nigeria are working to smuggle people into Canada. Human smuggling is not a good thing, as we all know, so why is the minister enabling people to illegally enter Canada and eroding our public safety?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I do not know what the hon. member is referring to. Our campaign of outreach and engagement is precisely meant to discourage irregular migration, not encourage it, so what the hon. member is stating is completely inaccurate.

We have a six-point plan, which includes an aggressive outreach plan for deterring irregular migration, and we are making the necessary investments for faster processing of asylum claims.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, I would assert that if the current system of outreach is trying to dissuade people from coming to this country in the manner in which they are, illegally, then given its current practice, I would say it is a huge failure.

According to the transport minister, 90% of illegal border crossers would not meet the criteria to claim asylum in Canada. If that estimation is true, it means that about 90% of the 35,000 illegal border crossers so far will need to be deported at some point.

Because the minister has failed to manage our borders, Canadians will have to pay hundreds of millions of dollars for deportations alone. We know they cost between \$1,500 to \$15,000, depending on where they have to be relocated to.

Between this and the initial voting against the declaration of the Yazidi genocide, I am actually beginning to miss the incomparable John McCallum. Is the current minister comfortable with the potential of being known until the end of time as quite possibly the worst immigration minister in Canadian history?

● (2120)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the hon. member is bringing passion to the issue of border security, but he knows very clearly that the Harper Conservatives cut \$390 million from border security operations. They introduced a convoluted scheduling system into the IRB that resulted in thousands of people being held in limbo for years by the Immigration and Refugee Board. Their record in terms of immigration processing is horrendous. It kept families apart for years.

We are doing the right thing. We are making the necessary investments to respond to the cuts that were made under the Harper Conservatives. We are reuniting families. We are making sure that we invest in border security operations and that we can also meet our international obligations. We know something that the Conservatives do not seem to understand, which is that investment follows talent. That is why we are making the necessary investments: to ensure that the express entry system and the global skills strategy attract the best and the brightest to Canada.

Mr. Glen Motz: Unfortunately, Madam Chair, the repeated rhetoric is that the Conservative government cut border services, but the fact is that our previous government increased the number of CBSA front-line officers by 26%. It is a good thing their number increased, because they are certainly needed now to deal with this illegal border crossing crisis. I suspect it must be very difficult to be RCMP members or CBSA agents at the moment, assigned to try to manage the illegal border crossing crisis, knowing that every day in their tour of duty they are going to be processing people who are illegally entering the country and receiving expedited work permits because our minister here has chosen to enable their entry rather than closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both the RCMP and the CBSA for their service because they are doing a great job cleaning up a mess that the current government has created. Why has the minister chosen to turn the RCMP and the CBSA into a concierge service for illegal border crossers?

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Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the hon. member is so thankful for the CBSA that he agreed to join a party that, when it was in power, cut \$390 million from that agency. This is the record of the party opposite. The members of the party opposite are trying to show once again that they care about immigration processing, but they left us with an abysmal record of backlogs and very long processing times. Live-in caregivers, for example, who provide an invaluable service to Canadian families, under the Harper Conservatives had to wait for between five and seven years to reunite with their families. We have reduced that to 12 months. We are reducing the backlog by 63% and have committed to eliminating it by the end of 2018. That is our record, and I am happy to put that record against theirs any day.

Mr. Glen Motz: Madam Chair, I certainly would agree with the minister that the Liberals' metric of spending more money is true; they certainly are spending more money needlessly on this. However, the metric actually needs to be that of a planned, orderly, and fair immigration process. That to me is the metric by which Canadians are measuring the whole immigration system.

What I have heard tonight is that the minister believes that Canadians think it is perfectly okay for him to spend hundreds of millions of their dollars to enable the security risks associated with illegal border crossers and ill-advised visa lifts. Would the minister like to apologize to them for wasting their money, or is he going to double down on his continued poor decisions?

• (2125)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we are very proud of the fact that we are once again making the necessary investments in more border security operations to allow the CBSA to do the work it was hampered in doing by the Harper Conservative cuts of \$390 million. We are proud to be making the necessary investment of \$74 million in the Immigration and Refugee Board so that refugee claims can be processed faster and people's lives will not be left in limbo for years and years. We are proud of the fact that we have expedited work permits for asylum claimants so that they will put minimal pressure on provincial social services and can support themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to start by thanking you for the opportunity to participate in this debate as we consider the votes under Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in the 2018-19 main estimates. I will be speaking for about ten minutes and then I will ask some questions.

A well-managed immigration system is vital if we are to ensure the future success of our country. I have to admit that I have a special attachment to this immigration system because my wife arrived in Canada from England 18 years ago. This relationship resulted in four young boys with blonde hair and blue eyes.

It is in this spirit that we established an unprecedented multi-year immigration levels plan last year in order to responsibly increase the number of permanent residents that Canada welcomes over a three-year period. Under this plan, Canada will welcome 310,000 permanent residents this year, 330,000 the following year, and 340,000 in 2020. These are the most ambitious immigration numbers in the recent history of Canada and they represent a major investment in the current and future prosperity of our country. In fact, according to

the Conference Board of Canada, we must increase our immigration levels to 1% of the population over the next 20 years to support sound economic growth in Canada.

With this plan, immigration levels will reach 0.9% by 2020, which means that we will have almost met the Conference Board of Canada's recommendation in just three years. This increase in immigration levels will help strengthen our country and keep us globally competitive, while stimulating innovation and economic growth, and supporting the creation of diverse, inclusive communities. The increase will help us face major challenges in the coming years, such as slower growth of the labour force and a labour shortage as a result of the aging Canadian population.

I want to remind hon. members of some important figures. In 1971, there were 6.6 people of working age for every senior. In 2012, the ratio of workers to seniors dropped to 4.2 to 1, and this ratio is expected to drop to 2 to 1 by 2036, in less than 20 years. Five million Canadians will be retiring in that time, and in two decades, nearly all of Canada's annual net population growth will come from immigration, which already represents 65% of our growth. We need to address this obvious demographic challenge if we want to be able to fulfill our commitments with respect to health care, pensions, and other social services; continue to grow our economy; and continue to fill our labour needs in the coming decades.

The multi-year immigration levels plan will benefit all Canadians because immigrants contribute to our economic growth and keep Canada competitive in a global economy. Immigrants can drive innovation and help employers meet their labour force needs.

Higher immigration levels will also improve the operations of our immigration system by helping us to reduce application backlogs and improve processing times for our clients. This will help us to reunite families more quickly, allow employers to more effectively hire the talent they need, and provide more timely protection to the most vulnerable people around the world.

It is fair to say that Canada is able to leverage what some call its immigration advantage. While an increasing number of countries are closing their doors to newcomers with innovative perspectives, an entrepreneurial spirit, and unique skills, Canada is taking a different approach.

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Immigration seems to be an economic differentiator for Canada in terms of both our current and long-term needs. That is why 60% of the growth in immigration levels for this year and the subsequent two years will come through our economic programs. Prominent among these, of course, is our provincial nominee program, which helps meet regional labour needs and distributes the benefits of immigration throughout Canada.

● (2130)

Another excellent strategy for meeting regional needs is the Atlantic immigration pilot program, through which the government works with the community as a whole and employers in particular to ensure that newcomers settle in Atlantic Canada and stay there long term. At the same time, the Government of Canada is launching new programs, trying out new ideas and introducing faster processing in order to enhance its appeal for the talent that the country needs to ensure its economic prosperity.

For example, the recent implementation of the global skills strategy helps attract top talent from around the world. The purpose of this strategy is to bring in high-skilled workers to Canada sooner by processing their work permit and visa application in just two weeks, among other innovative measures.

The start-up visa program is another example of an innovative economic immigration program that helps identify promising new businesses in partnership with business incubators, angel investor groups, and private sector venture capital funds. They commit to supporting foreign entrepreneurs who are starting up innovative businesses and the government gives those entrepreneurs permanent resident status so that they can come to Canada quickly to create more jobs and contribute to our country's economic growth.

All the programs I just listed are examples of how the government is using innovative, creative approaches to meet Canada's unique economic needs through immigration.

We will be increasing immigration levels in the coming years, but we will also be ensuring that our immigration system remains well managed and puts the safety of all Canadians first. That is so important it bears repeating: our system works and puts the safety of all Canadians first. Our multi-year planning approach is helping Canada come up with a better plan to handle the challenges and opportunities of higher immigration levels. Our approach is also helping provincial governments, municipalities, and newcomer settlement agencies make plans of their own.

Settlement agencies have actually been calling for a multi-year plan for years now. We also have to increase immigration levels in a way that Canadians support.

Our immigration system must remain well managed, its economic benefits must remain clear, and it must continue to put the safety of all Canadians first. Canada is unique among immigrant receiving countries because it places such tremendous importance on giving newcomers the help they need to integrate into our country.

Our settlement services, including language training, employment services, and newcomer orientation, are positive contributors to immigrants' success. Canada also sets itself apart with its emphasis on citizenship as ultimate outcome of a process that begins with immigration and integration.

In fact, most eligible immigrants, or about 85% of folks, decide to apply for Canadian citizenship. We believe that welcoming immigrants to Canada, helping them settle and integrate into our society, and eventually seeing them become Canadian citizens provides our country with great opportunities and a competitive advantage. That is why it is essential to maintain a well-run immigration system to ensure economic growth, support sustainable communities, and keep Canada globally competitive.

Madam Chair, I will now ask my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, a few questions.

We have seen an increase in the number of border crossings and irregular asylum claimants in recent months. What impact does this increase have on the multi-year immigration levels plan?

Before I let the parliamentary secretary answer, I think it is important to reiterate something that I mentioned in my speech, namely that border crossings by asylum seekers occur as part of a very well-run system. What I mean is that when asylum seekers cross the border, first, they are stopped by the RCMP. Then, they go through a whole security screening process, which includes fingerprinting and a series of biometric tests. The RCMP also runs their names through all of our databases to check if there are any special issues. This system is well run and ensures that our officials are there to keep all Canadians safe.

I will repeat my question for the parliamentary secretary: what impact does this increase have on the multi-year immigration levels plan?

● (2135)

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague and good friend from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia for his speech and his question.

Again, asylum seekers are not taking the place of other immigrants who come here or refugees that we have identified abroad. We have unveiled an historic multi-year immigration levels plan, which will help us achieve our immigration objectives, whether with regard to families, the economy, or refugees. Again, this has nothing to do with asylum seekers.

Every year, before November 1, the plan is changed according to our objectives and our needs. We know that newcomers are very important to the Canadian economy. We all have a role to play in helping them integrate into our country.

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Mr. Rémi Massé: Madam Chair, in another life, before I got into politics, I had the good fortune and honour to be the head of the CEGEP in Matane. We were especially proud because in order to develop our CEGEP, we had to attract new students from outside Quebec and Canada, and we managed to attract many from France, Mali, and Congo, among others. At a CEGEP of 700 students, we had more than 200 foreign students.

Attracting talent to Canada is important, but it is just as important to ensure that they integrate well and that they flourish in our communities.

Can the parliamentary secretary tell the House what we are doing to help immigrants succeed once they get here?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

We have a broad range of programs and we are working with more than 500 settlement service providers. I have had the opportunity to meet with many of their representatives across Canada since being appointed parliamentary secretary. I would like to thank these service providers, who are making a major contribution to the settlement of newcomers to Canada.

We have a wide range of pre-arrival services that help immigrants integrate, find jobs, and obtain the services they need, such as hospital services. We have invested more than \$1.2 billion in settlement and integration services. We are proud to have all these service providers who are really helping us ensure that newcomers integrate as easily as possible. We also want to provide immigrants with the language training they need so they can use both of Canada's official languages and contribute as quickly as possible to our economy. We all have a role to play, and these service providers really help us out in that regard.

• (2140)

Mr. Rémi Massé: Madam Chair, I come from a riding in eastern Quebec where there is a labour shortage, as is the case in many Quebec regions. It is vital that our approach attract the most talented people to Canada.

Can our parliamentary secretary tell the House what the government is doing to ensure the competitiveness of our country in a global economy?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, we have several programs to welcome the most talented people to Canada so they can contribute to our society and our businesses. We make these programs accessible for newcomers and we want to identify these immigrants so they can contribute to our economy as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Chair, as we talk about the brightest and the top talents, currently Canada has hundreds of Iranian nationals stuck in permanent resident applications as a result of delays in processing.

How many Iranian nationals are currently stuck in the backlog as a result of lengthy delays at the security screening stage?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, our government is committed to ensuring that every application is assessed based on its merits, in a

fair manner, and in accordance with Canada's laws. We acknowledge that some applicants have experienced security screening delays and are working with our partners to process applications efficiently.

We have engaged with the particular community mentioned by the member opposite that is impacted by these security screening delays and have committed to addressing their concerns.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how many are stuck in the system right now?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, our officials as well as those from Public Safety have met the particular members of this community and we are committed to addressing their concerns.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, that was not my question. My question was, how many Iranian nationals are stuck in the system and faced with 300 to 1,200% delays in their permanent resident applications?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, it is not uncommon for permanent resident applications to be delayed by security screening when the latter is affected by the complexity of the case, the delay in which the applicant provides the necessary information, and the overall volume of security screening applications.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the minister either does not know the answer or he is not answering. I asked how many people are stuck in the system. The average processing time is six months, and for Iranian nationals it is 18 months. Do the math.

In every single stream there are extraordinary delays. Therefore, how many people are stuck in the system across the country?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the officials from the IRCC as well as Public Safety have met with the Iranian Canadian Congress, as well as other community representatives, on this issue. They have committed to working with the community to address their concerns and are engaged in working together with the community to process the applications efficiently.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, so the minister does not know how much money is being spent by his government to fight a court case on the constitutionality of the safe third country agreement. He does not know how many people are stuck in the system, because he will not or cannot provide the answer. I am not quite sure exactly what the minister does know.

Now he says that they are doing something about this. How much longer do they have to wait?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the hon. member clearly knows that I am not the Minister of Public Safety and that security screening is done by the Department of Public Safety.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, that is right.

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• (2145)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I would encourage the hon. member to follow up with my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, who is responsible for security screening. Having said that, officials from my department, as well as Public Safety officials, have met with the Iranian Canadian Congress to address this issue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, what I do clearly know is that the minister is supposed to work across government to get these cases moving. The minister himself has acknowledged there is a problem, yet he does not know how many permanent resident applications are stuck in the system in his ministry and are not getting through. He does not know how much longer the applicants have to wait.

The government says that it actually wants this talent here in Canada to support innovation and the economy, yet the minister cannot answer basic questions. I am not quite sure exactly what questions the minister can answer.

Now I want to ask the minister this. Aside from Iranians, we have caregivers who are also stuck in the system. In fact, some of them have now been stuck in the system for 10 years. These are particularly the individuals with have a spouse, who may have been involved with the military at some point, or the police or the correctional system, but they have been in the system for 10 years. Does that sound reasonable to the minister, for someone to have to wait for more than 10 years to reunite with their family?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the member opposite is absolutely right. We value the invaluable services that caregivers provide to Canadian families. We care about the plight of caregivers. For us, caregivers are important to our Canadian economy and provide invaluable services to Canadian families. That is why we have prioritized the work that needed to be done and the extra resources that needed to be put in place to reduce the backlog in live-in caregiver programs and family reunification.

We have also reduced the processing time for live-in caregiver programs and family reunification from five to seven years under the previous Harper Conservatives to 12 months. I have made a commitment to the caregiver community that we will eliminate the remaining cases in the backlog by the end of 2018. Caregivers are an important segment of our population. They provide an invaluable service and we want to reunite them with their family members.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, if I am right, then the minister needs to do something. Let me just put this on the record. Roselie Dael arrived in November 2010 and is still waiting. Marcelina Domingo arrived in February 2011 and is still waiting. Wilma Dulin arrived in August 2011 and is still waiting. Gloria Ancheta arrived in September 2011 and is still waiting. The list goes on and on.

I actually have a spreadsheet of people who have been waiting, and they have been waiting for more than 10 years to reunite with their family members. This is not right. I would ask the minister to get on with it and to fix the system.

On family reunification, which the minister likes to speak so well of, I would like to know how many people's applications in the parents and grandparents stream have been approved through this year's lottery?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we are very proud of our record with respect to caregivers. We inherited a system in which caregivers were waiting five to seven years to reunite with their family members. We engaged with the community. We promised them that we would work on this issue. We put resources and a tighter team in place to ensure that we reduced processing times from between five and seven years to 12 months. We reduced the backlog in the live-in caregiver program by 63%.

For the remaining cases in the live-in caregiver program, we have committed to the community that we will eliminate the remainder of the cases in that program by the end of 2018. In addition to that, I have committed publicly in the media, as well as to the caregiver community, that as a government we will always maintain pathways to permanent residency for caregivers in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the government can congratulate itself all it wants, but the truth of the matter is that those families who have been waiting for years and years to reunite with their families are not congratulating the government because they are still waiting. The names that I read off are not fictitious but real names. By the way, I have a whole spreadsheet of them from across the country.

To the government House leader, maybe she should take that under advisement and figure it out for her constituents to make sure they get processed accordingly.

I ask the minister how many applicants were submitted in the parents and grandparents lottery this year?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, under the parent and grandparent program, we inherited a system that had only 5,000 applications. We promised Canadians that we would double that number once we formed government, and we kept that promise, going from 5,000 to 10,000 applicants.

We also inherited a system that was very unfair and not based on a random selection process that treated everyone equally. We have introduced a random selection process that now treats everyone equally. We kept our promise to double the numbers and the system is ongoing. Selected potential sponsors have until May 25, 2018 to submit their complete applications to sponsor their parents and grandparents.

• (2150)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how many applications has the government received to date?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, in response to the launch of the 2018 program, after the removal of duplicates, the department has received approximately 93,836 interest-to-sponsor submissions. Out of these, 10,000 complete applications will be selected.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, how many full applications have been received?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows, we receive interest-to-sponsor submissions. We then eliminate any duplicates. We then make sure that we have selected potential sponsors and out of that we will have 10,000 complete applications.

Business of Supply

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, in the first year the government did this, 500 application spots were left open. That is to say, only 9,500 full applications were received and 500 spots were lost. Will the minister commit to using in this year's quota those 500 spots that were not used in the first year that the Liberals implemented the lottery system

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we are in the month of May 2018, and so far, 8,600 complete applications have been received. That is a very good track record so far, and I am very confident that with the work that we are proceeding with in respect to parent and grandparent applications, we will receive 10,000 complete applications way before the end of 2018.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, for last year, when the government first started this, 500 spots were lost because the government did not receive the full applications. That is 500 families that have been waiting and waiting to be reunited through the parents and grandparents stream.

My question for the minister is fairly straightforward. Will he use those 500 lost spots from the previous year and apply them to this year's quota in addition to the 10,000?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we inherited a system that only had 5,000 spots in the parent and grandparent program. We promised Canadians we would double that number. We have kept that promise. We also promised Canadians that we would introduce a much fairer system of random selection, which we have. So far, we have received 8,600 complete applications, and it is not even June of this year. By the end of the year, I am confident we will receive 10,000 complete applications.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the minister will not answer my question. What that tells me is those 500 spots will not be utilized. Those 500 spots are families that have been waiting for years to try to be reunited with their family members. They will not be able to do so because 500 spots have been lost.

The minister will say that they are doing a great job on this. Let me be clear. The lottery system is the only stream where family reunification, getting loved ones together, is based on a lottery. They literally have to win a lottery to reunite with their family. Does that sound right to the minister?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, the member opposite knows that under the previous system if one person was willing to spend a lot of money compared to the next person, he or she had a better chance of getting selected. If one person lived closer to the processing centre than the next person, he or she had a better chance of getting selected. That was not a fair system.

We introduced a system that treats everyone equally, which is in line with what Canadians expect of us. We also doubled the number of parents and grandparents. Applications received in 2015 and 2016 are in process. We will ensure we eliminate those folks from the backlog, and parents and grandparents levels will actually increase in 2019 and 2020.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, the old system was not fair. This system is not fair either. I cannot believe the minister would actually think reuniting with one's parents or grandparents based on a lottery is a fair system. No other stream in immigration in Canada is

reliant on the lottery, the luck of the draw. That is what it is reduced to, and somehow the minister is proud of that. I am not.

My question for the minister is with respect to the 500 spots lost. The minister will not answer this question. He promised 10,000. The first year he implemented the lottery he lost 500 spots. Will he make up for those 500 spots that have been lost?

• (2155)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, that is still 4,500 more than the Harper Conservatives had in their allocation. We are committed to ensuring we increase the levels of allocations for parent and grandparent sponsorships in 2019, increasing them further in 2020 as part of our immigration levels plan. We are doing the responsible thing, which is doubling the number, improving the system, introducing a fairer system, but also attacking the backlog that was left to us in the parent and grandparent program by the Harper Conservatives.

We understand that immigration decisions and processing have a huge impact on families and on individuals. That is why we put in resources and prioritized these cases, to ensure families can be reunited.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, budget 2018 outlines a decrease in funding to the IOM, from \$2,140,000 to \$1,454,000. Given the context of the global refugee and forced displacement crisis, why is now the time to reduce the budget?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we are very proud of the investments and the financial support we provide to the International Organization for Migration, as well as the UNHCR. At a time when countries around the world are closing their doors to people, to refugees, to talent and to skills, we in Canada are taking the opposite approach and are welcoming those with skills and talents. We are also meeting our international obligations to provide safety and security for those who are seeking protection from persecution.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here today on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin people.

It is particularly meaningful for me to take part in today's conversation in committee of the whole as we consider the main estimates for 2018-19 of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, given that I am the child of immigrant parents and grandparents who came to this country to escape the aftermath of a war, to escape fear, intolerance, and poverty. They wanted to come to a country that offered a place to begin a new life, a place that offered a safe place for their children and grandchildren to achieve their potential. I am one of those grandchildren.

It is important to not only talk about the actions this government has taken to streamline and improve the immigration process, but also to acknowledge the expectation from applicants and Canadians alike that we continue to improve.

Business of Supply

The Canada we have today has been built largely by the immigrants who have come to this country to seek a better future for themselves and for their families. Together, we have created one of the best countries in the world. With our decreasing natural birth rate and our increasing retirement rate, our future economic success depends on us getting our immigration policy right moving forward.

I will be speaking for the next 10 minutes primarily on some of the improvements we have made in the system and then I will finish with a couple of questions for the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The government understands that the way Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada deals with immigration applications, and the timeliness of processing those applications, have a profound impact on the lives of individuals.

Over the past few years, the Government of Canada has made significant progress in reducing wait times and inventories across permanent resident categories, while also meeting the ever-increasing demand for visitor visas, work permits, and study permits.

As an aside, I can attest that when I first entered office over two years ago, long wait times were the absolute top complaint, particularly one that separated families for too long. It really caused great stress and great unhappiness.

Thanks to the multi-year level plans and the innovative new processes being piloted in our missions and processing centres in Canada and around the world, we expect many inventories to be eliminated by 2019, while broadly rolling out new mechanisms to process visas faster and more efficiently.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has been moving diligently toward an increasingly integrated, modernized, and centralized working environment to help speed up application processing globally. Updated technology allows the department to enhance efficiencies and take advantage of capacity anywhere in the network so applications can be processed more quickly.

Since we have started putting some of these measures into place, there has been a huge difference in just two and a half years. We virtually have no issues in my office around spousal sponsorships. Visa application issues have gone down significantly, and now our focus and our attention is on other matters.

Various factors can affect the time it takes to process applications, including the number of applications received and the complexity of the applications.

The gradual increase in immigration levels, as set out in the 2018-2020 multi-year levels plan, will provide more relief for long wait times and backlogs. I will remind everyone we have increased immigration levels in 2018 to 310,000; 320,000 in 2019; and 340,000 in 2020. This is because targeted levels increase the number of spaces in certain categories, such as spouses, partners, children, and economics. It allows IRCC to process more applications each year and admit more people.

The increased levels will also reduce wait times and backlogs, thereby addressing a key irritant to our clients, including Canadian family members and sponsors.

Increasing admissions of privately sponsored refugees and the provincial nominee program will similarly allow the government to process more applications from backlogs, which will continue to improve processing times.

The government has already taken action in many areas to reduce backlogs and improve processing times. I will give a few more details about some of the more specific action that has been taken and the results we have seen.

● (2200)

In terms of spousal applications, in December 2016, we announced improvements to Canada's spousal sponsorship application process to make it more efficient and easier to navigate. These changes included a new and improved spousal sponsorship application package to make the process simpler and easier for sponsors and applicants to understand and use. Our aim was to improve the spousal sponsorship process, making it faster and easier for Canadians and permanent residents to reunite with their spouses. I would also add that it was done to simplify the whole process and reduce the numbers of pages and the amount of work to make it easier to complete the application.

All of those changes have yielded results, and over the past year, the Government of Canada has made the spousal sponsorship process faster and easier. We met the commitment to reduce the backlog of spousal sponsorship cases by 80%, and we have shortened the processing time from 26 months, which was the wait period under the former Conservative government, to now just 12 months. I think this is a great achievement.

The changes we have made to the spousal sponsorship program are helping to bring spouses and families together faster, which has made people much happier in Davenport, and I am very happy about it. This has a broader benefit for newcomers. It helps with settlement and integration. The aim of our settlement and integration program is to help newcomers integrate well into their communities and succeed. Speeding up family reunification helps them do just that, and we all benefit from it.

In terms of caregivers, good progress has also been made on reducing backlogs and improving processing times for caregivers. We recognize that the role caregivers have played is an important one in supporting our loved ones and in helping grow Canada's economy. For far too long, these people have been waiting to reunite with their own families. Caregivers have been facing wait times of up to four to five years.

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Our government has committed to eliminating the live-in caregiver program backlog by the end of 2018, and we have established a 12-month processing time for new applications, which is a significant decrease from the previous wait time of five to seven years. As one can imagine, it is awful when caretakers leave their countries and go to another country to help others, and then suffer in the end because they wait so long to be reunited with their families, which causes them great stress and other negative consequences. We took action, put resources in place, and put the right people in place to eliminate this backlog, and the result is a positive one for everyone.

With respect to the parent and grandparents program, we came into government making a commitment to those looking to bring in parents and grandparents. We quickly addressed the commitment to reunite more families and doubled the maximum number of parent and grandparent sponsorship applications accepted for processing, which went from 5,000 to 10,000. We also significantly reduced the inventory of applications by over 80%, going from 168,000 applications in 2011 to approximately 29,600 in December 2017. I am so proud of the progress we have made on this, and I know that it has been very positive for those families that have been affected.

The next area I want to talk about is economic immigration. Canadian businesses have been clear that to remain competitive, we have to be nimble and quick in attracting and retaining top talent, and so we have made two key changes.

One is the express entry system, which is used to manage applications for federal high-skilled programs and a portion of provincial nominee programs. At present, we are within a six-month service standard for applications for express entry, and we have virtually eliminated inventories of applications that were received for federal high-skilled economic programs prior to the express entry launch.

I am particularly proud that we have also rolled out the global skills strategy, which launched last June. Employers can now access the skilled talent they need in two weeks or less, while those coming for very short periods no longer require a work permit.

The final area to mention is temporary immigration. Temporary resident intake has increased by almost 50% over the last five years, going from 1.9 million in 2012 to an expected 2.8 million in 2017. A lot more people want to come to Canada, so we are now exploring pilot programs that will leverage technology that can help us process faster while preserving the safety and security of Canadians.

Madam Chair, I have run out of time. I have shared with you a lot of good news about reducing our backlogs and shortening our processing times, and I know I have some questions for—

• (2205)

The Deputy Chair: It is time for questions and comments.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Chair, I have been listening to the debate this evening, and there seems to be a lot of confusion. The immigration system and the asylum system are two different systems. They are resourced differently. They are processed differently. We have made enormous changes to the processing times and have made great gains that we are so proud of in the immigration system.

For some reason, the Conservatives are trying to pit the two different immigrant groups against each other. It is a tired, old game of division and fear. It seems that we have to repeat some of our questions to remind the opposite side of some of the answers.

Could the minister give us more details on what the government has done to reduce processing times and backlogs for the various lines of business?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague from Davenport for her speech. I know she is passionate about the issue of immigration. I also want to thank her for the good advice she has given me.

We have made significant progress in reducing wait times and inventories across permanent resident categories. We also continued to meet the ever-increasing demand for visas, work permits, and study permits. We have reduced wait times significantly for spouses, live-in caregivers, and highly skilled workers. As my colleague said, all this was made possible thanks to our multi-year immigration levels plan, as well as to the fact that our government has made immigration a priority.

All of these efforts were made possible because we implemented new procedures for processing applications as quickly as possible and new processes in foreign missions. Wait times have been reduced significantly, and we are proud of that.

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Chair, maybe I did not say this very well earlier, so I will clarify.

The opposition has said many times this evening that we have been hiving off a lot of our resources to process the asylum seekers we are seeing. However, all of my speech this evening has been about how we have actually invested heavily in our immigration system, and it has not suffered. Indeed, it has massively improved over the last two and half years that we have been in government. I am very proud of the changes, of the investments we have made, and of the improved system we have. Absolutely, our current immigration system is not suffering because we have additional asylum seekers crossing our border.

Can the minister tell us about any additional plans for further improving processing times and client service?

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[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, again, it is important to understand the distinction between these two very different systems, namely the asylum system and our regular immigration system. These two systems are totally different. The multi-year immigration levels plan will help us clear our backlogs and improve processing times for permanent residents. As I mentioned earlier, we want to reduce wait times across categories. That is what we have been doing so far, by giving priority to those categories.

Our next step will be to move towards a technological environment. We are going to use new technologies to process applications as quickly as possible.

Over the next year, we want to keep moving in that direction and reduce wait times across all categories of economic immigration.

• (2210)

[English]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Chair, one of the key things we have put in place over the last year and a half is a new director of client services. I wonder if the minister could talk a little more about the director of client services. What is the ambition, and how are we going to improve this system moving forward?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Chair, once again, we are very proud of this new director's appointment. We want to reduce wait times and expedite the process, which can sometimes be burdensome for applicants. That will help us to greatly reduce wait times and simplify our forms. Client service is one of our priorities, and we are determined to ensure that clients receive the best and quickest service possible from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Chair, I wonder if the minister can provide a rationale to the House as to why Canada has decided to vote against Mr. Ken Isaacs to be the Director General of the International Organization for Migration.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Chair, we work very closely with the International Organization for Migration as well as the UNHCR to assist us in overseas refugee resettlement. We are proud of the partnership we have with the IOM and UNHCR. They are invaluable partners for Canada for refugee referrals and refugee resettlement. They have played a key role in our Syrian refugee initiative as well as our Yazidi program.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, maybe the minister did not understand the question.

Why has Canada decided to vote against Mr. Ken Isaacs to be the Director General of the International Organization of Migration in the upcoming election for this position in June? Why has Canada decided to vote against him? Could the minister please tell the House?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the member opposite has not understood that the vote has not happened yet. It is in June.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the minister has made a decision to vote against him. I would like the minister to provide the

rationale to the House on why he has chosen to vote against this particular person.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the member opposite must have abilities that are beyond me to talk about an election that has not happened yet.

I can only speculate or talk about decisions that are made about elections that are happening now or have happened. As far as an election that will happen next month goes, I am not in a position to comment on the results of an election that has not occurred yet.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I will ask another way so that perhaps the minister can understand. I will make it a little more facile.

Will the minister be instructing Canada to vote for Mr. Ken Isaacs to be the Director General of the International Organization for Migration?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, once again, no vote has occurred yet. The election is in June. I would encourage the hon. member to look out for the election race at that time and to stay tuned for the results in June.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell the House if the election results are public or private? Is the ballot public or private?

• (2215)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, once again, the vote is in June. As I said, we are in May 2018. If the hon. member wants to talk about the results after the election, I would encourage her to wait until June to do so.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, is the ballot that is cast for the Director General of the International Organization for Migration public or private?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, it is quite fascinating that the official opposition is using its valued time to question a minister on the intricacies of voting at the International Organization for Migration.

I am actually very much enjoying this, predicting how elections will go one month from now and how different nations, including Canada, will cast their ballot. I would encourage the hon. member to keep this line of questioning going.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I am happy that the minister has given me the segue. The reason I am spending my time on this question is that if this candidate is not selected, the Americans have threatened to pull their funding from the International Organization for Migration, which is approximately \$300 million.

The minister has promised the IOM additional funding, which would also be part of this should the Americans pull this funding. This is why I am asking the minister if he is going to tell us how he is going to vote, because the ballot is happening in private and there is no additional funding in these estimates for the International Organization for Migration. All of my colleagues here have been laughing about this, but this could be a very costly decision for Canadians, as well as for the International Organization for Migration.

Business of Supply

The minister should know how he is going to vote, given the massive implications for funding for the Canadian public. He should be able to tell the House this information and not make fun of us, as well as the government House leader, who has been giggling the entire time.

Will the minister please stand up and tell the House how he plans to vote in the election for the Director General of the International Organization for Migration in the next month?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, we value the partnership that we have with the International Organization for Migration, as well as the UNHCR. We work very closely with them on the referral of cases as well as transportation of refugees who have been selected to come and live in Canada.

As far as the upcoming election in June 2018 goes, no decision has been taken. The decision by Canada to support a particular candidate will be decided on objective criteria. That vote will happen in June 2018.

As members are very well aware, we are in May 2018. No decision has been taken with respect to Canada's decision. Any decision that will be made with respect to supporting a candidate for heading up the International Organization for Migration will be decided on objective criteria.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, can the minister please tell the House which objective criteria he is referring to, and which candidate he feels best suits those objective criteria?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, as I said, the International Organization for Migration is a valued partner of Canada. We take our partnership with the IOM as well as the UNHCR very seriously. We have worked with them for many years in both the selection of refugee cases and in their referral to us, as well as in transporting refugees to Canada and interviewing them. No decision has been taken with respect to Canada's support of the future head of the International Organization for Migration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, what are the objective criteria that the minister just mentioned, and which candidate does the minister best feel suits those criteria, given that June is about a week away?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that the decision will be made based on objective criteria. No decision has been made yet on whom we will support as a country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, it is May 24, and we are sitting in the House of Commons. I am just wondering if the minister could tell the House what the objective criteria are that he is going to be using to make a decision for this country in a very short period of time.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, they are objective criteria, not subjective criteria, and the decision will be based on that. No decision has been made on whom to support as the future head of the IOM.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I suggest that there should be a list. What is the list of objective criteria that the minister is using to evaluate this very significant decision that could have significant implications with one of our major trading partners as we are entering into an agreement regarding NAFTA?

● (2220)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, with respect to the decision-making process of Canada, I am paid by Canadian tax dollars and therefore I make decisions in the best interests of Canadians and Canada. We do not make our decisions on this side of the House based on criteria from other countries. Based on objective criteria, we will support the candidate who serves the best interest of Canadians and of Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, what are the objective criteria?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I would be very pleased to table the objective criteria.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, June is next month. There are potentially hundreds of millions of dollars on the line, and we are looking at the main estimates. I am wondering if the minister has any idea whatsoever, given that he is making this decision, what the objective criteria are. One would think that the minister of the crown responsible for this decision, after he has expounded the virtues of the objective criteria, should be able to tell the House what the objective criteria are.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the member opposite can understand that we would of course support the right candidate based on objective criteria. If the member opposite is interested in knowing what those criteria are, we would be happy to table the objective criteria as soon as we are able to do so. The election has not happened. The decision has not been made. The election, once again, is in June. We are in May 2018. We will be making a decision on whom to support very soon.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, it is May 24. This is a significant decision. The minister has chided me for saying that he is making a decision based on objective criteria, so what are they?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I am again fascinated that the official opposition is using its valued time to question a minister to ask about the intricate details of an election that has not occurred yet and on a decision that we have not made yet. That decision will be based on objective criteria that serve the best interests of Canada and of Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the International Organization for Migration has asked for additional funds from the government. It has not responded to an audit that was done in the last couple of years with regard to service delivery that it has provided to Canada, and that audit found there were deficiencies. The current Director General sat in front of a parliamentary committee and has still not provided a response to our parliamentary committee on the deficiencies that were found therein.

The minister does not know what the objective criteria are—that is very clear—so I will ask him another question. Were there representatives from Canada sent to the party that Ambassador Nikki Haley just had at the United Nations in support of Mr. Ken Isaacs?

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Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, it is quite interesting that just in my previous response I made it very clear that we would be very pleased to table the criteria. Obviously, that is something that we are happy to commit to, and to indicate that I am not aware of the criteria for Canada's support for the next candidate to head the IOM is blatantly false. No decision has been made yet. Despite the insinuations of the member opposite, any decision that we make with respect to supporting the future head of the IOM will be based on Canadian interests and Canadian considerations, not on contributions of Fox News or The Rebel Media.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the minister just said that he knew what the objective criteria were. What are the objective criteria?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Foreign Affairs provides the final approval on Canada's IOM vote. The IOM is an important partner for Canada. The UNHCR is an important partner for Canada. We believe in multilateralism. That is why Canada is re-engaging with the world. We are signing more trade agreements than ever before. We are running for the Security Council.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, we should be providing input into this objective criteria process, given that the IOM is asking for hundreds of millions of dollars from Canada. Therefore, one would think that the minister would want to have some input into that criteria. What advice has the minister given with respect to which candidate he wants to see selected and why?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, it is very simple. No decision has been made. The election is not occurring this month; it is occurring in June 2018. Any decision that will be made in supporting a particular candidate will be based on objective criteria that is based on our national interests, not on the considerations of some far-right media outlet.

• (2225)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, June is next week and the minister ostensibly should have been providing feedback to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. What are the objective criteria that the minister is using? Are they things like the amount of investment that is being asked for? Is it new programming? Is it the ability to respond to some of the audit criteria?

I am just asking what advice the minister is providing, as the minister of the crown for immigration, with regard to which candidate he wants to select. What criteria or what advice has he provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, given the election is happening in about a week?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the election is on June 29. No decision has been made with respect to Canada's decision. Again, our decision to support the future head of the IOM will be based on the objective criteria, which I have indicated I am pleased to table to the House.

The member opposite has criticized the UN on a number of occasions. She has criticized other international partners time and again. Therefore, I am pleased that the party opposite has now woken up, finally, to Canada's role internationally, and the importance of multilateral organizations like the IOM and its value to our immigration system.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the forum of international organizations is a healthy thing. That is why the minister should be telling the House what criteria he is using to select a candidate who is going to be in charge of an international organization that is providing refugee and humanitarian support and is in charge of hundreds of millions of dollars. This is not a laughing matter. Why can he not tell the House what the objective criteria are? This is a huge issue in the international community right now. This is beyond bananas.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, what is not a laughing matter is cutting refugee health care. Where was the passion of that member when she was in office when her government demonized refugees, when it cut refugee health services to the most vulnerable people in the world, pregnant women, victims of torture? Where was she when live-in caregiver families had to wait five to seven years to reunite with their families? Where was she when Jason Kenney used to call refugees "bogus"? Where was she when her party set up snitch lines and un-Canadian values of isolating women from citizenship ceremonies? Where was her passion then?

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to begin by highlighting how our government is working to help families through immigration, especially by reducing backlogs and shortening processing times for newcomers to Canada.

I will deliver 10-minute remarks, using data provided by the great public servants of our country and not from Google or Wikipedia, and then I will ask a few questions.

As many of you know, moving to a new country can be difficult. That is why we allow people to immigrate with their spouses and children. My riding of Surrey Centre is home to thousands of new immigrants, in fact almost 1,000 a month. Last year, we implemented our promise to raise the age of eligible dependants who accompany their parents from under 19 to under 22. This allows more families to bring their older children with them. We also allow for subsequent sponsorship of other relatives, including parents, grandparents, and spouses.

However, many of my hon. colleagues have met newcomers who have faced the hardship of family separation. We all know how difficult it can be to hear the stories of people who have waited for a long period of time to bring their immigration process to fruition. That is why reuniting families has been and will continue to be one of the top immigration priorities of our country. It is clear to us that keeping families together helps to improve their integration into Canadian society, helps to improve their economic outcomes, and helps them to go on to contribute to their new homes in Canada.

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However, saying this is one thing and making it happen is another. In December 2016, we announced improvements to Canada's spousal sponsorship application process to make it more efficient and easier to navigate. These changes included new and improved spousal sponsorship application packages, which were made simpler for sponsors and applicants to understand and use.

Then, as part of our commitment to enhancing client services, we also responded to feedback from applicants and made additional improvements to the application package in June 2017. All along, the plan has been to improve the spousal sponsorship process and make it faster and easier for Canadians and permanent residents to unite with their loved ones. These initiatives have yielded results.

For example, in December 2016, there were almost 75,000 people in the backlog of global spouses and partners. As of the end of 2017, more than 80% of those people had received final decisions on their applications. This means that thanks to these changes, spouses and partners are being reunited here more quickly. In fact, we have cut wait times for spouses from 26 months down to 12 months.

These are important changes. Canadians with a partner or a spouse who is abroad should not have to wait for years to have that person immigrate, nor should those already here in Canada be left uncertain of whether they will be allowed to stay. We want all newcomers to integrate well into their communities and succeed. Speeding up family reunification helps them to do that, and we all benefit from it.

We continue to listen to our clients, and we continue to work to improve the process. The government overhauled the spousal application package to make it more straightforward, simpler to navigate, and easier to understand. We have also made some changes to avoid unnecessary delays due to the submission of documents. Now spousal applicants submit their schedule A, the background declaration forms, as well as police certificates, as part of their initial paper application process. This helps to process applications even more quickly. I should note that the government will continue to listen to those who are in the application process and, based on their feedback, will act to continually improve service.

Allow me to add a few words on our actions to reunite Canadian citizens and permanent residents with their parents and grandparents. We continue to improve Canada's sponsorship program for parents and grandparents because it, too, helps to strengthen both Canadian society and our economy. We realize that helping people reunite with their parents and grandparents is an important issue for many families in this country. As a result, we've made the parent and grandparent program more fair and transparent, and we are working with potential sponsors to ensure that they are informed and aware of what they need to do in this process.

• (2230)

We doubled the maximum number of parent and grandparent sponsorship applications for processing, from 5,000 to 10,000. We also significantly reduced the inventory of applications by over 80%, from 168,000 applications in 2011 to approximately 29,600 in December 2017. As well, it is worth noting that families can also consider the parent and grandparent super visa, which allows holders to stay in Canada for up to two years on the initial visit compared to six months for a regular visa.

Finally, I will outline the actions we have taken to improve the processing of applications under the previous live-in caregiver program, which was closed in 2014 with a significant inventory of outstanding applications. In fact, in my office alone, I had over 40 such live-in caregivers who had been waiting for more than seven years to get their applications processed.

Our government places great value on the services that caregivers provide to families and communities in Canada. We recognize the role they have played in supporting Canadian children and aging parents, in contributing to communities, and in helping to grow Canada's economy. Because of this, our government will continue to ensure that caregivers and their families are reunited in Canada faster.

To respond to this, the government is committed to eliminating at least 80% of the backlog of live-in caregiver program cases by the end of this year. In fact, we have already reduced the wait time for caregivers from seven years to less than 12 months. This is an achievement that we can all be proud of, as it allows working caregivers to reunite with their families much more quickly.

Under the current caregiver programs, processing times are even shorter, at six months or less. As the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has stated, we will continue to ensure that caregivers have a pathway to permanent residency. In fact, we are currently reviewing the programs we provide with a view to improving them.

I keep hearing my Conservative colleagues state that irregular migrants are taking spots or are causing delays in the immigration of regular migrants, but in my riding of Surrey Centre, nothing could be further from the truth. Wait times for every category—live-in caregiver, family, and spousal—have decreased. Wait times in the economic categories of express entry or government-sponsored refugees have also decreased.

In closing, I note that our government is determined to support the families of people who immigrate to Canada. We will do so whether by reuniting spouses and partners, improving programs for parents and grandparents, or by reducing the backlog of caregiver applications. The improvements we have made to our programs will continue to help newcomers integrate, build stronger ties, and to contribute to the future of Canada.

• (2235)

The Chair: I would ask the hon. member to stay on his feet and go ahead with his questions.

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Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, can the minister or the parliamentary secretary tell us how they have reunited families in Canada, particularly through changes and improvements to the spousal program?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague from Surrey Centre for his speech and for the excellent work that he does on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

It is unacceptable for spouses to be separated for a long period of time. That is why we promised Canadians that we would reunite these families as quickly as possible.

We have reduced the backlog by over 80% and cut processing times from 26 months under the Conservative government to less than 12 months, so that spouses can be reunited as quickly as possible. We also simplified the application process so that these people can be repatriated as quickly as possible.

We are proud of that commitment. We promised to ensure that spouses are reunited as quickly as possible and we kept our word. Once again, processing times have been reduced from 26 months to 12 months, and we are very proud of that.

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, I would also like to ask what the department is doing to ensure that permanent residence applications for caregivers are being processed quickly and efficiently, and that caregivers who arrive as temporary workers continue to have a pathway to permanent residency.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, we made it possible for caregivers, who are a tremendous help to Canadian families, to be reunited as quickly as possible. We are committed to guaranteeing that these caregivers will become permanent residents as quickly as possible.

We are also proud to have processed the backlog of caregiver cases. By the end of 2018, we will have processed all of the outstanding files. We have already made quite a bit of progress. For example, the number of backlogged files fell from 62,000 in 2014 to just 16,000 in February 2018.

We also have a processing time of 12 months for new applications, compared to the previous five to seven years under the Conservatives. We are committed to reuniting caregivers as quickly as possible. We also eliminated the \$1,000 processing fee for the labour market impact assessment. We did this for spouses, caregivers, and other categories of citizens, to reunite these families as quickly as possible.

I think Canadians can clearly see that this is a priority for this government. These families will be reunited as quickly as possible, as long as we are in government.

• (2240)

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in British Columbia, and in my riding of Surrey

Centre. Hotels, restaurants, and the tourism industry depend on tourism. Could the minister tell the House how many visas were granted in 2017, particularly from the two fastest-growing economies, China and India? How many of those visitors were granted 10-year multiple-entry visas?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, we know that people who come to Canada as tourists or to be with family are very important. As I said, we want those people to come to Canada. We also want people coming to Canada to be screened so they can come here safely.

Our priority is to make sure tourists and people with family members in Canada can be with their families here. In the past year, we have been working hard to process applications from people who want to come to Canada as quickly as possible. We will keep working hard to make that happen because we want our immigration services to be one of the best services we offer.

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, we keep hearing from the other side that all these resources are being taken away and wait times in regular streams of immigration are increasing. However, in my riding of Surrey Centre, the wait time for every single stream of immigration has decreased, whether it is live-in caregivers, family class, or spousal class. I would like to ask the minister whether there is any stream of immigration where wait times have increased past the 2015 Harper Conservative government, and whether we have had any delays to any stream of immigration, economic or family-wise.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, what I can say is that, under our government, wait times have decreased considerably. For example, for spouses and live-in caregivers, processing times have dropped from 26 months under the Conservatives to 12 months under our government. We want to reunite families as quickly as possible. We want those families to contribute to the Canadian economy as quickly as possible. That is a priority for our government. The historic multi-year plan we implemented will help us continue to reduce processing times. We will shrink the backlog and reunite families as quickly as possible. That is what Canadians want from our government.

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[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, as a follow-up to my colleagues who thought that only we have gotten irregular migrants, I understand that irregular migrants have happened in the past. There were spikes in 2014 and 2012. Did the previous government ever shut this so-called loophole in the safe third country agreement, or did it ever designate the 9,000-kilometre border as a legal border crossing?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, on the issue of making the 9,000-kilometre-long border almost impenetrable, I would remind members that the previous government slashed more than \$400 million from border resources. The Conservatives are now asking us to put resources along the entire border which spans 9,000 kilometres. I think that is a ridiculous idea, and Canadians know that it is unrealistic.

We will continue to hold discussions with our American counterparts on different matters related to immigration, and we will continue to ensure that our immigration system is robust and effective, and that it protects the security and well-being of all Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, can the minister tell the House how many people who have had valid ETAs issued to them from countries that have recently had visas lifted, meaning Mexico, Romania, and Bulgaria, have subsequently had to be removed on the direction of the CBSA or immigration officials prior to their boarding a plane?

• (2245)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to provide the member with the objective criteria that I mentioned earlier for the future head of the International Organization for Migration. Some of the criteria that we ask ourselves include, what is the candidate's experience working on global migration? What is the candidate's experience working in the area of humanitarian assistance? Does the candidate have experience working with national governments? Does the candidate have experience building consensus across national governments? What is the extent of the candidate's experience working in or with civil society? What is the extent of the candidate's financial and people management experience? Has the candidate demonstrated management excellence in previous positions?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, how many people from countries that have recently had visas lifted—Mexico, Romania, and Bulgaria—been offloaded from planes or been told they could not board?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we have issued over 7.8 million electronic travel authorizations.

Let me get back to the objective criteria. We are looking for someone to head the International Organization for Migration who has leadership experience. Does the candidate have experience leading an organization of similar size, budget, or otherwise as the IOM? Does the candidate have experience leading organizational change?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the minister just spent some time talking about tourism.

I have heard significant concerns from airlines that they are now being required to offload passengers from countries that have had visa exemptions lifted where valid ETAs have been issued. We have seen a spike in asylum claims from countries like Romania and Mexico and are now in a situation where airlines are being charged with removing passengers for whom the government has already issued ETAs.

I do not see any plans in these estimates by the government to indemnify or compensate airlines for having to remove passengers who have booked tickets, but whom the airlines then have to offload because the RCMP, the CBSA, or immigration officials have instructed the airlines to remove them. We know there are many people who have been in this boat in recent months, particularly Romanian nationals.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the Mexican visa lift has done a tremendous job at restoring and revitalizing our important relationship with Mexico, a relationship that was damaged considerably by the party opposite.

The Mexican visa lift has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of tourists, international students, and other business travellers coming to Canada. It has already injected over \$700 million into the Canadian economy, resulting in lasting economic benefits for Canada.

We are proud of the fact that we lifted the visa requirement on Mexico. We are working closely with Mexican officials to make sure that we address any risks and that the visa lift remains sustainable.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I will just repeat the question because I am not sure the minister has understood it.

Airlines are expressing concerns to members of Parliament that they are absorbing costs because the government is issuing electronic authorizations for countries that have had recent visa lifts. I am wondering if the minister is considering indemnifying or compensating airlines for this issue given the volume of people this is happening to. If he is considering doing that, I am wondering why it is not in these budgetary estimates.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the first and foremost responsibility of our government is the safety and security of Canadians. That is why we are proud of the fact that the electronic travel authorization allows us to push back our border and prevent people who are a threat to Canadian society from even being able to board a plane to come to Canada.

We are proud of the fact that we have issued over 7.8 million electronic travel authorizations. We have had the ability to use information-sharing abilities with the United States and other partners to ensure that people who may pose a risk to Canadian society do not get on those planes.

Business of Supply

On the issue of moving forward with the eTA, we are proud of our record, and we will continue to make the necessary investments to make sure that it continues to operate smoothly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, just to clarify for the minister, I would like him to give this some thought. The issue is that, yes, electronic travel authorizations are being issued, but they are then being rescinded for people who have bought tickets, and they are being rescinded and enforced by airlines. That seems to me perhaps not the best and most efficient or effective way to manage the eTA system. I believe this is going to have an impact on both tourism and our asylum claim system.

I think the minister misunderstood my question, but we will move on to something else.

How many cases have been finalized at the IRB of asylum claims that have been made by people who have illegally crossed the border into Canada from the United States since the beginning of 2016?

• (2250)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, what did considerable damage to our tourism industry were the inefficiencies in processing visas by the previous government. It did not make visa processing and immigration processing a priority.

I have made it a priority to make sure that I visit as many visa offices as possible to ensure that we institute best practices, we introduce efficiencies, we reduce red tape to make sure that we encourage more and more people to apply electronically so that they are able to follow and track their applications on line.

We will make sure that this year we succeed in making sure that this is the year of Canada-China tourism.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, will the minister table with the House, in the next week, the number of cases of asylum claims that have been heard by the IRB made by people who have illegally entered Canada from the United States and subsequently claimed asylum since the beginning of 2016?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that we are the government that is making the necessary investments in border security and making the necessary investments in the Immigration and Refugee Board. Why? It is because faster processing of asylum claims is critically important to legitimate refugee claimants so that they can proceed with their lives, and not live in limbo, and contribute back to Canadian society.

Those who are found not to need Canada's protection are removed from Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I will take that as a no. That is a very important number for parliamentarians to have, and it is unfortunate that the minister has decided not to table that with the House. In fact, I think that is a lack of transparency.

I am wondering if the minister is considering a change to the policy that essentially states that regulated career colleges cannot have international students attending their institutions become eligible for the post-graduate work permit. If he is considering a change to that process or that ruling, when does he anticipate seeing a change to it being implemented?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, we work very closely with the provinces, and we listened to them when they asked us to make the necessary changes to the immigration system. This is an example of that. They came forward and told us that some private colleges were not abiding by the terms of the post-graduate work permit. They asked us to make those necessary changes. We listened, and we did that.

When it comes to international students, we welcomed 272,000 international students in 2016. That number jumped to more than 300,000 last year.

I am the first immigration minister in Canadian history to not only do outreach to prospective international students to tell them to come and study in Canada, but the first to tell them that we want as many of them to stay in Canada as possible, because they will make great Canadian citizens.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, again, I am not clear on what the minister's policy is on that, but we will move on. I am sure that the career colleges will be disappointed with that response.

We have asked a lot of questions in the House, and this is a concern I hope all parliamentarians share, about the plight of gay Chechen men, many of whom have faced extreme persecution, and still do. Many were placed in concentration camps on the basis of their sexuality. I think everyone in this House would condemn that action.

My understanding is that only 39 men were brought to Canada under the program the government lauded and that the program was shut down at the end of 2017. I would implore the minister, and I would ask him out of respect, to please reinstate that program.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that our government has been steadfast in promoting the rights of the LGBTQ2 community both domestically and abroad. That extends into our refugee program. We have worked very closely with the UNHCR and private sponsors to prioritize LGBTQ2 refugees. We have extended funding to the Rainbow Refugee Society. Promotion of LGBTQ2 community rights, both in Canada and abroad, is and will remain a priority for our government.

• (2255)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I did not hear an extension of that program for gay Chechen men, so I will give the minister another opportunity to respond.

However, first, he just said that his government has a commitment to LGBTQI refugees. That is a passion that I share too. I think that they are among the world's most vulnerable people, and they should be prioritized for resettlement to Canada.

Business of Supply

My understanding is that the minister has not yet committed to making the Rainbow Refugee RRAP a regular program. The program has been highly successful, and I want to commend the work of many outreach groups in Canada that have worked so hard to make it such a success. My understanding is that the minister has not committed to making it a regular program with regular funding, but he is committing hundreds of millions of dollars to deal with the crisis at Roxham Road. To me, this is a mishmash of priorities. I wonder if the minister will commit to making the Rainbow RRAP program an ongoing, regularly funded program within his ministry.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, a promotion of LGBTQ2 rights, both in Canada and abroad, is a top priority for our government. We have raised issues with respect to the rights of LGBTQ2 individuals all over the world and the private sponsorship of refugees. We have privately sponsored LGBTQ2 refugees to Canada under the Rainbow Refugee assistance program. The department provides up to \$50,000 a year in support to this program. We have recently announced and have extended this agreement for the next two years. This shows that we remain committed to this wonderful program that allows LGBTQ2 refugees to be resettled in Canada.

We work very closely with the UNHCR to identify the most vulnerable people, including members of the LGBTQ2 community.

The Chair: There are about two minutes left.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, the figure that the minister just used was \$50,000. He just touted \$50,000 for LGBTQI refugees. The minister gave \$149 million to the government of Quebec to deal with the Roxham Road crisis. He allocated \$179 million in this budget to deal with the processing of paperwork of people who are coming from the United States of America, which is a safe country, illegally into Canada to claim asylum, and he just touted \$50,000 for LGBTQI refugees.

However, the minister did not do two things. He did not say that he would extend the program that he cancelled in 2017 for gay Chechen men who have been in concentration camps, and he did not say that he would make the Rainbow RRAP program a regular program, which speaks comparatively to the billions of dollars that the government is throwing at the border instead of closing a loophole in the safe third country agreement, and he did not commit to that either. It is a question of priorities.

Canada should have a compassionate, fair immigration system. We should welcome refugees. We should ensure that this is done in a planned, orderly fashion so that we are supporting the world's most vulnerable. I cannot stand here in good conscience and support spending hundreds of millions of dollars, if not billions of dollars, to facilitate an issue caused when people who have reached the United States of America are illegally entering this country to claim asylum, causing backlogs in the IRB and backlogs at homeless shelters in Toronto. We are now talking about shifting people and diverting people one way or the other, and it is not planned or orderly and it is not compassionate.

The minister stands up here to talk about \$50,000 for a program to save people who legitimately are being tortured for their sexuality. He can stand up and talk about all of these platitudes, but when the rubber hits the road on prioritizing allocation of funding for the

world's most vulnerable, the government continues to fail. It is a serious problem, because Canada should be looked at as a world leader in these issues.

I just hope that anybody listening tonight will understand that it is a failure in a broken system to talk about \$50,000 or hundreds of millions of dollars to ignore a program that could be solved through smart legislation.

I want to say that I give up, but we are going to keep fighting for the people of Canada.

The Chair: The time has expired, but I want to give the hon. minister equal time to respond.

The hon. Minister of Immigration.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, the fact is that we have doubled the number of resettled refugees to Canada. We have quadrupled the number of privately sponsored refugees. The \$50,000 refers to one funding stream to one particular organization that facilitates the private sponsorship of LGBTQ2 refugees.

However, the member opposite talks about compassion. I wonder where her compassion was when she sat at the cabinet table when the Harper Conservatives cut refugee health care to the most vulnerable people in the world, pregnant women, victims of torture. LGBTQ2 refugees had to go without refugee health care because of the decisions made by the Harper Conservatives. Where was the member opposite then? She sat at the cabinet table.

Where was she when the Harper Conservatives took in an unlimited number of applications, but had very limited output in the privately sponsored program, 4,500 spots per year? We have quadrupled that number to 17,000 this year. We have created extra spots for vulnerable women and girls. We have ensured that our private refugee program processing time has come down by 25 months. We have ensured the IRB has the necessary resources to ensure refugee claims are heard fairly and quickly so legitimate refugees can move on with their lives and those who are deemed not to need Canada's protection can be promptly removed.

That is our record and I would compare that record against the Harper Conservative record any day.

• (2300)

The Chair: It being 11:03 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported.

The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

*Business of Supply**[Translation]*

(The House adjourned at 11:04 p.m.)

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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