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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, September 24, 2018

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1100)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. Colleagues, the devastating tornadoes of last Friday have taken an enormous toll on the citizens of Ottawa-Gatineau. Many have sustained damage to their homes. Some have even lost everything and must now rebuild their lives, including some employees of the House of Commons. Therefore, I would like to take a moment to thank those who have made it possible for us to fulfill our responsibilities as members of Parliament today, the employees who worked over the weekend to ensure that the parliamentary precinct could function safely and effectively, and the dedicated hydro workers and first responders who have accomplished miracles in restoring power and maintaining order throughout the affected region.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to express my admiration and appreciation for the national capital region MPs, who have been working non-stop to help their constituents.

Many residents of Ottawa and Gatineau were hit hard by Friday's tornadoes. I encourage all those who can lend their neighbours a hand to do so.

[*English*]

It being 11:05 a.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

BILLS OF EXCHANGE ACT

The House resumed from March 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-369, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Indigenous Peoples Day), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too share and echo your

sentiments vis-à-vis the people of Ottawa-Gatineau, as well as the first responders and all those who were involved in assisting the families who were deeply affected by the events of last Friday.

I am honoured to contribute to this debate. I am pleased to acknowledge that I do so on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

I thank the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for introducing this bill. I also thank her for her ongoing work to achieve reconciliation.

[*English*]

The idea behind this bill is to establish a national holiday that will allow Canadians to reflect upon and understand the long and painful history relating to indigenous people. The road to reconciliation between Canada and indigenous peoples requires all Canadians to understand our shared history and acknowledge past wrongs while creating a path forward. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action provide all Canadians with this renewed path forward for Canada's journey of healing and reconciliation.

This bill is inspired by call to action 80, which states:

We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

That is why when the calls to action were released in June 2015, the Prime Minister, who was then the leader of the Liberal Party in opposition, immediately affirmed the unwavering support of the Liberal Party of Canada and our parliamentary caucus for all the TRC's recommendations and called on the Government of Canada to take immediate action to implement them. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report in December 2015, the Prime Minister then committed the Government of Canada to working "...in partnership with Indigenous communities, the provinces, territories, and other vital partners, we will fully implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

Private Members' Business

This past June, our government supported and passed Bill C-262, an act to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, also known as UNDRIP. In February, our government established a recognition of rights framework, which is a fundamental shift in approach between Canada and indigenous peoples. Today, there are over 60 rights recognition tables around the country that seek to advance the process of this recognition and ultimately self-determination.

Our Prime Minister noted earlier this year that reconciliation calls upon all of us to confront our past and commit to charting a brighter, more inclusive future. We must acknowledge that centuries of colonial practices have denied the inherent rights of indigenous peoples. The recognition and implementation of indigenous rights will chart a new way forward for our government to work with first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to undo decades of mistrust, poverty, broken promises and injustices.

We have listened and learned, and we will work together to take concrete action to build a better future and a new relationship. Over the past three budgets, the government has invested significantly to advance the implementation of the calls to action and to support the crucial work with our indigenous partners to identify and address joint priorities. In fact, progress has already been made on over 80% of the calls to action under federal and/or shared responsibility. However, we know that more must be done and that we need to be held accountable for advancing this crucial work.

[*Translation*]

The National Council for Reconciliation's interim board of directors presented its final report to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations on June 12. According to the final report, setting up a national council for long-term reconciliation with adequate funding and enabling legislation is important for indigenous peoples, Canadians and the government. The council will have to report periodically to ensure ongoing oversight and accountability on implementing the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action.

[*English*]

The National Council for Reconciliation's mandate will be to advance reconciliation efforts through the development and implementation of a multi-year national action plan for reconciliation.

The conclusion of the final report makes the following poignant observation:

We believe that hope is the first step in reconciliation. We believe hope is the basic building block upon which reconciliation must lay its foundation. We must plant and nurture seeds of hope in Indigenous communities and in the greater Canadian public. Hope gives us the belief that all action matters, no matter how small and no matter by whom. With trust, Canadians and Indigenous peoples can work together on building a new future, a better future. It all begins with hope.

We also need all Canadians to know what progress is being made.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has opened the eyes of many Canadians to the horrific truths of residential schools.

The Indian residential school system was a systematic plan to remove indigenous children from their homes, families and cultures to facilitate the stated policy of “killing the Indian in the child.”

During my tenure on the indigenous affairs committee, we heard from so many survivors of the residential school system. The member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has shared his experience with all of us and has educated all of us in the House of his time in residential schools. Survivors like him continue to educate all Canadians of our past but equally, inspire us to do better.

All Canadians have a responsibility to educate themselves about this dark chapter of our shared history and work toward repairing the intergenerational damage caused by this appalling policy.

This is why our government is unequivocally committed to the implementation of the TRC calls to action and will be supporting sending this legislation to committee for further study.

"Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one." These are words from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and words that the member from Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River quoted in her speech when she introduced the bill that we are debating today. I wholeheartedly agree with this sentiment.

Healing the damage of residential schools will require the sustained action of not only involved governments, but other institutions and all Canadians.

The need to achieve reconciliation is a fundamental truth and is beyond partisan politics. That is why I am so pleased that the recent motion put forward by the member for Timmins—James Bay calling on the Pope to implement call to action 58 and issue an apology on behalf of the Catholic Church to residential school survivors, their families and communities passed with the overwhelming support of the House.

We look forward to working across party lines to ensure that this legislation fulfills call to action 80 and reflects the “collaboration with aboriginal peoples” contained in its text.

Together, we will chart a path forward that advances reconciliation and builds a stronger future for indigenous peoples and Canadians alike.

● (1110)

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-369, an act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Indigenous Peoples Day).

This bill would make National Indigenous Peoples Day a statutory holiday. As a result, about 6% of the labour force would be impacted by this change. This bill would grant a holiday for employees of the federal government and federally regulated businesses only. It would not affect employees who are not subject to the Canada Labour Code.

Private Members' Business

National Indigenous Peoples Day has been proudly supported and celebrated by Conservatives, both while in government and as the official opposition. Indigenous peoples form an integral part of our country and their histories, cultures and traditions should be recognized and celebrated by all Canadians.

Every year our party encourages Canadians to take part in the local National Indigenous Peoples Day celebrations so that we can all learn more about the rich history and traditions of indigenous peoples throughout this country, as well as the tremendous contributions which indigenous peoples have made to this country to make it what it is today, a better place to live.

In my city of Saskatoon, National Indigenous Peoples Day events are always something to look forward to. They are celebrations that help bring the whole community together in the spirit of diversity, understanding and, of course, learning. Every year in June, National Indigenous Peoples Day is one of the major events in my city of Saskatoon. The event is held in Victoria Park where the celebrations begin in the morning with a pipe ceremony. The event this year was followed by Rock Your Roots and a walk for reconciliation which was very well attended. Hundreds of people lined the streets of Saskatoon on this walk. It is an excellent opportunity for everyone to come together in the spirit of reconciliation. I was very proud to see the display of unity in my city.

The celebrations offered a very important opportunity for children and youth to learn about the rich and diverse cultural heritage of first nations and Métis peoples within my province of Saskatchewan. Additionally, the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre hosted numerous activities this year, which allowed young people to both observe and participate in a first nations dance, along with songs and teachings. I think this is particularly important for the young people of our province. These celebrations are very successful and they are important to the entire community.

When we discuss the impact of the addition of a new statutory holiday, we need to really think about whether we have gathered all the right information to make an informed decision. As my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has stated before in the House, we need to know the economic impact related to the implementation of this new statutory holiday. If we do not have this information available to us, it is hard for us to know what kind of effects the addition of a new statutory holiday would have on Canada's economy. It is important to note that in discussing whether to add a new statutory holiday to Canada's Labour Code, we are not considering at all whether we should re-examine any of the existing statutory holidays. Specifically, we are not looking at whether we should remove some of the existing holidays going forward.

These factors are very crucial to our understanding of the economic impact associated with this bill, which in turn informs our decision-making. We must also consider whether statutory holidays have the desired effect on increasing the learning and awareness of these events and traditions which they are meant to honour and celebrate.

• (1115)

Currently, National Indigenous Peoples Day ceremonies and celebrations across the country enjoy a wide attendance by people from all walks of life. In June, here in the national capital region, I

was happy to attend this year's ceremony near the Canadian Museum of History. A number of people attended the morning ceremony. Traditional sunrise ceremonies are enjoyed by all as they mark the beginning of a day filled with diverse cultural celebrations across the country.

We need to be concerned about the impact a statutory holiday might have on all of these celebrations and cultural festivities. Similar concerns have been raised by officials. We have had a debate in the House about whether Remembrance Day should be a statutory holiday. Different regulations exist throughout the country concerning the status of Remembrance Day in terms of whether it is a statutory holiday or not. Keep in mind that since 1970, the Royal Canadian Legion has come out against the resolution to make the day a statutory holiday. One official from the Royal Canadian Legion, Bill Maxwell, highlighted his concerns with making Remembrance Day a statutory holiday and stated that by institutionalizing it as a statutory holiday, the impression is that people would stay at home and would not make an effort to attend a ceremony downtown on November 11.

Last Thursday afternoon, I sat in on a meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. David Chartrand, president of the Manitoba Métis Federation, echoed those same sentiments. He said that we do not really need a statutory holiday for Remembrance Day and he wonders if we even need one for National Indigenous Peoples Day. With a day as important as National Indigenous Peoples Day, we need to take great care to ensure that it does not risk becoming a holiday that is robbed of its significance by being viewed by employees as simply a day away from work.

Reconciliation with our first nations, Métis and Inuit communities is a process that all Canadians should be committed to and should support. We must make every effort to guarantee that indigenous peoples across the country receive fair and equitable access to education, economic development and employment and training opportunities. These are all fundamental aspects of reconciliation and they are vital issues which the Liberal government is failing to address.

In 2016, a report by the C.D. Howe Institute found that only four in 10 young adults living on reserve across Canada have completed high school compared to graduation rates of seven in 10 for indigenous peoples living off reserve, and nine in 10 for non-indigenous Canadians. These statistics are totally unacceptable and clearly show the vast difference in the kinds of education opportunities that are available to communities on reserve compared to everywhere else in the country. These differences act as a barrier to reconciliation, yet the Liberals have broken their promise to close the education gap between on reserve and off reserve. The consequences of this broken promise for the on-reserve communities are numerous and severe. The same 2016 report highlighted that these low graduation rates had many negative repercussions on reserve, which include unemployment, poverty and limited social and economic opportunities.

Private Members' Business

While we need to make sure we know what the impact of the designation of National Indigenous Peoples Day as a statutory holiday would be, the empirical data on the question is lacking. As a result, we cannot be clear at all in our discussions on the matter because we are missing key personnel information. The intentions of the bill may be well meaning, but we must also think about whether a statutory holiday is in fact the best way to preserve the meaning of National Indigenous Peoples Day.

● (1120)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House today to support not just Bill C-369 but the tireless efforts and tremendous work of my colleague, the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

The member is a Dene woman from Saskatchewan, who served her community as mayor of La Loche for 12 years and worked with the RCMP's aboriginal advisory committee for almost a decade to help build safer communities in the north. She is a role model for all Canadians, especially for young indigenous women across this country. As a passionate advocate, she continues to demand action from government so that the people in her community are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. As an indigenous woman, her consistent and persistent advocacy aims to ensure that the voices of the first peoples are heard.

On this note, the member has brought before us Bill C-369. This bill would make June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day, a statutory holiday in Canada. This bill would also fulfill recommendation 80 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. While I was relieved to hear over the summer that, after months of silence, the Liberal government was ready to support the member's bill, I was truly disappointed that it made a partisan effort to undermine the work of my colleague. In going forward with this approach, the government did not even pause to stop to consult with my colleague on a bill which she brought forward. Throughout our society and history, successive governments have actively sidelined the role and voice of indigenous peoples, particularly indigenous women, and it was very disappointing to see the government continue to do this even while attempting to engage in acts of reconciliation.

I believe it is of utmost importance to continually reflect on the words of the TRC, when it stated, "Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered." This calls for collective actions across communities, across levels of government, across party lines and across Canada for reconciliation and the recognition of the history, rights, cultures and languages of first nations, Métis and Inuit people throughout our country. It is a reminder that reconciliation falls on settler society, not on indigenous people.

Passing Bill C-369 would not tackle all the socio-economic challenges met by indigenous communities, but it would provide a time and space for reflection on Canada's colonial history and its current effects on the rights of first nations, Métis and Inuit communities across the country.

The government has signalled that there are two dates being considered for a statutory holiday and also that changing the name to

the national day of truth and reconciliation is being considered. June 21 is a date significant to first nations, Métis and Inuit people and is already established as National Indigenous Peoples Day. It is already marked by celebrations across Canada. It falls on the summer solstice, a date that historically has marked a celebration of indigenous culture and heritage. It is my understanding that the government is thinking about changing the date to September 30, Orange Shirt Day.

While Orange Shirt Day is an important one, a day that first nations, local communities, local governments and schools come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for generations of children to come, I share the concerns of my colleague that by co-opting and renaming National Indigenous Peoples Day as Orange Shirt Day as a day of truth and reconciliation would be harmful to the ongoing project of reconciliation. It would be an act of taking a day of celebration and changing it to a day of recognizing settler violence and apologies. In effect, it would be shifting the focus away from indigenous people and toward settler society. This would undermine the valuable and difficult work under way from coast to coast to coast of indigenous activists in communities, which are tirelessly working to build up and restore indigenous lifeways in Canada.

● (1125)

By extension, recognizing September 30 as a statutory holiday would also further the narrative of violence experienced by indigenous people in Canada. Without doubt, settler societies' understanding of the legacy of residential schools is critical and important. However, continuing to limit the national experience of most Canadians to that of recognizing a day of violence toward indigenous people would do little to empower indigenous communities and to foster an environment in which first nations, Métis and Inuit life ways could grow and flourish.

My riding of Vancouver East is home to the Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society and the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society, to name just two of the many important indigenous organizations in my riding. Last year, Freida Gladue of the Family Services Society and Susan Tatoosh of the Friendship Centre Society were interviewed by the Vancouver Sun about making National Indigenous Peoples Day a statutory holiday. Ms. Gladue noted the importance of providing Canadians from all walks of life the opportunity to learn about, experience and participate in the celebrations of indigenous people. She stated, "It should be a stat holiday for everyone. A lot of my friends are calling to say they can't come because they have to work today."

As most of us may recall, this year the House was sitting on June 21, so like far too many Canadians, I was unable to attend the celebrations in my community because I was here in the House of Commons. Ms. Tatoosh described the importance of the day, stating that it is "a day where we get to promote our pride, our culture and our status as citizens of Canada. We share our culture, our achievements, our culture and dances and through this outreach, we support the concept of reconciliation."

Private Members' Business

I do not want to diminish the critical work of reconciliation through the recognition of generations of injustice, mistreatment, discrimination and the further generational impacts of the events that continue to this day. However, that work should not erase the need to acknowledge the beauty of Canada's indigenous peoples, their cultures and languages by honouring and celebrating them.

Promoting and sharing the depth of first peoples' culture and teachings through events that celebrate them helps build bridges between communities. Through this effort, we are moving the goalposts from the notion of tolerance to appreciation, and from appreciation to respect, and from respect to celebration. In doing so, we are working together to change the necessity of preserving indigenous culture from an act of defiance to an act of appreciation, from an act of tightly holding on to one's identity to an act of sharing with others who you are, with open arms. It means creating the space for indigenous cultures in Canada not only to survive, but also to thrive. That in my opinion is what true reconciliation entails.

Establishing June 21 as a statutory holiday across Canada would help provide that space. It is far overdue, and I hope that all members will stand united in taking this step toward reconciliation and support my colleague's bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this significant moment in our history, a moment to move forward to celebrate and acknowledge our first peoples and the gift they have given to all of us as immigrants, namely, a place to call home and a place to belong. It is absolutely time for us to ensure that the first peoples are equal partners at the table and for all Canadians to understand the importance of first peoples in Canadian history.

Once again, I call on all members to support this bill.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by acknowledging that the lands on which we are gathered to discuss the important legislation introduced by my colleague from Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River are part of the unceded traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

From a reconciliation perspective, since that is precisely the focus of my argument, I think it is especially important to emphasize that point so that everyone here in the House is well aware of the context surrounding our debate on this bill.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute the Mashteuiatsh Innu first nation and the Saguenay Native Friendship Centre, which are located in my region, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

It is time to make National Indigenous Peoples Day a statutory holiday in Canada. There are currently no federal statutory holidays dedicated to indigenous peoples. National Indigenous Peoples Day exists and is recognized, but it is not a statutory holiday. We do have precedents, however, as other jurisdictions in this country have enacted legislation to make June 21 a statutory holiday. Bill C-369 calls on the federal government to do the same, to show some leadership and set an example for the provincial and territorial governments that have not yet created this statutory holiday.

In its report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made it clear that reconciliation is not an indigenous issue; it is a Canadian issue. To achieve true reconciliation, we may be called upon to re-examine all aspects of Canadian society. This is indeed a call to action, to concerted action on the part of all governments in Canada and all communities in the interest of reconciliation with first nations, Métis and Inuit. Merely recognizing these peoples is not enough. We must also recognize their history, their rights, their cultures and their languages.

By passing Bill C-369, the House of Commons would be sending a clear message about its intention to create space for reconciliation. Once established, this national holiday will serve as a reminder to us all of what it really means to have a treaty-based nation-to-nation relationship. It will also be an expression of respect for the historic and cultural importance of first nations, Métis and Inuit.

Obviously this bill is not necessarily going to resolve all the socio-economic problems that indigenous peoples face, problems that my party raises in the House all the time, but it will provide a time and place for reflecting on our colonial history and its lasting effects on the rights of the first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across the country.

For example, a statutory holiday could become an opportunity to organize events to commemorate and raise awareness about victims of residential schools and Canada's colonial system, the effects of which still weigh heavily on indigenous peoples today.

It is rather obvious that my colleague's bill is not a new idea. In 1982, the National Indian Brotherhood, now known as the Assembly of First Nations, launched a campaign to have National Aboriginal Day recognized as a national holiday. It was not until 1996 that June 21 was proclaimed National Aboriginal Day by then Governor General of Canada Roméo LeBlanc.

That date was chosen following consultation with indigenous peoples and statements of support from numerous indigenous groups. Some of these groups wanted the summer solstice, a day that holds a special significance to indigenous peoples in Canada, to become National Aboriginal Day.

As I mentioned before, other governments have made National Aboriginal Day a statutory holiday.

• (1135)

These include the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, which made it a holiday in May 2017. In June 2017, my colleague from Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River introduced the bill we are debating today to get the federal government on board. In September 2017, provincial MPP Michael Mantha, a New Democrat, introduced a bill in the Ontario legislature entitled An Act to proclaim Indigenous Day and make it a holiday.

Private Members' Business

The Liberals have stated many times that the relationship with indigenous peoples is the one the government values as most important. The government also committed to follow through on the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in a spirit of reconciliation and healing. Elected officials of other administrations have understood it, and this bill is a new opportunity for the government to move from words to action. Inspired by the call to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this bill would give hope to indigenous peoples and Canada mainly by fostering an awareness of the consequences of residential schools and by paying tribute to the survivors and the victims of foster family abuse, to their families and to their community.

A statutory holiday would give Canadians an opportunity to better understand our shared history and ensure that they would acknowledge this history, which is a crucial component of reconciliation. This bill gives the Liberal government, as well as the House of Commons, a chance to participate in the reconciliation process by granting a day to reflect on our dark colonial past and to pay tribute to the contributions, heritage, cultures and languages of indigenous peoples.

New Democrats are not the only ones who support making National Indigenous Peoples Day a statutory holiday. The Assembly of First Nations has been calling for this for years. At its 2016 annual general assembly, members adopted a resolution calling on the government to institute a statutory holiday on June 21. Bobby Cameron, the chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, expressed support for this bill in June 2017. In addition, Robert Bertrand, the national chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, attended the press conference as a public show of support when this bill was announced.

I would also add that we are not the only ones here in the House calling for the creation of this holiday. The Liberal member for Winnipeg Centre circulated a petition asking that National Indigenous Peoples Day be made a statutory holiday. We know that he is not the only one in the Liberal caucus who supports our initiative. That is why we are hoping that everyone here in the House of Commons, regardless of party, will support my colleague's bill.

Like the member who spoke before me, I too was unable to attend the National Indigenous Peoples Day events organized by the native friendship centre in my community on June 21. It was a beautiful day, and the centre had invited me to participate in the activities it organized at Place du citoyen. Unfortunately, I had work to do here in the House. The House was in session, and we were here very late voting. We did not get much sleep last spring. My thoughts were with them on June 21. However, I think that supporting my colleague's bill will make all the difference. I am asking the House to vote in favour of this bill.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak for a couple of minutes to the legislation because it is an important piece of reconciliation. The Prime Minister has been very clear, and was even before he became Prime Minister, about that important relationship between Canada and its indigenous peoples. He has stated on many occasions just

how important that relationship is. I believe there is widespread support, from ministers, cabinet, to my caucus colleagues, in fact beyond the Liberals benches to the New Democratic benches and to many from within the Conservative Party, recognizing the importance of reconciliation.

It is important for us to recognize, and it has already been referenced, the TRC calls to action. Call to action 80 urges:

[T]he federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

The TRC did a great service to Canada by providing these very tangible recommendations. The Prime Minister has been on the record on numerous occasions, endorsing the report brought forward by the TRC. We understand that the responsibility of the minister, and even within the call to action, is the obligation to continue that consultation as we work toward it. We recognize the importance of this issue.

I believe that during Jean Chrétien's era, there was a proclamation with respect to National Aboriginal Day in June. Last year, it was renamed to National Indigenous Peoples Day.

• (1145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am going to interject because I have just been advised that the hon. parliamentary secretary has already spoken to this and therefore is not able to speak to this again. I am so sorry.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to speak in support of my colleague, the Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, and her Bill C-369, a bill that would create a national indigenous peoples day.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional lands of the Algonquin people. I thank them for sharing this beautiful land with all of us.

I live in the traditional lands of the Syilx people, the Okanagan nation. Most large public gatherings in the Okanagan are opened with a traditional prayer and the signing of the Okanagan song. The part of that song that I have taken to heart is, "We are beautiful. We are beautiful because our land is beautiful." Those words emphasize the relationship between all of us and the land that sustains us, that we are nothing if we treat our land without respect. They are powerful words.

Private Members' Business

I grew up on the boundary of the Penticton Indian Reserve and I still live in the house in which I grew up. I like to tell my friends from the Penticton Indian Band that I grew up on the res. However, I did not grow up on it like those people. As I grew up, I knew nothing of the struggles of the kids I went to school with from the reserve. We did not talk much. I knew nothing of the struggles of them and their families, of the residential schools situation. I did not really know anything about their culture, heritage, or language. I did not even know there were still people speaking a traditional language there.

In 1978, I was out on the Chilcotin Plateau and went into a café. I realized soon that everyone in the café was speaking Chilcotin. I had never heard an indigenous language spoken before. I realized how little I knew of the cultures of the people who were here first, the first peoples of Canada.

In 1981, I met Jeannette Armstrong, someone whom I have come to know and respect a great deal. She grew up a couple of kilometres from me in Penticton. My father knew her mother and yet I never had met her before. She spoke of her family's struggle to retain the culture and language. She spoke fluent nsyilxcen, the language of the Okanagan people. I was totally blown away. I had no idea there were still speakers of that language, that the culture was still retained and so rich.

Since that time, I have learned a lot from my colleagues in the first nations communities of the Okanagan about that culture and what they have been doing to retain it and make their people proud of it and get their kids learning the language again.

Recently, I had the honour and very humbling experience of sitting in on an immersion class in Penticton that taught nsyilxcen. It was humbling to sit there for a day, hearing people speak a language that I knew very few words of, a language that was formed in my home valley. It was literally the language of my land and yet I knew nothing of it.

I still know very few words in nsyilxcen. I know a few of the plants and animals as I am a biologist. Probably the only word I knew as a kid, because my father would call bitterroot, was "speetlum". Speetlum is one of the four food groups of the Okanagan people. It is the root that gave them sustenance through the year. I know the word for Saskatoon berries, "seeeya", again one of the important foods of the Okanagan people.

• (1150)

However, it was not until I moved back to the Okanagan in the 1990s and started working a lot with people in the local first nations communities on the conservation of their lands, as they were very concerned about conserving the environment of their lands, that I got to hear more of their personal stories. People who were working with me, very dedicated workers, had real personal struggles, such as families torn apart, addictions, life in residential schools, which had sent them to Alberta and northern British Columbia as kids, yet they had come back to work to rebuild their communities.

At the same time, my wife Margaret was working for the Osoyoos Indian Band, building the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, one of the most magnificent interpretive centres in the country. If people are ever in the Okanagan, I urge them to visit it. It is a real celebration of

the Syilx culture and is very well presented. Through her, I met other people who knew their culture and their language. It was such a rich experience, learning all of this from my neighbours. As Canadians, we do not have that opportunity very often.

Some of the projects I worked with brought kids together, kids from the first nations community and non-indigenous kids, to do habitat rehabilitation, plant trees and shrubs. At the same time, they were planting seeds of reconciliation in our communities.

I have seen such a change over the last 20 or 30 years in the Okanagan Valley with respect to the building of reconciliation. People are feeling a lot better about the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. When I first went there in the 1990s, it was very touchy. However, that has really changed, as people are now taking the time to learn about each other's cultures.

Many of us celebrate July 1 every year as our national day. As well, many of us celebrate June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day. Although it is not a holiday, I attend the events in my community when I can. I know a lot of people do. In those events, we learn about indigenous cultures, their heritage and their languages. However, it would mean so much more if it were a national holiday.

Therefore, I really want to support my colleague's initiative to create a national statutory holiday. Yukon and the Northwest Territories have set a precedent by making June 21 a holiday in those territories to ensure that people have the time and the mindset to really set aside a day to learn about these important issues, and to take important steps toward reconciliation.

Lim'limpt.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my colleagues in the House for the dutiful consideration of my bill and for sharing their thoughts on making National Indigenous Peoples Day a statutory holiday.

I am very much looking forward to continuing our discussions in the near future as we work together to do what is right for indigenous people across Canada. The discussion we have heard today is part of a centuries-old conversation about how we make time for first nations, Métis and Inuit people in our country. Historically, we know that the federal government's position has been that there is no time for first nations, Métis or Inuit people. For governments in the past, indigenous people were to be civilized, educated or eliminated. History has proven past governments wrong. Indigenous people have become stronger.

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Our recent conversations about the time for indigenous people have focused on reconciliation and how we commemorate the leaders who committed genocide. Apologies were made. Canadians have heard the stories of survivors. Canadians have heard apologies from prime ministers. They have heard the lack of apologies from religious leaders, and they have heard the promise of a government saying that it would do right by indigenous people now.

Reconciliation is the government's word. Reconciliation is the government's promise. Reconciliation is the burden of government and the burden of settlers. While the government should be having that conversation about reconciling Canada's past, indigenous people are thinking about their future in Canada. We are asking different questions. We are slowly moving away from asking how we will survive and instead are asking how we will thrive.

What we are seeing now is a renaissance of indigenous culture, indigenous arts and indigenous languages. Indigenous leaders and movements from the past are being taught in history classes. Indigenous people are thriving in business, science, technology, justice and health. I have seen with my own eyes how our cultures and languages are growing in our communities and how our families and youth find strength in our traditions. There is still so much work the government needs to do for indigenous people who are suffering, but first nations, Métis and Inuit people have done so much for a society that has and continues to try to ignore them.

To be clear, my bill does not ask to give indigenous people the time to perform their trauma. I am not asking to give indigenous people the time to accept our apologies while we atone for our actions. I am not asking to appropriate an established indigenous holiday so settlers will have another day off work. I am asking if we, as the Government of Canada, will give up part of our own time so that indigenous people across this country can celebrate what makes them truly unique.

It was in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action that I proposed my bill. I believe people in Canada are capable of mourning the legacy of residential schools while also thinking optimistically about the future. That is, after all, what we do every year on Remembrance Day. It is vital that we remember those we lost in residential schools, that we honour the survivors, and that we never forget how the Canadian government tried so hard to get rid of first nations, Métis and Inuit people. However, the stories indigenous people are telling now are far more optimistic and think so far into the future that they refuse to be defined by the impact of residential schools. Let us not limit the future of first nations, Métis and Inuit people to only a settler narrative of past injustice. Let us put an end to the government's practice of defining indigenous people by the things settlers have done to indigenous people. Let us listen to the generations of indigenous people who stand up every year on June 21 and continue to survive and continue to celebrate who they are and who they will become.

• (1155)

If we are truly committed to reconciliation, it is our duty to think about the time of celebration indigenous people have created for themselves. Indigenous people have told us for decades that June 21, the summer solstice, is their day of celebration. I hope that when

members of this House vote on this bill, they will show that they are listening.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 26 immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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[*English*]

ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT

The House resumed from September 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time this morning with the member for Parkdale—High Park.

For decades, we have seen concerted efforts made to try to remove barriers to accessibility across Canada, but pervasive barriers still exist all around us. These barriers exist in our physical environment. They exist in the way information and communications technologies are developed, in how employment practices are established, in the way procurement policies are created by the government, in how government serves Canadians and in how our federal transportation networks are structured. These barriers stop millions of Canadians from participating in everyday activities that many people take for granted.

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There was a time in Canadian history when the needs of people living with disabilities were not even part of the conversation. That is still too often the case, but thanks to the advocacy of leaders in disability and accessibility issues in Canada, we are more aware of the issues of those living with disabilities. We are increasingly aware of the challenges and injustices faced every day. Legislation alone will not be enough to address the issue; we need a change in the way we as Canadians think.

In Ontario, legislation will ensure that a sports complex has accessible parking spots, wide doors and washrooms. However, if people in wheelchairs are relegated to the second floor because no accessible seating is provided, or where accessible seating is provided, people stand up and block their view for the most exciting part of the game, the goals, that is hardly inclusive.

This is an issue I have been deeply committed to throughout my tenure as a member of Parliament and before I was elected. In the spring of 2017, I held a round table on employment for people living with disabilities in my riding of Oakville North—Burlington. The round table brought together organizations such as Community Living, experts on accessible employment and people with lived experience.

I continue to advocate for this issue in the community, in the House and with my colleagues in Parliament. We need to recognize the contribution people living with disabilities make to employers. It is not about doing what is right, although it is. It also makes economic sense. Just ask employers such as Mark Wafer, former MPP Pete Kevin Flynn, and Phillipa Durbin, who talk about the benefits to their businesses because they have hired those living with disabilities. Ask employees such as my staffers, Steven Muir and Karina Scali, or people like Robin, Andrew or James, who are outstanding employees who make significant contributions to their work.

Madam Speaker, you are aware that our government is a strong proponent of promoting inclusion and fairness to grow the middle class. Our government has committed to measures to make Canada a more equitable place, such as improving income security for seniors and helping families through improvements to the Canada child benefit.

Accessibility is a right in this country, not a privilege. That is why we are putting accessibility at the heart of our actions for greater social justice. That is why our government has brought forward Bill C-81, the accessible Canada act, to uphold that right in areas under federal jurisdiction. This involves Parliament and all that we do here. It involves the Government of Canada, crown corporations and the federally regulated private sector. It includes organizations in the federal transportation network, the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors and the banking and financial sectors.

Federally regulated sectors represent a large component of the Canadian economy. They employ about 900,000 people and are essential to economic, civil and social participation in society.

I believe that our government and our partners in the federally regulated sectors can be true leaders in accessibility. By changing the status quo in these areas, I am confident that a change in standards will follow in the private sector. However, our ambition is greater

than that. Our ambition is that this legislation will lead to a more consistent experience of accessibility across Canada.

With this in mind, our government's actions on accessibility are focused on priority areas that Canadians living with disabilities have told us have an impact on their daily lives. They include public buildings and spaces, service delivery, employment, transportation, information and communications technologies and procurement of goods and services.

The core of Bill C-81 is the development and implementation of new accessibility standards in these priority areas. Through Bill C-81, our government is proposing the creation of a new organization called the Canadian accessibility standards development organization. This innovative organization would govern and oversee the process of creating new accessibility standards in partnership with key stakeholders.

I am proud that this organization will be led by a majority of persons living with disabilities on the board of directors. This is key to ensuring that those with lived experience are part of the decision-making process. This has been an issue in the past and continues to be an issue in our country, when those developing policies do not include those living with a disability.

● (1205)

This organization will be the first of its kind in Canada and one of the few in the world that is dedicated to developing only accessibility standards. The organization will work in partnership with persons living with disabilities, technical experts, industry leaders and representatives from organizations that are obligated to comply with the law and its regulations.

The standards created by the organization will then be considered by the government for application to the federal jurisdiction through regulation. Provinces and territories will also be invited to participate in the standards development process. By bringing together perspectives and knowledge about accessibility issues into one place, our government envisions that the Canadian accessibility standards organization will become a global centre of technical knowledge and expertise on accessibility.

We believe that this organization can serve as a national and international model for action on accessibility by putting the principle of “nothing about us without us” at the heart of its operation, letting people living with disabilities lead the way.

Over time, these standards will lead to measurable improvements to accessibility and have a real impact on the lives of Canadians living with disabilities and functional limitations.

In closing, I would like to reflect on the spirit of this legislation. Our government is committed to backing Bill C-81, with focused investment across the Government of Canada. This includes the development of the Canadian accessibility standards development organization.

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As a government, we want to make accessibility a reality as we hire people, make our facilities easier to access and purchase goods from private sector suppliers. It is the sum of all these efforts, including new accessibility standards, that will allow people living with disabilities to be included in a way that many of us take for granted.

This legislation is the start of building not just an accessible Canada, but an inclusive Canada. We need to recognize that accessibility is a start, but it is not enough. We need to be leaders and effect real cultural change. This is how we will provide everyone in this country with the chance to realize their full potential. This is how we will make sure that everybody can contribute to the Canada of the future.

Our country will be stronger and all Canadians will benefit when we include everyone in the conversation, when we ensure that each and every Canadian can reach their full potential and when we build a truly inclusive country.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member and I see eye to eye on many points she has raised.

One thing I want to bring to her attention is that some people are concerned that the bill is not perfect. I understand that happens sometimes. Bills come forward, and of course the committee work is there to make them even better and, perhaps, to identify things that might be missing.

I know that people have raised with me that they are very concerned that the bill lacks timelines. There is some concern that we could be going on for quite a long time before we actually see some of the changes on the ground.

I am not sure if the member is on the committee, but does she understand the need to be open to additions or amendments to the bill in committee?

• (1210)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, at this point I am not on the committee, although I did sit on the committee when it reviewed Bill C-65.

My experience on committee has been that there is really good work that happens there. Bill C-65 would be a prime example, where really important amendments were brought forward.

In my opinion, it is critical that this bill be implemented. I know the minister has made a commitment to see that this is legislation that will impact people's lives and not years from now, but in the near term.

I look forward to the deliberations that happen at committee and to hearing from witnesses. If there are improvements to be made, the committee will benefit from the expertise that will be provided at the committee meetings.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Speaker, I wanted to mention that one of the areas that has been brought to my attention as missing in the bill is the American sign language and Quebec sign language. The bill does not speak to including them in the Official Languages Act.

Across Canada, on the weekend, there were community demonstrations in over nine legislative buildings, asking that this be an important addition or amendment to the bill.

Would my hon. colleague like to comment on that omission in the bill?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I should have said this last time, but I want to thank the hon. member for her advocacy, as well as the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, who has been a vocal advocate on that side of the House for people living with disabilities.

I have spoken up at events where sign language interpretation is provided but the interpreter is standing in the dark. There is not much use having interpreters standing in the dark who cannot be seen by the people who need to see them. I am not familiar with the reasons why that was not included in the bill. I am sure it is something that will come up at committee hearings. Those individuals who wish to be heard will certainly be given the opportunity to speak at committee.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments that were made by the member opposite.

However, going through the summary of the bill, I know that there is a lot of talk about how there are going to be some changes and help as far as how individuals are concerned. The reality is all we are looking at is a bunch of bureaucracy. We are looking at an accessible Canada act and we are dealing with a Canadian accessibility standards development organization. We are looking at a commissioner associated with that, the chief accessibility officer. It seems as though what we are building, instead of continuing to talk to people who have done so much work in the past, is just another set of bureaucratic stumbling blocks that we will have to deal with.

It has been two and a half years or three years since this was first introduced. I am wondering how people can have assurances that there is actually going to be some action taken from all this bureaucratic information that we have in front of us.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Speaker, I know from speaking to advocates in my community and beyond that this is legislation that they have been calling for. I applaud the minister for her due diligence in meeting with organizations all across the country, as well as meeting with individuals who have done work on best practices in other countries. The minister sat down with Inclusion International to see what best practices would be. I have heard incredibly positive comments about the legislation.

We need a starting point and this is it. It is a really good one and I am very proud of the work of the minister and our government in bringing this forward. I think it is going to make a huge change for people in our country living with disabilities.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. With this bill, our government is fulfilling our commitment to guarantee the full and equal participation of all persons, especially persons with disabilities, in society.

The consultation previous to the tabling of this legislation was vast, an important part of our government's commitment to hear from Canadians on issues that affect them. More than 6,000 Canadians participated in various ways. We held 18 public engagement sessions, nine round tables, a national youth forum and an online questionnaire. The principle, "Nothing about us without us", was embraced for these accessible Canada consultations, which asked all Canadians to think about what accessibility means to them and what it could mean to their communities.

The consultations were the most inclusive and accessible for persons with disabilities in Canada's history. These consultations informed the legislation that is before us today, the accessible Canada act, which would work to remove barriers for persons with disabilities in numerous ways. Among other things, it would create the role of a chief accessibility officer; it would reinstate the disability advisory committee, which had been dismantled by the previous government; and it would enhance the opportunities fund by adding \$40 million per year, which would fund employers to hire persons with disabilities and provide the framework to create more accessible environments. In total, our government would pledge \$290 million over the next six years to implement this important legislation.

I want to take a step back from the current legislation and focus locally on my riding of Parkdale—High Park. This summer, I hosted a town hall in my riding to hear from my constituents regarding the accessible Canada act. I was joined by eight panellists with various backgrounds and expertise, including David Lepofsky, chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance and law professor at the University of Toronto and Osgoode Hall; Renu Mandhane, the chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission; and Jeff Adams, a Paralympian gold medalist and six-time champion in wheelchair sports. The town hall was to explain this new legislation and take questions on it from my constituents. It was an educational experience not only for the individuals in attendance at the town hall but also for me.

We set out to organize this town hall with the goal of ensuring that it was completely accessible for all persons with disabilities. My staff and I attempted to take into account the numerous and varied barriers that might affect the ability for a person with a disability to participate meaningfully in the meeting. However, many were brought to our attention that we did not anticipate. For instance, we sent out an email to constituents informing them of the upcoming town hall, with a poster enclosed as a PDF attachment, something I think many members in this House might have done. We quickly learned that the document we created was not accessible for those with a visual impairment. The poster needed to be in a format where a screen reader could interpret the text, such as text contained within the body of an email, not as an attachment poster, so that screen-reading technology could communicate that material to those who are visually impaired.

We also made sure to bring a sign language interpreter at the town hall so that those with a hearing impairment could understand and participate in the discussion. We found that some people are hearing impaired, but do not understand or know sign language. Therefore, to ensure that my town hall was as inclusive as possible, we had on-

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site live captioning for those who are hearing impaired, but do not understand sign language.

Finally, we resolved to host the town hall in a fully accessible building that was also large enough to accommodate all of the guests who wished to attend. This meant that there were fewer buildings to choose from in my riding, but in the end, we hosted the event at the Swansea Town Hall, a level and spacious venue that was fully accessible. Thanks to Swansea Town Hall for hosting this.

However, the experience of organizing the town hall cemented my view about how important it is to have this piece of legislation move actively forward. As a government, as a Parliament, we must ensure that we establish a framework for a truly inclusive Canada and that as many barriers to access are removed for individuals with disabilities as possible. I was fortunate to receive important feedback that evening from my constituents, from persons with disabilities and from relevant experts. They will contribute to this bill and make it even stronger.

This is the start of a very important conversation about accessibility in Canada, one which I would state is long overdue, but I am happy to report that this conversation is already bearing fruit. Not less than four weeks after holding my town hall, I was honoured to host the Prime Minister in my riding for the Bloor Street West Ukrainian festival and the Roncesvalles Polish Festival, both the largest of their kind in North America. Over 500,000 people visit these two festivals over the course of the weekend. At the opening ceremonies of both festivals, I brought a sign language interpreter up onto the stage to provide live simultaneous sign language interpretation for my remarks and the Prime Minister's remarks. He was a bit more excited about translating the Prime Minister's remarks, truth be told. This was a first for both festivals.

● (1215)

I would now like to talk specifically about the legislation itself. First, it represents the single biggest development in federal access health legislation in 30 years, since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms itself came into force. This new legislation is the cornerstone of our government's plan for the progressive realization of a barrier-free Canada. Second, Bill C-81 would provide accessibility standards for entities to achieve and maintain an ongoing monitoring system to ensure that Canadians see results, and to hold organizations accountable.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

Third, approximately \$53 million over six years will be invested in support of a new strategy for an accessible Government of Canada that will be developed and released to the public within one year of the passage of the legislation. This strategy will serve as a roadmap that enables our government to meet and exceed its new accessibility obligations under the legislation.

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The Treasury Board Secretariat, in collaboration with people with disabilities and their organizations, will ensure a coordinated and cohesive approach to the design and implementation of the strategy across government.

This will be accomplished through the establishment of an accessibility hub that will provide leadership, coordination and oversight in making the Government of Canada accessible to its clients and employees.

[English]

Fourth, Bill C-81 would expand the existing opportunities fund for persons with disabilities to better support activities in two areas. The first area would improve matching services that connect employers and persons with disabilities. While the opportunities fund helps persons with disabilities develop the skills and knowledge they require to meet the needs of today's economy, more could be done to connect these individuals with employers with available jobs.

The second area would enhance businesses' efforts to develop effective recruitment and retention strategies. The opportunities fund would work with these employers by supporting their efforts to create inclusive workspaces and to develop and implement in-house strategies to effectively recruit, accommodate and retain persons with disabilities. The fund would have both a national stream and a regional stream, totalling nearly \$40 million per year in funding. This would better support employers that have a demonstrated commitment to hiring persons with disabilities but who need support to find the right match and to create workplaces that allow employees with disabilities to reach their full potential.

Fifth, as I alluded to earlier, we are also reinstating the disability advisory committee, which is vital to ensuring that the Canada Revenue Agency connects with a wide range of stakeholders and takes their views into account as we administer tax measures for people with disabilities. The committee's mandate is to provide advice to the Minister of National Revenue and the commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency on the administration and interpretation of the laws and programs related to disability tax measures administered by the CRA. The legislation would guarantee that the needs and expectations of the disability community are taken into consideration.

The committee would also advise the CRA on how it could better inform persons with disabilities and various stakeholders about tax measures and important administrative changes. Moreover, it would be tasked with reviewing the CRA's administrative practices and making recommendations on how we could enhance the quality of our services for persons with disabilities.

Those six components make for a comprehensive suite of items that would work collectively toward the progressive realization of a barrier-free Canada. Most importantly, our entire approach to the development of this legislation has been informed by one fundamental principle: nothing about us without us. The practice of paternalistic thinking, that the government knows what is best and what is appropriate for persons with disabilities, is gone. In its place is a new, modern 2018 approach to legislating, where the government listens and actively solicits the input, feedback, advice and ideas of persons with disabilities about how best to address their

needs. This legislation is the first step in that process, and it is one that is long overdue. I urge everyone to take a non-partisan approach to this important legislation and to support it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, in my riding of Barrie—Innisfil, I have been dealing with Gloria Noseworthy, who has an organization called the Crossroads Community Centre, which helps adults with autism transition from their younger years into adulthood. We were very fortunate this weekend to have the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin come to speak at an autism symposium that Ms. Noseworthy had put on.

One of the concerns that was raised among parents of adult children with autism is their ability to access employment. Many of them currently have skill sets that can be applied. For example, it is well known that the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin's son Jaden works in a library. He does a great job.

How would this legislation help address the concerns of people like Gloria and other parents who have children with autism who are transitioning into adulthood?

• (1225)

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's genuine concern for this important issue. Empowering and unleashing the potential of people who are living with autism as they transition to adulthood is critical, and that is exactly what informs this entire piece of legislation.

I would redirect the conversation to what I outlined in my speech about the opportunities fund, which is about ensuring that young people, including people with disabilities, have skills. It is also about matching them with employers who are ready, willing and able to employ such persons but literally do not know how to go about doing so because they do not have the resources at hand. Providing that match is fundamental. For parliamentarians on both side of the floor, it is incumbent upon us to facilitate that kind of matchmaking and unleash this potential, not just for autistic young adults but for all young adults with disabilities.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that legislation to address accessibility for people with disabilities in Canada is overdue, so I am glad to see this bill before us. However, it is missing some significant components, including a timeline to achieve full accessibility. I would just quote David Lepofsky, Canadian lawyer and disability advocate. He said:

It's a good starting point and certainly the most substantial piece of legislation introduced by any government in Canada. But it's going to need substantial additions and improvements to be effective, including a deadline to reach full accessibility.

Would the government be open to accepting amendments to this bill at committee stage so that we can truly work toward full accessibility with a timeline to meet the needs of Canadians in a non-partisan way?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's important work on behalf of her party and on the immigration file that we worked on jointly previously.

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It is important not only to have a strategy and objectives, but also a sense of when those objectives and strategy should be fulfilled. I heard from Mr. Lepofsky, as I mentioned, at my own town hall, I know him from legal circles prior to being elected to the House. He made the exact same important point to me. It is informed by his understanding of the Ontario act, which does have a timeline. That is an important facet to keep in mind.

As for the member's question with respect to the committee process, as always we are hoping for a very vigorous and comprehensive study at the committee stage, and robust amendments that would fulfill the important areas of this legislation and flesh out areas that may not have been contemplated earlier can be proposed.

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility (Accessibility), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was so glad to hear that my hon. colleague held a town hall about accessibility issues, something that I have wanted to do.

What are some of the best practices he learned from that town hall that could inform other MPs who think they would like to do this in their constituencies?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the best thing I could say is not to be afraid of doing something. It is more complex, as it is a bit of uncharted territory, but members should not be afraid to listen to those who are giving them feedback. Do not be afraid to think outside of box in how they embrace people and their ability to understand what they are doing. A case in point is that we dealt with some hiccups. We dealt with some concerns about closed captioning and sign language and how we can ensure it would all work conjointly. It was not particularly easy, but it is so worthwhile ensuring that everyone understands the message this legislation is sending, which is that this place, this government and this nation belong to all of us.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, today's discussion is on Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. When I first heard that the government might have an interest in helping the disabled, I immediately thought it would be formalizing some of the great work done by advocacy groups for the disabled, perhaps looking at special initiatives to enhance the disability tax credit program or considering ways to help caregivers cope with their everyday stresses. Truly it was disappointing to hear that its initiative was instead centred around the creation of a government bureaucracy. When the creation of a regulatory body to facilitate consultations is the main focus of the proposed legislation, it makes one wonder what has been happening on this file since the initial mandate letter was presented back in 2015.

It took two cabinet shuffles with two mandate letters to finally get this project to the House, and the notable outcomes are to continue consultations and to start considering actions for regulations. With this comes a price tag of \$290 million. Therefore, after two and a half years of consultations, we have come up with a plan to formalize more consultations. Do members see a pattern here?

With the current government, talk is what it is does best. Positive, thoughtful action is a mysterious notion to it, and one that is only calculated once political expediency has been factored in. What could the Liberals have done to recognize and make meaningful the

lives of those Canadians who face physical, psychological and emotional barriers?

I would like to start my remarks by addressing something that is very dear to me, the carnage here in the national capital region last Friday night when the horrific tornado destroyed people's homes, damaged public infrastructure and seriously hurt so many people. I witnessed the carnage of the black Friday tornado in Edmonton in 1987. Homes were destroyed, areas were levelled and, sadly, many lives were lost. Thirteen years later, I witnessed this again firsthand.

As a farmer, it is just natural to look at the sky, and I remember doing so on a hot and muggy Friday afternoon in 2000 as I was delivering grain to our local elevator. Someone was going to get hit. It was obvious that a storm was brewing, and it was so hot that afternoon we decided to go to our trailer at Pine Lake, where it was just a little cooler, to make supper.

Being on the lake below the hill, we never saw what was coming, but a guy on a catamaran racing to the shore to take cover under a neighbour's deck was our first clue. Then it started hailing, and then hailing into the wind. Trees were twisting and snapping onto our trailer and boat, and we were just a few feet away. The water rose two feet and then rose two feet again as we watched this giant green wall of water in front of us. Then, as quickly as it had come, it abated. It looked at though the ground was covered with lawn chairs. However, it was trailer walls and debris instead.

A boat that had been stored on a trailer half a mile away was stuck in the mud in front of us. There was carnage everywhere. Once we freed our boat from the tree that had landed on it, we tried to get to our neighbouring campground of Green Acres. Our friends owned the campground. My brother had his trailer there, and many of our friends considered it their summer home. Local fire and rescue crews were quickly on the scene and I, along with many others, made it to the site to do what we could. The 12 deaths and the utter destruction of the campground made national news. The path of the tornado also caused extreme hardship for our neighbours, as their homes, farms, and fields were also caught up in this devastation. This was part of the story that never made the news. The other part of the story that sadly gets so quickly forgotten is those who were injured during the disaster.

Whether it is injuries from a natural disaster, accidents at home or on the road, or disabilities from disease, members of our society need to know that we stand with them. That is what I want to quickly address today.

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Besides the physical damage that many people must endure, there is also the reality of serious psychological damage that needs to be addressed. In the aftermath of the Pine Lake tornado, our community came together to deal with both. Leaders arose from this disaster. Champions of the disabled community became well-known spokespeople and got the attention of everyone. One such champion was Marlin Styner. Marlin was a quadriplegic. He helped bring all of us to a heightened state of awareness of the barriers that existed in our city of Red Deer.

• (1230)

Marlin later sat on the premier's provincial task force for the disabled. He, along with another advocate for the disabled, Dr. Gary McPherson, showed us how to create a city and community that understood what true barriers for the disabled were. Red Deer soon became, and continues to be, a community where not only physical barriers but other barriers as well are always top of mind, and we have solutions.

Our nation has had many other champions as well. Terry Fox taught us what can be done when we look beyond those things that others think would limit us. Another personal hero of mine is Rick Hansen. His Man in Motion tour took him through my hometown of Innisfail. My mother, who was wheelchair bound in her last few months of dealing with bone cancer, presented Rick with a cheque on behalf of the Pythian Sisters organization which she so proudly served.

Rick Hansen did more than just raise money for spinal cord research. He also showed us what a true advocate for the disabled he was when one of our local cowboy heroes, Duane Daines, was injured in a rodeo accident in B.C. Rick visited Duane shortly after his accident and assured Duane that he still possessed all the qualities that made him a champion saddle bronc rider, and that these qualities would make him successful in whatever he did in the future. He was right.

Local farmers and ranchers Bob Blair and Oliver Marshall are two other friends who have always impressed me with their determination and drive. This makes those of us in our community realize that all barriers can be overcome.

Sadly, Marlin Styner and Dr. Gary McPherson, who I mentioned earlier, are no longer with us.

Another champion, Trevor Paré, a young man I had the pleasure of teaching in Innisfail many years ago, recently passed away. Even though Trevor was afflicted with Pompe disease, he showed our nation, our community and especially his beloved Red Deer Rebels just how one should strive to live every day to the fullest.

The reason I have spoken of these champions is that they know, and knew, how to overcome barriers. This can and should be a lesson to all levels of government. Our community of Red Deer always considers the issues of the disabled. Our province championed their concerns and one would hope that our federal government would as well.

Too often forgotten are the other champions of the disabled: the caregivers. Whether it is the parent of a disabled child, the spouse of an Alzheimer's sufferer, the family of a terminally ill loved one or the

professional caregivers who work to make their patients' lives better, they deal with barriers as well.

When this government looks at ensuring a barrier-free Canada, it is not just the management of a bureaucracy that needs to be considered. It is not about hiring thousands of people to ensure that government workers make sure government departments heed their directives. It is not about setting up an enforcement regime to ensure that all are following a government mandate. It should not be about just giving lip service to the real needs of the disabled. Rather than pushing for years and years of consultation, we should be looking at the many success stories that are part of Canada's efforts of inclusion. We are a nation of champions and we know how to accommodate those who need help. We are a nation that respects all of its citizens. We always have and we always will.

How can we reduce barriers and help integrate those with disabilities? How can we do this quickly so that logical solutions are implemented as soon as possible? It takes vision and commitment.

I submit that this was one of the hallmark aspects of our previous Conservative government. I remember very well the campaign in 2008, during which under Stephen Harper we advocated for a registered disability savings plan. That election was in October. By December, the registered disability savings plan was introduced and available for Canadians. That monumental change, which helped both the disabled and their caregivers, took place in under three months.

The Liberal government's plan is one of talk and more talk, bureaucracy and government red tape, and delay when one should be championing results. The legislation is what it is. The next stage is committee review. I believe it is necessary to get this bill to committee so that we and the public can give it its due consideration.

I hope that during this discussion the real needs of our disabled community can be highlighted, that the real champions of our disabled community can be given a voice and that the caregivers who put their lives on hold to devote to their loved ones will be recognized.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech made by my colleague across the way.

After reviewing the bill, does my hon. colleague agree with its underlying principle, namely that policies need to be developed by the community, for the community?

Government Orders

•(1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, the point I was trying to make was that there are a lot of solutions that are already there. It is one thing for the government to say that it is going to try to bring them together, but nowhere in here do I see where it talks about real initiatives and engagement with those groups that are involved. No doubt the government has talked to them about it and there have been discussions. However, when we go through the summary and the various parts of the bill, all we see is how it is going to set up bureaucracy. Nowhere does it talk about, other than in the very short preamble, how the government would attempt to realize some of the goals that it has mentioned. I think this is the critical component. It is a big bill and there is a lot in there, but once we read the bill, we realize that it is all bureaucracy and red tape.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague from Red Deer—Mountain View.

He talked about the tornado that hit his riding 13 years ago. I myself lived through a microburst five years ago. It was utterly terrifying. My thoughts are with the people in both Hull and Ottawa who went through that experience last week. Of course, people with disabilities have an even tougher time, especially in severe storms like this one. Earlier, the member mentioned the barriers faced by people with disabilities.

How is this bill going to help people with disabilities? Most importantly, are you going to support Bill C-81?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member was doing just fine, but she went off course when she addressed her question directly to the member. I would ask the member to address the Chair, not individuals.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, I am sure that having studied this yourself as well you would see the merits that would be associated with the bill.

The point I was trying to make about the carnage that had taken place was not with respect to what happened that day; it was about the lives that had been affected, and the fact that there were champions of the community who were able to become part of it and make sure that we had some real solutions. With those real solutions came approaches that the Province of Alberta was able to use. That is what I was dealing with when I was speaking of it. It is not a case of there is something that just happened and there were a number of people who were killed and many who were injured, and now they happen to have barriers. The point was that it brought the community together, and we looked for the excellence that was there and expanded upon it.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague made some very good points. There are many disabled persons in Canada, and the bill is attentive with respect to that area. However, if I was looking at this from their perspective, I would ask what is in it for me.

I would ask my colleague from Red Deer to elaborate a little more on what he was just referring to. There does not seem to be much more than a complaints process in this bill. I am wondering if he concurs with that or if there is something I have missed in it.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, the important thing that I was attempting to get at was there are some solutions, but having read the bill and simply looking at the summary, all that we see is how the government can develop another department, how it can bring it together, and how it will have the ability to go after another department and put penalties on it. That is really what is here. I do not think that is what people in the disabled community felt was going to happen. The title, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, has nothing to do with the major part of the discussion in the nine or 10 parts of this bill.

•(1245)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are talking about Bill C-81, but this reminds me of an event that took place this summer in my riding, Jonquière. The Martin-Valin ZEC, a controlled harvesting zone, inaugurated a new lakeside wharf for use by people with reduced mobility who want to go fishing.

I had a chance to talk to some of them during the grand opening. Some had never seen the lake up close before, and others were holding a fishing rod for the first time. Wonderful projects like that are so great.

I would like to congratulate the Martin-Valin ZEC on this wonderful project, which enables people with reduced mobility to enjoy nature and fishing.

I would like my colleague to comment on Bill C-81. Does he think that all government laws and policies should be examined from the perspective of people with disabilities?

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, certainly I believe it is important we look at inclusiveness for everyone to be able to help them. Again, the point I was attempting to make is that we see that in our community. One would simply anticipate the government would be that enlightened, but as we know, it is a big machine and it is hard to get moved around. It is important we address those kinds of concerns. When I consider the legislation being put before us, there are concerns about everything associated with it. For example, how does one build one department so it can look after another department? It is one of the reasons that when the bill gets to committee, I hope the Liberals are not going to try to push it through without actually talking to people who are really affected by this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to ask my colleague a question on this important bill.

This is a historic bill. My colleague mentioned that the Rick Hansen Foundation has also described this as a historic bill.

My question is very simple, and my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles has already asked it, too. Will you be supporting the bill?

Government Orders

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member for Thérèse-De Blainville made the same mistake as his colleague. I hope the member will be sure to address his question to the Chair next time.

[English]

The hon. member for Red Deer—Mountain View.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, I read in some of the commentary how this was a historic piece of legislation. It is important. It is important there be discussions, and I believe once it gets to committee there can be discussions there. It took a long time to get to this stage. The mandate was presented in 2015 and here it is 2018. If that is what the member means by a lot of history and being historic, I suppose that would speak to that. However, the reality is that things can get done quickly if one desires it and really makes it an important focus of the government.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

In my previous jobs, I have worked extensively with people with disabilities and people with various difficulties.

I discussed this bill with them over the weekend. Their first comment had to do with the \$290-million envelope allocated to preparing a plan, which will ultimately lead to something. Since they are familiar with the costs and needs involved, they are wondering why that money is not being used right away.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on that.

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Madam Speaker, the member certainly knows very well the issues and concerns of disasters that can take place in his hometown. This is something that affects communities. I believe people understand there has to be direct action. What we see in front of us is a call for money, and there would tax dollars associated with this in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Going through each of the various parts of the legislation step by step, we see this in things like how we can develop another watchdog to look after another group or how we are going to deal with transportation because it is under federal purview, and how are we going to deal with each of these different groups. There is a lot more that can be done, and hopefully that will be the focus of the discussion at committee.

• (1250)

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful to have this opportunity to speak about the measures our government is taking to make Canada a more inclusive and accessible society for all Canadians.

The word “inclusion” tends to be overused, but, for us, it has a specific meaning. It means making efforts to support people who face obstacles when they try to participate fully in society. Of course, this primarily affects people with disabilities.

I am very proud to see Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, being tabled in this House. It responds to real needs for

many Canadians. The numbers are troubling. Only 49% of Canadians with disabilities, aged 25 to 64, have a job, and that is compared with 79% of Canadians without a disability. They earn 44% less than Canadians without a disability, and are more susceptible to poverty.

We can all agree, I am sure, that this is unacceptable, and that is why we are acting so resolutely. As we are preparing our plan to create accessibility legislation, we knew we would need to listen to Canadians who really have this topic at heart. We held the largest consultation on this topic in the history of Canada. We met with more than 6,000 people and over 90 organizations.

By listening to Canadians throughout this consultation, we learned about the real issues surrounding accessibility in our country. These consultations guided the preparation of the bill that is before the House today.

I would like to start by noting that if it is passed, the bill will apply to organizations under federal jurisdiction. This includes Parliament, the Government of Canada and Crown corporations, as well as the federally regulated private sector. This last group includes organizations in the transportation sector, the broadcasting and telecommunications sector, and the banking and financial sector.

One of the priority areas of the bill is the development and implementation of new accessibility standards. Bill C-81 proposes to create the Canadian accessibility standards development organization. This innovative organization, the first of its kind in Canada, would have a mandate to develop model accessibility standards that would guide the requirements that organizations under federal jurisdiction must respect to identify and eliminate obstacles, and to prevent the creation of any new obstacles.

The Canadian accessibility standards development organization would give people with disabilities a voice in the development of accessibility standards that affect them directly. As a result, the board of directors would be made up of a majority of people with disabilities.

We are fully aware that accessibility will not happen overnight when this bill is passed. Passing bills is not enough to change mentalities and implement solutions. That is why we are determined to collaborate with all Government of Canada organizations to produce results that will make the implementation of accessibility practical and possible for everyone.

Our approach is simple: we want to lead the way and be leaders in accessibility in this country. Everyone in this House has their own personal story about people with disabilities, whether it is a loved one, a friend or a colleague. We are all affected.

Accessibility issues affected me personally when my mother suffered a major stroke when she was 69 years old. We were told she would not survive the night, but doctors did not know my mother. She was a fighter and survived for 13 years, but not without major challenges. For the rest of her life, my mother navigated the world in a wheelchair. It was not easy, and my dad worked extremely hard, trying to make life a little easier for both of them.

Government Orders

That was in the early 1990s. I am concerned that barriers still exist, and we need to move forward as a government, and as a federal government we need to become leaders in this field.

● (1255)

Watching my parents was eye opening. My dad even designed his own contraption to help him load my mother's wheelchair in and out of their car trunk because it was far too heavy for him to lift.

He would map out the day, trying to determine if they could go to the mall and find a washroom on a moment's notice. This was 25 years ago, so accessible washrooms were not the norm, and even if they were, my dad was not always allowed into the ladies' room to help my mother get on and off the toilet. It robbed them both of their dignity.

These are very personal, very natural parts of everyone's life, but not if one is disabled. The simplest thing can become daunting and keep people with disabilities from feeling welcomed in society.

While my mom and dad were trying their best to stay active despite my mother's disabilities, my young daughter was struggling in school. As the early grades went by, we realized she was having great difficulty and finally was diagnosed with profound learning disabilities.

At that time, I was the news anchor for the television station in London. My job was reading the news every night to thousands of people. Ironically, my daughter was having an almost impossible time trying to learn to read.

I will never forget the day when Lauren was in grade 6 and the school called a meeting with me and her dad. They told us they did not know how Lauren learned but they could not teach her. They suggested we find another school for her to attend. We were devastated. How could a public school and her teachers give up on her?

We were told Lauren would never read for pleasure, something her dad and I enjoy doing so much. We worried about how these challenges would limit her future job prospects and what type of job she could do when she finished school.

Parents of children with learning disabilities need to constantly advocate for their own children to make sure they get the support they need. As a country, we need to support these young people early, so that they can become happy, healthy young people who have jobs to look forward to.

As for Lauren, getting her into a special needs class was the turning point and really helped her find her way. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Today Lauren does read for pleasure. She turns 30 in a couple of days and she is now giving me suggestions for books that I should read.

We all have our personal stories of people in our lives who are in some way disabled or differently abled, as I like to say. Everyone needs support and we will all benefit from a more accessible Canada. When the most challenged in our society are given a chance to succeed, we all succeed.

The Government of Canada is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the country as well as the largest employer in Canada.

Moreover, organizations under federal jurisdiction represent a large portion of public space in the country and employ nearly one million Canadians. These organizations can have a major impact on the culture change concerning accessibility.

In addition to Bill C-81, the Government of Canada will invest in a procurement accessibility resource centre. We will also adjust policies to ensure that the products and services purchased by the Government of Canada are accessible. We hope that our leadership will encourage organizations all across the country to join the movement and be proactive for accessibility.

People with disabilities who are successful in the workplace are in the minority, and that should not be the case. Many businesses are starting to come to the realization that hiring people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do, but it is good for business.

Fifteen years ago I was part of a group of London business people who started the Ability First Coalition to encourage employers to hire and retain people with disabilities. I put the emphasis on retain, because too often people with disabilities will start a job but find it for whatever reason too challenging, maybe because of a lack of appropriate training, or maybe they needed some type of accommodation that the employer was not willing to consider.

There can be many reasons, but businesses that have had success will tell us that their business is richer and more rewarding for all employees when there are people with disabilities working and getting paid just like everyone else.

● (1300)

Improving accessibility is good for business. Employment and Social Development Canada estimates that fully including and accommodating people with disabilities in the workplace could produce economic benefits reaching 1.3% to 1.9% of GDP or \$26.4 billion to \$38.5 billion annually. That is astonishing.

A similar recent study by The Conference Board of Canada, which looked only at physical accessibility, also showed that making workplaces accessible would have a significant impact on economic growth.

We have to remove barriers to success and this is exactly what this accessible Canada legislation does. Really, what we are looking for is a culture change. We will lead by example and become a global model for accessibility.

This bill represents a real transformation in the Government of Canada's approach to accessibility. Up to this point, any action for accessibility was up to those affected. It was up to them to take the initiative and file complaints with authorities about systematically inaccessible processes, with the hope that it would lead to results. This is now changing with this bill. It will no longer be up to Canadians with disabilities to fix the system.

Government Orders

We want to ensure that barriers are eliminated before they become problems. We are doing this through new measures for compliance with an application of the bill. As a result, organizations under federal jurisdiction will now be responsible for the implementation and equality of accessible practices.

In 2012, almost 3.8 million, or about 14%, of Canadians age 15 years and older, reported being limited in their daily activities due to a disability. This percentage is expected to increase with population aging since the prevalence of disability increases with age.

The barriers faced by Canadians with disabilities today are real and tangible. Every day, barriers prevent Canadians with disabilities from being able to access necessary services and buildings. Barriers continue to impact the participation of people with disabilities across all aspects of work, family and community life. If passed by Parliament, Bill C-81 would benefit all Canadians, especially Canadians with disabilities, by helping create a barrier-free Canada.

This bill proposes proactive compliance activities such as inspections, document audits and a series of tools, including compliance orders and warnings, compliance audits and fines. I should specify here that this does not take away people's right to file complaints and receive compensation if they are victims of prejudice because an organization does not respect its new obligations under the bill and regulations. It is the combination of all these measures that will lead to real change in accessibility in Canada.

The goal of this bill is to eliminate barriers and provide more access and possibilities for all people with disabilities. We still have a lot of work to do to create a Canada that is truly accessible and inclusive, but I am confident. Together, if we support Bill C-81 we will be taking another step in the right direction.

There is something else that is happening today on Parliament Hill that I wanted to make everyone aware of. The first ever United Nations International Day of Sign Languages was celebrated yesterday and it coincides with International Week of the Deaf. The theme for this year is "With Sign Language, Everyone is Included!" It emphasizes the importance of recognizing sign language as a principal means of communication in today's world.

Later today we are going to have a reception and hear more from people. I am going to have a chance to have my first lesson in sign language, which I am looking forward to.

• (1305)

Our government is committed to ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for all Canadians with disabilities, and that includes Canadians who are deaf. Tabling this legislation will remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Canada is at its best when everyone is included. I encourage all members in the House to join me today in recognizing and celebrating the contributions made to Canadian society by people who are deaf.

Some of the highlights that our government has committed to and has done over the past will show that we are on the right track, but it is only a beginning.

Our government has taken leadership on the access to alternative format materials for persons with a disability through the accession of the Marrakesh Treaty in 2016, and an investment to date of over \$6 million for the alternative format materials.

We recognize the importance of supporting the removal of barriers in the built environment, and we announced in 2017 an increase of \$77 million over 10 years to expand the activities of the enabling accessibility fund. This fund, with an annual budget of \$22 million, supports the capital costs of construction and renovation related to improving physical accessibility and safety for people with disabilities.

In April 2018, our government made changes to immigration's medical inadmissibility policy to strike a balance between protecting publicly funded health and social services and bringing it in line with our current views on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Through the historic new investment in the investing in Canada plan, all federally-funded public-facing infrastructure will be required to meet the highest published applicable accessibility standards in our respective jurisdictions.

Also, the national housing strategy will ensure that a minimum of 20% of new construction and repaired units must meet accessibility standards and all projects must be designed barrier-free. This strategy also includes a commitment of 2,400 affordable housing units built for persons with developmental disabilities.

One thing we take from this is that disabilities mean so very much to so many different people.

My grandsons were born very prematurely and weighed less than two pounds at birth. We were very concerned about what would happen to them as they grew up. I am so happy to say that the twin boys turn six-years-old in a couple of days. One would not know they were born prematurely. The only evidence is the fact that maybe their eyesight is not as good as it should be, so they both wear glasses.

We were worried that Harrison was going to be legally blind and we waited patiently to find out what his abilities would be. Through the years, every year, it seems to be getting better. However, it is going to be while before we know as parents, as grandparents, whether Harrison will need accommodations in his school life. I hope and I pray that with this accessible Canada legislation, we are moving in the right direction so people like Harrison my grandson, Lauren my daughter, and my mother, who is in heaven, will all realize that we are working in the right direction to make Canada a more accessible place for all.

• (1310)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-81, from what the member is describing, is rather redundant. For a number of years, Ontario has been implementing laws to make commercial buildings barrier-free. Even federal government agencies apply for the enabling accessibility funding. It is redundant in the sense that already the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, for example, has a catalogue of different appliances to help people with their vision. The Diabetes Foundation has different classes, information and helpful aids for people suffering with diabetes.

Government Orders

How exactly are we even to believe the Liberals? Speaking of diabetes, they took people suffering with diabetes off of the list of conditions that would be acceptable for the disability tax credit. The disability tax credit bill to restrict the fees that promoters of the disability tax credit could charge was voted for unanimously. Even though the Liberals voted in favour of it, they went against it as soon as they formed government.

How are we to believe that this bill is anything more than something to make it look like Liberals are doing something when all they are doing is building bureaucracy?

Ms. Kate Young: Madam Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague that many organizations are doing phenomenal work. That is not in question. Many provinces are well ahead of the game. Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and now British Columbia are really making headway.

What we need is a federal accessible Canada act. This legislation would take us there. It means we will make strides that we need in order to make all of Canada accessible. It is progressive legislation. It will take time, there is no question. However, I cannot imagine anyone would suggest that we not start the process, and that is what we are doing.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, the New Democrats think this important legislation. However, my understanding is that this falls under federal jurisdiction buildings for accessibility. The City of Hamilton did a report on where it could help people who had these challenges by making it more accessible for them. In Hamilton, 20% of the population has disabilities. The report said that \$157 million were needed to make the city full accessible by the year 2025.

How would this bill help cities like Hamilton to go forward in ensuring this is a barrier-free Canada?

Ms. Kate Young: Madam Speaker, I have heard that Hamilton is doing extremely great things in moving this forward, and we can learn from that. We can certainly find evidence, as I mentioned, in different provinces and cities like Hamilton that we are doing well. However, some places across Canada are not doing too well and we need to raise the bar.

People with disabilities should not be the only ones who have to push to make Canada more accessible. This legislation really shifts the focus from people with disabilities so they will no longer have to rely on individual Canadians with physical disabilities to fix the system; we need to fix the system. Will it be challenging? Will there be extra costs associated? Of course there will, but we must start moving forward to ensure Canada is accessible for everyone.

•(1315)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, as it happens, this is my first occasion to rise to discuss Bill C-81, a bill we have been studying all through the summer months.

I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for using the word “must” just now when she said we must move forward. My question actually relates to that. The word “must” is all too infrequently in the legislation and the word “may” is there a lot more. I do not mind the word “may” for obvious reasons, but in legislative terms, I would rather see “must”.

I will give the parliamentary secretary an example and hope for some encouragement. We need to amend the bill in committee. For instance, the all-important section states, “The Governor in Council may, by order, designate a member of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada”, otherwise known as the cabinet, “as the Minister for the purposes of this Act.” There is another section like it that says the accessibility commissioner “may” provide written reports to the minister, who of course may be appointed. It is pretty clear that we need a minister responsible and the intention and spirit of the act make it obvious.

Could the hon. parliamentary secretary reflect on why we would not make it mandatory that cabinet always appoint a minister responsible for purposes of this act?

Ms. Kate Young: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's underscoring how she likes to use the word may in some instances, but would like the word must to be used in this instance. This is one of those discussions that can be had at the committee level. These are discussions we as a government need to hear, of where there may be room for improvement with the legislation.

I know we have said, time and again, talking about this legislation, that we have to respect the disability community and that “it is nothing about us without us”. That is why we continue to hear that phrase. It is important that the people with disabilities get to appear before committee and express their concerns and what they would like to see in legislation, moving forward.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary and the minister for bringing forward what is a true example of stellar federal leadership in ensuring a barrier-free Canada. I also listened attentively to her speech and was touched by the numerous personal bits of testimony. I know all members of the House can share equivalent stories about people in their lives who have benefited in the past from federal and other intervention with respect to accessibility, and will benefit in the future by the enhanced standards that we will put in place.

I was curious to hear the opposition talk about this in terms of bureaucracies and growing government. Would the parliamentary secretary reflect on federal leadership in this area and what she thinks will be the great advances we make due to this federal leadership and this legislation?

Ms. Kate Young: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question. This speaks to my heart. As members could tell from my speech, a number of times throughout my lifetime I have realized that it is not easy for anyone who has a disability. We all have certain types of disabilities, but some are more impactful and profound than others. We all must take leadership.

Government Orders

I am so proud to be a part of a government that is taking that necessary step. This is the most major legislation for the disabled community in Canada in the last 30 years. We need to move forward. This is not a partisan issue. This is something we all believe is necessary. We must act and act quickly to get this into law so all disabled Canadians can feel they are being listened to and heard and that they will in time reflect how their government and the House are behind them totally.

● (1320)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Saskatoon West.

I am here to speak to Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. This is an important bill and one which we should all be talking about. We should really be considering what it means to have a barrier-free Canada.

Bill C-81 would establish several new important official positions and agencies, for example, the accessibility commissioner in charge of enforcement, a Canadian accessibility standards development organization which would create model accessibility standards that the government could enact as regulations, and a chief accessibility officer to advise and report on progress and needed improvements. It would look at this in terms of what comes under federal jurisdiction. That is a start.

This bill is a positive step in the right direction, but I am concerned that there are some significant gaps. The majority of these gaps are around allowing these organizations to decide instead of enforce. Persons with disabilities are put in positions that often are uncomfortable. It is our job as Canadians, as it is the job of the government, to look at what those barriers are and make a difference.

Bill C-81 does not have any mandatory timelines for implementation, which concerns me, as action is required. The best way to measure action is through outcomes. The bill would not require all federal government laws, policies and programs to be studied through a disability law lens. I think that is important to do as we look into the future of this country. The bill would give several public agencies or officials far too much sweeping power to grant partial or blanket exemptions to specific organizations from important parts of the bill. This is very concerning. Also, the bill would separate enforcement and implementation in a confusing way over four different public agencies. Rather, it should be providing people with disabilities a single service location, a one-stop shop. They really require that to get the action they need.

Recently, I was having a discussion about the bill with a young man in university who has severe dyslexia. He also happens to be my son. As a parent of a child with a severe learning disability, I had a lot of learning to do. He was diagnosed when he was in elementary school. It was very weird for me walking around the world to realize how fast I recognized words and what I gather by seeing words around me every day. My son lives in a world where he is basically always surrounded by a foreign language. I think about when I travel internationally to communities where I cannot read the signs, or I do not understand what the ingredients are or I cannot read the menu. Those are challenges that my son faces every day. He did well in school, obviously, as he is now in university. One of the hardest

things for him and his family were the many people who saw him as very intelligent and competent, which he absolutely is, but they did not understand the challenges that he faced because of his learning disability. Many educators thought that if they did something differently they would be able to fix him. I want to be clear. They are not bad people or bad educators. In fact, if it were not for many of them, he would not be in university today. I specifically think of Mr. Murphy, Dr. Morrow and Ms. Fonagy who really supported him. They understood fundamentally that he was not broken, that he is just dyslexic.

What my son said to me this past weekend was profound. He said, "People do not want people with disabilities to be successful. If we succeed, it means they will have to accommodate us." I really hope that people in the House hear that, because it was really hard for me to hear that. This is a serious reality that accommodation is perceived as a burden, as something that is often seen as too much work.

One day in August I spent two hours in a wheelchair. I learned so much and recognized that I just touched the surface of understanding what it is to live in a wheelchair. The reality for me was that if I wanted to get out of that chair, I just had to stand up. I want to thank my constituent, Karen, for taking me out that day. She has been in a chair for quite a while and she was an amazing teacher. She does this with a lot of political figures. For me, it was an opportunity for a very brief time to experience the world through her eyes and experience.

I learned a lot of things that were really frustrating. I learned that my arms are not very strong. I learned that the Canada Post on Comox Avenue in Comox is very welcoming and accessible, but getting up that ramp sure gave me sore arms.

● (1325)

I learned about the placement of buttons when I wanted to open a door. I learned what it means when there is a small dip or hill and how much harder it is to get up it. I remember watching her coast around at an angle to push the button and then get in the door on an entranceway that was on a hill.

I learned about how challenging it can be to cross the street, because people often do not look for people at that height. She has to sit there and wait until people look her in the eye.

I went through numerous stores, and I am very grateful to all the local businesses that are used to her doing this route. It was amazing for me to see and feel how a small display on the floor would actually mean so much more work to manoeuvre and try to figure out how to get around it.

I came to the realization that there are a lot of parking spots which are not that accessible. When we see that symbol on the ground in a parking lot, we think it is good that there is accessible parking. However, I saw parking spots that had that symbol that were definitely not accessible.

Government Orders

What was most startling for me was when I posted about that experience. The response of one woman who has a severe disability was that it is simply easier to stay at home. We have to recognize that when we do not create an accessible environment and an accessible Canada, we are leaving people out.

I remember speaking with another gentleman in Campbell River who was also in a wheelchair. He spoke about showing the city the challenges he faces every day, and how the response was it wanted to be helpful but was very overwhelmed because it simply does not have the resources required to actually make it more accommodating for people. I feel for the municipalities that have so few resources and so much of the responsibility. If we want to build a barrier-free Canada, then working with communities must be a fundamental part of the process.

I want to make this clear, because my son always makes me accountable for this. I do not think we should be doing this out of pity. I think that if I felt sorry for my son he would definitely not appreciate it and would take me to task. We should do this because we want everyone to participate in our country. Consideration is about acknowledging that anything could happen to any one of us at any moment, and if it does, we have to rely on one another. Tomorrow if I could not walk, see or read, that would not make me any less of a person.

I want to come back to what my son said, which is, "People do not want people with disabilities to be successful. If we succeed, it means they will have to accommodate us." We cannot hide from the reality that there is truth in that statement. I am not positive in any way that is the intention of our country or the intention of people. However, the impact is something that can be measured. It is something that is experienced by people who have different challenges. I really want to see a Canada that is accessible to everyone and that looks at opportunities to open the door.

I understand that this bill is focusing on what we can do federally, and I hope and challenge all of us to do so much more. I am happy to support this bill. I am very hopeful that when it goes to committee there is a lot of work done and that a lot of discussion happens with respect to how we can actually make this more fulsome. I want to take out a lot more of the options and have things in the bill that makes action happen. People who have different challenges are tired of hearing things and want to see concrete action on the ground.

We know that poverty rates are considerably higher for people with disabilities and we must be mindful of what the impact is for them with respect to going out and having the energy to be accessible. I remember Karen talking to me about the price differences for a wheelchair, or the tires for a wheelchair, and how she actually goes to a bike shop to get tires because it is significantly cheaper. We need to be looking at these issues. We need to do that because it is simply the best thing to do for our country.

As the seniors critic for the NDP, I would also mention that seniors with disabilities face a higher rate of poverty than people without disabilities. We really need to be comprehensive about this and have that discussion.

I will support the bill. I am happy this bill is here. I am happy that this is something we are discussing. I am always happy to talk about

the disabilities that we see and the ones that are invisible. The committee has a lot of work to do, and I hope the bill comes back with a lot more action and a lot less meaningless promises.

● (1330)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the passion with which she spoke to this issue and for using examples of not only her son but people in our community.

I have had the opportunity to have a number of round tables in Whitby on this piece of legislation, the accessibility act. One of the things they talked about was that they do not want to be cared for, that they want to be able to do things themselves, so I really did appreciate some of your sentiments.

One of the other things that people in Whitby spoke about was that they want to ensure that organizations are compliant. The bill grants the accessibility commissioner, the Canadian Transportation Agency, and the CRTC the powers of inspection and investigation. How important are these powers to ensure there is compliance and that we are truly making an inclusive Canada?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the hon. member to address questions and comments through the chair.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I always appreciate it when we work hard in our constituencies and listen to the people we represent. I fundamentally believe that we are a voice for our riding, and I appreciate the member's work around this bill.

I absolutely agree. I think of all the years of trying to support my son. It is very hard to support somebody when we have no idea what the person is experiencing, but we are trying the best to be there. He was frustrated by the barriers in his way, and even more frustrated when people tried to help him when he was not asking for help. It is very important that when we look at compliance, we look at ways to make sure that the actions are happening and that dignity is given to the people.

When I spent that time with Karen, I learned important things, such as when going up a hill, to not just hold the outside of the wheelchair but to hold the actual tire to get moving up that hill. I struggled behind her. If it came down to an arm-wrestling contest, she would win. She has incredible strength and power.

We have to make sure that in everything we do, we are opening doors. This should not be a country where we leave people behind. Our very existence could depend on it.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are several areas of concern with respect to this piece of legislation. On this side, we are hopeful that when it does get to committee, we are going to be able to work it out.

I know the member spoke about this, but a particular issue is that there are no mandatory timelines. There is \$290 million being spent over six years, but within that six years, there is no measurement or time frame in which the action is to be taken.

Government Orders

I was wondering if the hon. member could expand a little more on her concern, and what she is hoping to see once it gets to committee and then comes back to Parliament.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, there are some things that I am hoping to see change when the legislation goes to committee. I am hoping to see a lot more concrete measures. We need to have something so that it is not just money flowing out, but actual on-the-ground work that needs to be done to support people with disabilities. I hope when the bill goes to the committee that work is done. I am really interested to see what the witnesses share with us.

At the end of the day it is important to recognize that words are not enough. It is really about action. What we need to see in this legislation is action that is measurable, so that we know that these outcomes are really making life better for people who have certain challenges.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague made very thoughtful and moving comments, especially in illustrating the poignant point made by her son, as well as the lessons we can learn from people with disabilities.

To this end, Bill C-81 is before us. The government talks about how we must move forward, yet the bill itself does not require us to work with provincial or municipal governments or the communities to realize accessibility.

I wonder if the member could comment on that, and whether or not we should make that change at committee.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I absolutely think this issue is something that needs to be looked at in committee.

When I talked to community members in different communities across my large riding of North Island—Powell River, I heard that what we really need to see is support on the ground so that people can lead a more fulsome lives.

Let us get moving. It is time for action.

• (1335)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, Debbie Windsor is a Saskatoon resident who is tired of waiting for life to get better for people living with disabilities. Debbie has used a wheelchair most of her life. When she attended high school, she had to leave her home on the west side of Saskatoon at 5:00 a.m. to head to the east side of Saskatoon, where the only accessible high school was at the time.

Debbie would say that some things have changed since her high school days, but that change has been way too slow and too incremental. In a recent interview with the local paper, Debbie was asked what her biggest frustration was with respect to getting issues addressed for people living with disabilities. She said it was trying to find out where to go and who to speak to to find out who to hold to account so that change could happen.

Debbie is trying to get the message out that things must change for people living with disabilities so that they can be truly included in all aspects of life, from education to employment, so she launched her own radio show, on CFR in Saskatoon, called *Above and Beyond the Disability*.

I had the opportunity to sit down with Debbie to discuss what governments must do if they are really serious about making life better for people with disabilities. One thing Debbie impressed upon me was how all too often those employed to provide services to people living with disabilities are non-disabled persons. She and I agree that this has to change.

During our interview, I heard loud and clear from Debbie about the difficulty of holding people to account for changes needed and the slow pace of change. Debbie was also adamant that those with disabilities be included not just as volunteers and consultation participants but as employees in the design and implementation of all services, policies and laws that impact their lives.

As always, it is an honour and a great responsibility to rise in the House to represent my constituents of Saskatoon West to do my best to give the people living in my community a voice in Parliament on issues and concerns that are important to them. Today I stand to speak in support of Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada. I rise to add my voice to the debate with the hope that the bill will be a game-changer for people in my community like Debbie and the 5.3 million Canadians living with disabilities, and indeed, for all Canadians.

As my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh stated, “these proceedings” the debate on Bill C-81, “have the potential for tremendous historic significance. We are debating a bill that, if done properly” could very well become “breakthrough legislation” that will be proudly studied and celebrated for many “generations to come.”

We have been anxiously waiting for this legislation since it was promised during the last election, and of course, those living with disabilities and those advocating for disability rights have been waiting much longer for this day to come. It is incumbent on us as parliamentarians, with the input of citizens, to get it right, and that is what I hope we are all here to do today.

To get this legislation right, it needs improvements. The government must be open to allowing it to be thoroughly studied at committee and to ensuring the full participation of those living with disabilities so that their voices and expertise are heard loud and clear during the proceedings. Finally, the government must demonstrate that it is truly listening and will be open to accepting amendments at committee to this important bill.

How can this bill be better? What do we need to do to get it right? Here I will turn to the work and words of those in the know, the individual advocates and groups working to ensure that the human rights of those living with disabilities are respected and protected.

I want to acknowledge the work of Debbie Windsor, Barrier Free Saskatchewan, the National Institute of Disability Management and Research, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance for their work and expertise, which has been extremely helpful in informing my comments today.

Government Orders

How do we make this bill better so that it can really be historic in its impact on the lives of people with disabilities? When Debbie mentioned accountability for change, or the lack of accountability, I looked to see if this bill would deliver. It would not. The lack of timelines in the bill is a concern. Without clear timelines, many are concerned that there is no way to hold the government to account for timely implementation.

Splitting enforcement and implementation and spreading those functions over four different agencies seems confusing and overly bureaucratic. I do not see how this would be a preferred way to serve people. I am curious as to how anyone would see this set-up as effective or efficient. It sounds like a system built to serve government, not people.

● (1340)

My colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, said it well in her speech when she described the enforcement and administration of the bill as a snarl, with the result of very similar regulations being enacted by the different agencies involved rather than by one single agency. The duplication would not just risk inconsistencies, it would create them, causing even further delays. The bill should be streamlining systems, not creating more barriers and bureaucracy.

Exemptions should be the exception, not the rule, but I am afraid that the bill would allow too much latitude for officials to exempt organizations, with little to no oversight or public accountability for why these exemptions were being allowed. This needs to change. If the bill would truly put people first, exemptions would need to be exceptional and reviewed independently.

Both the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, and the Canadian Transportation Agency remain in the frame around enforcement. To my earlier point, most agree that a one-stop enforcement agency is preferred by just about everyone who has commented on the bill. Putting that aside for a moment, neither of these agencies have proven effective in enforcing their current obligations on accessibility. Both of them have broad powers to exempt organizations from complying with the proposed legislation. Hopefully, committee members will carefully review and improve this aspect of the bill.

As the minister mentioned in her speech, the definitions of “barrier” and “disability” put forth in Bill C-81 draw from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They are broad and inclusive, supporting the greatest number of Canadians.

Since ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, Canada has not proceeded with enabling legislation to bring our laws in line with this international obligation. It is good to see this legislation using definitions found in the convention. It is a good start, but we must not stop there. Bill C-81 does not fulfill all of Canada's obligations under the treaty, so a reference in the legislation to a timeline for when Canada would fully meet its obligations would be an important addition to the bill. I encourage the committee to give this aspect of the bill its attention as well.

This past Saturday afternoon, on the grounds of nine legislative buildings in Canada, including on the grounds of the Saskatchewan legislature, people gathered to demand that American sign language

and Quebec sign language be designated official languages in Canada. This call for the inclusion of ASL and QSL was also heard during the government's consultations for Bill C-81. This recognition is not included in the bill as tabled, so I strongly encourage committee members to rectify this oversight with amendments at committee.

David Lepofsky, a Canadian lawyer and disability advocate, in a recent interview, summed up very well where we find ourselves with the tabling of Bill C-81. He said:

It's a good starting point and certainly the most substantial piece of legislation introduced by any government in Canada. But it's going to need substantial additions and improvements to be effective, including a deadline to reach full accessibility.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to reiterate the importance of this legislation in changing millions of people's lives for the better. I also want to reiterate the NDP's support for the bill and the principles it espouses. This is an important piece of legislation. It deserves our time and attention to get it right. It is my hope that we are all on that path together.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her comments, in particular for referencing David Lepofsky and his input in getting us to where we are today.

One of the concerns we have, as we watch this go through committee, is the tactics that happen sometimes in the House. We would be getting people with disabilities to testify, to come to Ottawa, with attendant care, with medical procedures that will have to be done to get them to fly to Ottawa or to take the train or to get transport here. We saw last spring adjournment motions and all sorts of other trickery in the House that collapsed committee work. In light of the fact that we have such a delicate population, in terms of accommodation and people who want to speak to the issue, could you give us the assurance that the NDP would not play games to interfere with people with disabilities coming to testify so that reasonable accommodation could be met and we would not be bringing people to Ottawa just to send them home?

● (1345)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I certainly will not give you that reassurance, and I would ask the member to address the questions and comments to the Chair. He has been in the House long enough to know that.

The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

Government Orders

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Speaker, if the member had heard the comments around the House today, especially from the NDP caucus, he would have found that we are supportive of the bill. We have asked the government to share, in its remarks, if it is open to including amendments that would make the bill better. I can only speak for myself, but that conveys my commitment to make the proceedings improve the bill. It is a commitment I have made to my constituents.

All parties in the House cannot step back and say that they have not played games. I hope my colleague will enter into the conversations at committee with a commitment to actually build a barrier-free Canada.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member from the NDP mentioned David Lepofsky. He has been a leading advocate for a barrier-free Canada and is probably one of the best examples of thoughtful advocacy I have seen in my time in public life. I recall him teaching, in my bar admission course in Ontario, through the Law Society of Upper Canada, issues related to people facing disabilities. I want to thank Mr. Lepofsky. He is also quite tenacious on social media in making sure that these issues are not forgotten.

The member highlighted a number of the areas where this falls short. All parties, I think, want to see fewer barriers, more engagement and more opportunities for people. The fact is, and this is what Mr. Lepofsky's group has also highlighted, the government provides the ability for itself to set standards or regulations but sets no timeline for the government to lead by example with respect to future plans for its infrastructure in future federal jurisdiction areas, such as ports, airports and these sorts of things. Is that lack of a timeline and a commitment to federal leadership something the member feels is a bit of a shortcoming in Bill C-81?

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Speaker, I think it was clear in my speech that I am concerned that there do not exist, as another member of the House mentioned, enough "musts" in this legislation so that those folks who have been advocating for legislation such as this would see something happen sooner rather than later.

The other big concern for me, which I have spoken about before and was a big part of my life when I was a social worker, is that I am a real advocate for the one-stop shop. I find the way compliance and enforcement are described in this legislation is very confusing and overly bureaucratic. It certainly does not speak to the issues that were brought to my attention, which is that it is very hard to hold a government to account when there are all these different agencies involved. One needs a road map to deal with them.

I am really hopeful that the government is sincere in what I have heard in the House about being open to amendments to make this legislation stronger and will speak to the many advocates who have said that the legislation is historic but needs help and amendments at committee.

• (1350)

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am absolutely delighted for the opportunity to speak to the accessible Canada act today.

Throughout the accessible Canada consultation, the broadest consultation on disability in our country's history, the Government of Canada heard from more than 6,000 people and over 90 organizations.

These stakeholders told us clearly and repeatedly that Canada needs disability legislation with teeth. We need legislation that would move us away from the current system of placing the onus on disabled Canadians to remove barriers. We need legislation that would help us build a more inclusive, accessible and tolerant society. We need legislation that would set in place a system to proactively identify, remove and prevent barriers in areas of federal jurisdiction.

To this end, Bill C-81 would create a dedicated accessibility commissioner within the Canadian Human Rights Commission who would be responsible for ensuring that organizations are in fact meeting their obligations under the proposed accessible Canada act.

The need is clear. Let me remind hon. members of a few of the most recent statistics published by Statistics Canada that elucidate this issue.

The employment rate of Canadians aged 25 to 64 with disabilities is a mere 49% compared with 79% for Canadians without a disability. The employment rate among persons aged 25 to 64 with a mild disability is 68% compared with 54% for those with moderate disability and 42% for persons with severe disability, and merely 26% among those with a very severe disability.

Approximately one in two university graduates with or without disability held a professional occupation. However, graduates with a disability were less likely to hold management positions and earned less than those without a disability, especially among men.

Among Canadians with a disability, 12% reported having been refused a job in the previous five years as result of their condition. The percentage was 33% among 25 to 34-year olds with a severe or very severe disability.

I am sure that members on all sides of the House would agree that the measures we are proposing today in Bill C-81 would help address this inequality and are long overdue.

This is how Bill C-81 would work.

With respect to compliance tools, the accessibility commissioner would have access to a variety of proactive enforcement tools to verify compliance and to prevent noncompliance with the act. Proactive inspections of regulated entities would be a large part of ensuring that the onus for removing barriers is not placed on individual Canadians. The accessibility commissioner would be empowered to conduct an inspection of any place that he or she considers necessary to verify compliance. In addition, the commissioner would have the authority to conduct paper-based inspections through production orders.

If, following an inspection, the accessibility commissioner found that an organization had contravened its obligations under the act, there would be a variety of different tools the commissioner could use to ensure compliance.

Government Orders

One of these tools is compliance orders. A compliance order would ensure that if an inspector sees a barrier that needs to be removed immediately, the inspector could order that this be done within a timeframe the commissioner considered appropriate. For instance, if an organization has placed garbage cans that block an accessible entrance, an inspector could order those garbage to be moved without delay.

The accessibility commissioner would also have the authority to issue notices of violation. These notices could be given with a warning or with a monetary penalty.

Under Bill C-81, the maximum penalty for a violation would be \$250,000. The penalty issued for a given violation would depend on the nature and the severity of the issue, the criteria for which would be set out in regulations.

However, Bill C-81 also includes the idea of continuing violations, whereby a violation that continues more than one day would constitute a separate violation for each day and could result in separate \$250,000 penalties each day the violation continues.

Additionally, if the possibility of an administrative monetary penalty is not enough to encourage an organization to comply with its obligations, Bill C-81 would also provide authority to publish the name of the organization or person who committed the violation, along with the amount of the penalty.

In terms of jurisdiction, compliance and enforcement under Bill C-81 would build on existing expertise within the Government of Canada and fill gaps where needed.

Bill C-81 expands on existing sector-based mandates, authorities, expertise and experience in relation to accessibility within the federal transportation network and broadcasting and telecommunications services.

- (1355)

Both the Canadian Transportation Agency and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission have existing accessibility mandates. Bill C-81 proposes to enhance these mandates and to expand the powers and responsibilities of the Canadian Transportation Agency as well as the CRTC in relation to accessibility. The Canadian Transportation Agency would continue to be responsible for the accessibility of passengers in the federal transportation network, with an enhanced mandate, responsibilities and powers. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission would continue to be responsible for accessibility in relation to broadcasting and telecommunication services with new responsibilities for overseeing accessibility plans, feedback processes and progress reports.

Through amendments to the Canada Transportation Act, the Canadian Transportation Agency would have new proactive compliance tools to ensure that those in the federal transportation network are meeting their accessibility obligations. These compliance tools would be very similar to those of the accessibility commissioner, including the ability to issue notices of violations, with fines again up to \$250,000. Given the whole-of-government approach to ensuring the removal of barriers in federal jurisdiction, the bill requires that the various authorities put in place mechanisms

for collaboration and coordination across organizations regarding their policies and practices in relation to accessibility.

In terms of remedies, although the focus of Bill C-81 is on proactive and systemic change, the bill also provides for complaints mechanisms for individuals who have been harmed by an organization's non-compliance with its accessibility obligations.

Bill C-81 provides individuals with a right to file complaints with the accessibility commissioner if they have been harmed or have suffered property damage or economic loss as a result of, or have otherwise been adversely affected by, the contravention by an entity of regulations made under the proposed accessibility act. If, after investigating a complaint, the accessibility commissioner finds that the complaint is substantiated, the commissioner could order a broad range of remedies, including that the entity that committed the contravention take appropriate corrective measures; make available to the complainant the rights, opportunities or privileges that they were denied; pay compensation to the complainant for wages they were deprived of, and for expenses incurred by them as a result of the contravention; pay compensation to the complainant for the additional costs of obtaining alternative goods, services, facilities or accommodation as a result of the contravention; pay compensation for any pain and suffering the complainant experienced; and pay the complainant an amount if the accessibility commissioner determines that the contravention is the result of a wilful or reckless practice.

The maximum amount that could be awarded for each of pain and suffering and wilful and reckless practice would initially be set at \$20,000, but Bill C-81 includes a provision that would increase these amounts over time to account for inflation. If individuals and organizations think that the accessibility commissioner made an error in dismissing a complaint or in ordering a remedy, they would be able to make an appeal. For most complaints, these appeals would go to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. For complaints about parliamentary entities, appeals would go to the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board.

The accessibility commissioner would not be responsible for dealing with all complaints, however. In recognition of, and to leverage, the existing expertise of the Canadian Transportation Agency and the CRTC, these organizations would be responsible for dealing with complaints in the federal passenger transportation network and in respect of the Broadcasting Act and Telecommunications Act, respectively.

Through the amendments to the Canada Transportation Act proposed in Bill C-81, the Canadian Transportation Agency would continue to deal with complaints in relation to undue barriers to the mobility of persons with disabilities in the federal transportation network, with enhanced remedies, such as compensation for pain and suffering, which would be better aligned with the remedies available under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The Canadian Transportation Agency would also deal with a new type of complaint that addresses contraventions of regulations made under the Canada Transportation Act that result in harm, similar to complaints made to the accessibility commissioner under the proposed accessible Canada act, with similar remedies for individuals.

Statements by Members

For complaints about broadcasting and telecommunications services, Canadians would continue to file complaints with the CRTC, which would use its existing authorities under the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act to address the complaints.

In the case of grievances, many public service and parliamentary employees have existing grievance rights. Bill C-81 builds on these rights. Through amendments to the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Employment Act, and the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, these employees would be able to refer their complaints for adjudication.

• (1400)

I conclude by saying that I hope all members will support this bill at this reading so that it can go to committee, where it can be reviewed and sent back to the House for approval.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

TORNADO IN GATINEAU

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, we were all gripped by images of desolation in the wake of the tornado that tore through Gatineau. The Bloc Québécois stands with the victims. Our hearts go out to them in this difficult time as their resilience is put to the test. I want to thank the first responders and volunteers who are providing invaluable support.

Yesterday, the Government of Quebec announced immediate financial assistance as we await the final tally of the damage. I expect the Canadian government will do the same.

We are also appealing to the public's generosity. For local residents, donations of non-perishable food and personal hygiene products are being collected at the former Sears location at the Galleries de Hull. Quebeckers can donate money to the Red Cross online or by telephone.

Hang in there, Gatineau.

* * *

[*English*]

TORONTO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, local democracy is under attack in Toronto. While the rest of Ontario's municipalities are holding elections without any interference, Toronto's vote has been plunged into chaos by the Ford government at Queen's Park.

The decision to disrupt the election while already in progress was and is wrong. The arbitrary, unexpected and poorly executed move to cut the size of Toronto's city council is creating uncertainty and confusion. Voters do not know which ward they are in and they do not know which community council is going to handle the critical issues of the neighbourhood. Local democracy matters.

No other city in Ontario is being treated this way. It is not right and it is not fair. The premier has bragged that some parts of Toronto

will be overrepresented while others will be deliberately discriminated against. This is vindictive and undemocratic.

Our government knows that municipalities are critical partners in making life better for Canadians. Cities matter, Toronto matters and the people of Toronto have the right to govern themselves through free and fair elections.

* * *

SPRAY LAKE SAWMILLS

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the long-standing legacy of Spray Lake Sawmills in Cochrane, Alberta, as it celebrates its 75th anniversary.

This family-owned business was founded in 1943 by Chester Mjolsness, who set up a permanent home for the sawmill in the town of Cochrane in 1969. The sawmill created jobs for the residents of Cochrane, but to the Mjolsness family, it was also an opportunity to have a positive impact on the growth of the community. Through countless philanthropic gestures, including the construction of a world-class recreation centre, giving back has always been essential to their model of business.

Though at the ripe old age of 99, Chester now leaves the management of the sawmill up to his son, Barry, the importance of the community is still apparent in everything that they do to give back. There are probably not many projects in Cochrane that have not been touched by the Mjolsness family.

To Spray Lake Sawmills and the Mjolsness family, I would like to thank them for all they have done to contribute to the growth and prosperity of Cochrane and area. I congratulate them on achieving this milestone and here is to another 75 years.

* * *

• (1405)

GENDER EQUALITY WEEK

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the leadership of the MP for Mississauga-Lakeshore, this week is Canada's first Gender Equality Week. This week, Canadians are invited to reflect on and address the challenges faced by women and gender-diverse individuals. Advancing gender equality is not only right, it is also smart. If we move forward with meaningful changes, we could add \$150 billion to our GDP in less than a decade.

In my riding, I run a program called young women in leadership, where we pair young women with businesses and organizations for a job shadow. It gives young women a chance to experience a career they may not have otherwise considered and has inspired some to change their mind about what path to pursue.

Gender equality means a larger workforce with more diverse ideas and better decision-making. Let us allow Canada's first Gender Equality Week to inspire us, because if we get this right, we all benefit.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

VOYAGEURS DE SAGUENAY BASEBALL TEAM

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to you today about a baseball team in my riding, the Voyageurs de Saguenay. After another great season, I wanted to acknowledge the team's play. Martin Pouliot began coaching the team in October 2015. Thanks to the hard work of the coach and players, the Voyageurs won their first division title since joining the Quebec junior elite baseball league in 1995. Although they were defeated on September 15, I congratulate the Voyageurs for their efforts and for making the baseball season in our region an exciting one. The day after the team was eliminated at the last tournament, the coach stated that "the best place to play junior elite baseball is in the Saguenay."

To that I say thank you. Thank you for taking our team so far and giving our region such a great sports story. Congratulations Voyageurs, and thank you for the great times!

* * *

[English]

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Mr. Geng Tan (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today many families from across Canada will reunite to celebrate the mid-autumn festival, a special day of togetherness with loved ones and friends. It is an opportunity to champion the benefits of a vibrant multicultural Canada, where diversity is our strength. It is also a chance to celebrate the many contributions made by Asian Canadians, whose culture, traditions and heritage enrich the lives of all Canadians.

It is in this spirit of celebration and togetherness that I welcome parliamentarians from all parties to celebrate the mid-autumn festival in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building right after tonight's vote.

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MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my constituents in Richmond, I am excited to join Canadians of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese descent in celebration of the mid-autumn festival, when families and friends will come together in harmony under the full moon for good food and fellowship. Originally a Chinese harvest tradition focused around moon worship, the moon festival now celebrates giving thanks, unity and prayer.

While I encourage all Canadians to join their neighbours in celebrating this special festival, I also offer my thoughts and prayers to those who have been affected by the two tornadoes that struck the national capital region this past weekend. The moon will shine again tonight.

[Member spoke in Cantonese]

[English]

I wish everyone a happy moon festival.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SIGN LANGUAGES

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise in the House today to recognize language diversity. It is time to re-evaluate how we define and practise communication in our communities.

Yesterday was our country's very first International Day of Sign Languages. I am honoured to welcome to the Hill today my constituent, Jessica Sergeant, who is a great advocate for the deaf community. Sign languages are equal to spoken languages and thus should be widely embraced and accessible. For deaf people, early access to sign language is vital to their growth and development. We must not treat deaf people as disabled and we need to embrace our differences and encourage the growth and acceptance of sign languages as a norm.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I encourage you and all of my colleagues from all sides of the House to not only celebrate this first International Day of Sign Languages, but to also reflect on how we can better represent all languages throughout our diverse country.

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MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, I joined the Richmond Chinese Community Society at Lansdowne Centre in celebrating mid-autumn festival. I would like to thank Linda Li, Thomas Yu, Phyllis Chan, Michael Chiu, and all the great volunteers at RCCS for organizing this great annual event.

[Translation]

This festival was a time for friends and loved ones to get together to celebrate the harvest and the achievements over the past 12 months.

I am honoured to rise today to extend my best wishes to the people of Steveston—Richmond East and all of Canada on this autumnal equinox.

I wish everyone joyous celebrations and a happy, prosperous year.

* * *

● (1410)

FIREARMS

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that there is no end to the Liberals' summer of failure.

I rise today as an avid hunter and a member of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus.

I want to give a shout-out to all of the hunters and fishers for whom this time of year is very important.

I was recently invited to participate in activities at a shooting club in my riding. I witnessed all those who participate in this sport systematically applying existing safety rules and legislation. I previously had the same opportunity in the Isle-aux-Grues archipelago, also in my riding.

Statements by Members

In a region like ours, hunting is not just a hobby; it is a way of life. After all, Montmagny is Canada's snow goose capital. Anyone can clearly see how hunting plays a role in my constituents' everyday lives. However, some Canadians are worried about Bill C-71. They believe, as do I, that Bill C-71 will have no effect on gun violence and will simply create more red tape.

I am committed to standing up for the interests of hunters in my region by saying no to a registry that is costly, ineffective and—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

* * *

TORNADOES IN GATINEAU AND OTTAWA

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the national capital region, including Hull—Aylmer, was hit by a tornado. Thanks to the national emergency alert system, residents were able to find shelter.

Hundreds of people no longer have a roof over their heads. I arrived minutes after the tornado had passed. There was massive devastation, but the story I want to share with the House is a story of resilience.

I got to see Gatineau's strong sense of community at work. What matters is not what happens to us, but how we deal with it. Mayor Maxime Pedneaud-Jobin, the Red Cross, Hydro-Québec, emergency preparedness organizations, City of Gatineau staff, first responders, bus drivers for the Société de transport de l'Outaouais, the business community, and countless volunteers did a stellar job.

I urge all Canadians to donate to the Red Cross to help those who have lost everything.

I want everyone who has been affected by this disaster to know that the community and every level of government are behind them. I also want to thank the residents of Hull—Aylmer for making all the difference.

* * *

[English]

FUR TRADE

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to recognize one of Canada's oldest and most historically significant industries: the fur trade. From Jacques Cartier to Samuel de Champlain, the first nations and the Hudson's Bay Company, the fur trade was and continues to be crucial to our resource-based economy. There are over 60,000 Canadians who work in various sectors of the fur trade, including mink and fox farms, trappers, designers, auction houses, manufacturers, retailers, artisans and many more. The fur trade provides income for people in rural and remote regions, including many indigenous communities. I am proud to have a mink breeder in my riding of Long Range Mountains. Fur is a sustainably produced, renewable natural resource with strict animal welfare standards, and it is these standards that produce our world-renowned furs worn and sought after by many. Canadians can be proud of this heritage industry. It showcases our excellence on the world stage.

In closing, I would like to encourage all members to attend the Canada Mink Breeders Association reception this evening in Centre Block.

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TORNADOES IN OTTAWA-GATINEAU

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, storms ripped through communities, uprooted homes and tore apart the lives of people right across the greater capital region. Yet, our first responders, our volunteers, our charities and our friends and neighbours all rallied together to take care of one another in this extraordinary time of need.

Even though the lights were out at many intersections, spontaneous order broke out as people used courtesy and common sense in order to make it through all of the confusion.

For all those people who were most affected, who lost their homes, they should know that we stand with them, that we admire their courage and we present them with our total solidarity as they rebuild their lives.

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STAND-UP COMEDY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Knock, knock, Mr. Speaker. Who is there you ask? Well, me, and a big bunch of comedians. Do you know what else? They are a lot funnier than me.

However, they are here today on a more serious note. They are here in this place to advocate on behalf of stand-up comedians across our country.

As a country, we take pride in our comedians. However, many of us probably do not realize that stand-up comedy is not a recognized artistic activity or a discipline by the Canada Council for the Arts. In fact, it is not recognized as an art form by any province or territory across our country. That is not something to laugh about.

I thank Sandra Battaglini and all the comedians who form part of the Canadian Association of Stand-up Comedians for their advocacy and hard work on this issue. Sometimes they make us laugh; sometimes so much we cry. We stand with them and take so much pride in their art form.

• (1415)

The Speaker: I can just sense members getting nervous about any cracks they are planning to make during question period.

The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

* * *

PHARMACARE

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to host our leader, Jagmeet Singh, in my riding of Hamilton Mountain this past Friday.

We had the opportunity to meet with Hamilton residents to talk about the NDP goal of universal pharmacare. I would like to thank Hamilton poverty round table members, Linda Gill of the Canadian Federation of University Women, and many others who participated.

We heard about Jody's grandmother who received lifesaving treatment, but then could not afford the \$700-per-month drug cost to keep her alive, and the person who relied on the generosity of the drug companies to cover high drug costs that were not affordable. What happens when that generosity runs out? We heard about residents ending up in emergency with an asthma attack, taking up precious emergency room resources because they could not afford their asthma medication.

After hearing the tragic stories of seniors and working families making a choice between paying rent or paying for lifesaving medication, I am more convinced than ever that it is time to implement a universal pharmacare program. We cannot afford not to.

* * *

MEMBER FOR YORK—SIMCOE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I first met the member for York—Simcoe back in 1995 when Regina hosted the Grey Cup. It was really apparent to me at the time that the member had two great loves: CFL football and politics, as evidenced by the fact that he has not missed a Grey Cup game in over 30 years and he has been an elected member of Parliament for over 14 years.

Several years later we met again, as we were both elected in the 2004 federal election. After a couple of years in opposition, we formed government in 2006, and I had the pleasure of being named parliamentary secretary to the member as he served two times in the role of government House leader.

Sadly, today marks the last time the member will sit in the chamber as he has decided to retire. Over those 14 years, the member has been a great friend and mentor to me.

On behalf of all my parliamentary colleagues, I simply say “Thank you PVL for your great service to our country, to our institution. Parliament will be diminished by your absence.”

The Speaker: On occasions like this, we sometimes allow a little skirting of the rules about naming members.

The hon. member for Kanata—Carleton.

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TORNADOES IN OTTAWA-GATINEAU

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, our amazing community of Dunrobin in my riding of Kanata—Carleton was devastated as an EF3 tornado touched down, destroying homes and businesses, causing injury and unimaginable destruction.

Over the weekend, I witnessed an amazing emergency response. Mayor Watson and city councillor Eli El-Chantiry led an all-out effort to come to the aid of Dunrobin. Police, firefighters, paramedics, support workers, the team at West Carleton Secondary School, road, building, hydro, and gas crews, giving it their all.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hundreds of people worked hard to help those in need.

[English]

I encourage those who want to help to donate to the Red Cross. For those who have been on duty for the last three days straight, I thank them very much for their efforts.

The residents of Dunrobin are an example of amazing community strength and compassion. They are in our thoughts as they face this tragedy, and we will be there with them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, residents of Gatineau and Ottawa were hit by an EF3 tornado on Friday.

My thoughts, like those of all my colleagues in the House, are with those affected by this terrible tragedy. I would like to thank Canadians for the solidarity they have all shown since Friday, particularly the first responders who have been working so tirelessly.

Could the government give the House an update on the situation and tell us how it intends to help those affected?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, on behalf of the government, let me associate myself with the remarks of the hon. gentleman. Everyone in the House is thinking of the people who have suffered such loss over the course of this last weekend.

The Government of Canada was in constant communication with the provincial and municipal authorities during the course of the weekend to make sure that if any access to federal assistance was required, that would be made available immediately. We have co-operated completely with local officials, including today in providing geomatic mapping services to both the provinces of Ontario and Quebec to ensure they have the very best possible information in coping with the circumstances.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction said that most of the illegal immigrants who came to Canada last year have left the country.

Oral Questions

Unfortunately, that is completely untrue. According to the Canada Border Services Agency, only 398 of the 32,173 illegal migrants who came to Canada last year were deported.

How can we trust this minister if he cannot even give us accurate information and data regarding his own portfolio?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this issue. During a media interview this past weekend, I created unnecessary confusion by mistakenly suggesting that the majority of asylum claimants had left. My intention was to explain how people who were deemed ineligible after exhausting all due process were in fact removed. Upon becoming aware of the confusion that I had created, I took immediate steps to clarify my remarks and to apologize.

As part of our government's ongoing commitment to openness and transparency, we post information related to irregular migration online, and all statistics related to asylum claims, interceptions and processes are publicly available.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are these: Since being appointed, the minister has not presented Canadians and members of Parliament with a concrete plan to resolve the border issue and the crisis we have been dealing with for almost two years now.

When data are made available, the minister has no clue what data he is talking about when he answers questions from the media and opposition members. That is ludicrous.

We would like the minister to stand up, show some leadership and come up with a plan. If he cannot, we can.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is steadfast in its commitment to keeping Canadians and our borders safe.

The minister apologized for any confusion he may have caused. Contrary to what fearmongering Conservatives would have everyone believe, on our watch, the number of applications processed over the past year has gone up by 50%. Most of the people who arrived last year are waiting for their claims to be processed.

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the minister was asked by Global News if he was tracking the whereabouts of 33,000 illegal border crossers, he claimed that “the overwhelming majority” of illegal border crossers had left the country. However, today, the Globe and Mail reports that only six illegal border crossers have been removed by his government.

Therefore, I have a very precise question. If the government has removed six illegal border crossers, how many illegal border crossers remain in Canada?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite, because of her vast experience on the immigration file, knows that individuals who come to our country, crossing into Canada seeking protection and asylum as they flee from persecution, are not illegal

crossers and are dealt with according to law. They are entitled, by international convention and Canadian law, to due process and humanitarian support.

● (1425)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I created some confusion. I asked him very clearly how many illegal border crossers remained in Canada, and he could not answer. I am going to ask what every Canadian wants to know after that disastrous interview. If the minister cannot tell the House how many illegal border crossers remain in Canada, how can they possibly expect to believe he knows where they are? Where are they?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under Canadian law, all people coming into this country seeking asylum are entitled to due process. When all of those processes have been exhausted and they are deemed ineligible, they are subject to removal by the CBSA. The people that the member opposite is referring to are still engaged in that process, and when those processes are complete, the law will take effect.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, discussion is a two-way street. Testimony given by members of indigenous communities about the Trans Mountain expansion project show that the discussion was not a true dialogue, but rather a monologue in front of a row of officials. Discussing means sharing. It does not just mean sitting down and taking notes while yearning for the meeting to be over.

Does the government realize that it has a constitutional duty to meaningfully consult indigenous peoples?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no relationship more important to our government than the relationship with indigenous peoples. I started reaching out to indigenous leaders before the decision by the federal court, and I have continued to do so. We believe that we will engage with them in a meaningful two-way dialogue and listen to their concerns very, very carefully in order to move forward on this project in the right way.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a big difference between what the government is saying and what it is doing.

Over the weekend, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard acknowledged that the government had failed to adequately consult indigenous communities that would be affected by the pipeline. I congratulate him on finally reaching the same conclusion as the Federal Court of Appeal.

Oral Questions

The problem is that without the court's intervention, the government would not have respected either the voice or the will of indigenous communities. The government says it is going to hold consultations, but in reality, it has already made the decision to force through the Trans Mountain expansion.

Is the government going to keep plowing ahead with total disregard for its responsibilities to indigenous communities?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect us to work hard to make sure that we are expanding our resource market beyond the U.S. market. They also expect us to follow the highest standard possible engaging in indigenous consultations, as well as respecting and protecting the environment. That is exactly what we have been doing, and that is the course we will follow in making sure that we are moving forward on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion in the right way.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Trans Mountain, the Minister of Natural Resources said that the Liberals should have engaged in “meaningful dialogue” with indigenous peoples. He is right. He should have, and they did not.

The indigenous communities confirmed that there was not a meaningful two-way discussion, and the courts agree. Now, this weekend, we hear that there is no guarantee that all concerns raised by indigenous people will be addressed. How is that meaningful consultation?

Why are the Liberals satisfied with the bare minimum when it comes to their most important relationship?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the hon. member to look at the court ruling. The court has acknowledge that we put a framework in place that was sound and that we engaged in good faith with the indigenous peoples, and we will continue to do so. We have instructed the NEB to take steps to initiate the inclusion of marine shipping and the impact of that on the environment in the review it will undertake over the next 22 weeks, and we will be announcing our next steps shortly.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member to read the decision, where it is very clear that it was only note-takers, not decision-makers. When it comes to actually having consultation, it is imperative that we finally see a two-way discussion, which in meaningful consultation happens. In fact, when you say that the pipeline will be built on the one hand and on the other hand you say that you are going to have meaningful consultation, it is not only misleading, but absolutely insulting. The courtrooms confirmed that the Liberals' consultation process was completely faulty. Indigenous people need to meet with decision-makers, not note-takers. It is common sense.

How can the Liberals think that redoing the same process will have a different result?

• (1430)

The Speaker: The use of “you” in that question perhaps could be interpreted to mean “one”, or it could mean “you” as if the people across the way. I would ask members to be cautious and to direct their comments to the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, there is no relationship more important to this government than the relationship with indigenous peoples, and that is exactly what we have been developing. We put a very strong framework in place, which the court acknowledged was a sound framework. Yes, we fell short on the implementation of that framework and we have committed to do better, and we will do better. We will engage with indigenous peoples in a meaningful two-way dialogue and listen to their concerns and offer accommodation where accommodation is possible. That is the only way to move forward.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when asked why veterans cannot access benefits meant for them, the minister told veterans, “When you prepay at the pump, you put in 80 bucks, you don’t fill it up, you get that credit back.”

There is one guy out there who has no trouble accessing funds meant for veterans, Christopher Garnier, a murderer who never served a day in his life and went straight to the front of the line.

When will the minister revoke veterans benefits for this killer?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I share the outrage of the hon. member and many members of the House.

I cannot comment on the specifics of this case because it also involves a veteran. This case involves a veteran whose privacy I must protect.

I have asked officials to go back to find out what happened and to come back to me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would ask hon. members to listen to the answers, whether they like them or not, and wait for their turn to speak, which will come eventually, I am sure.

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he killed officer Catherine Campbell. He put her in a compost bin, and he dumped her under a bridge.

He has never worn the uniform, yet she wore two uniforms, one as a police officer and one as a volunteer firefighter.

By his lawyer's own admission, Christopher Garnier developed his PTSD from strangling her to death.

When will the minister take charge of his department and revoke veterans benefits for this killer?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will return when my officials have come back and told me exactly how this happened.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that I am thinking of everyone in the Gatineau and Ottawa region affected by Friday's events.

Last week, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said that he had asked for the Christopher Garnier case to be reviewed. Can the minister tell us today that he will stop Mr. Garnier from receiving assistance from a fund reserved for our brave veterans?

I remind members that Mr. Garnier is not a veteran; he is a criminal.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all keeping officer Campbell's family in our hearts. For privacy reasons, we cannot comment on this case. However, the minister has asked the department to investigate and find out how the decision was made.

•(1435)

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs claims to be outraged by this situation. Canadians are outraged by this situation. The victim's family is living in anguish and does not understand. Nevertheless, the minister has not done a thing.

The Prime Minister is the one who calls the shots. He can put an end to all of this. When will he?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for privacy reasons, we cannot comment on this case. However, the minister has asked the department to investigate and find out how the decision was made.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2010 it was discovered that serial killer Clifford Olson was receiving OAS payments. The Conservatives saw how outrageous that was and immediately took steps to stop it.

That same year, Karla Homolka almost got a pardon. Again, the Conservatives saw how outrageous that was and stopped it.

Fast forward to today, we have learned that convicted murder Chris Garnier, who is not a veteran, is getting veterans benefits. What do the Liberals do? They sit on their hands and do absolutely nothing. When will the minister do the right thing and stop these payments?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on the details of this case because, of course, a veteran is involved. I should not have to remind the members opposite that their sharing of personal medical information of veterans for political gain is doubly the reason that we must protect veterans' personal information.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has the ability and the authority to stop payments from going to a convicted murderer who is not a veteran. We are not asking for information; we are asking for action. Why is it that the Liberals are always able to defend the so-called rights of the Chris Garniers, the Omar Khadr, and the returning ISIS terrorists of this

world, but have excuse after excuse for doing nothing for veterans, and doing nothing to defend their ability to get support? When will the Liberals take action—not information, but action?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated in the House before, at the centre of this case is a veteran. I will not back down from protecting the rights of a veteran and a veteran's family and their right to privacy in this case. I have asked my officials to go back to find out how the decision was made and to get back to me.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sarah Alderman, a researcher at the University of Guelph, found that even short exposure to diluted bitumen can be deadly to young salmon, a critical species to B.C.'s economy, tourism and fishing industry. Canadians know that when it comes to oil spills, the question is not if, but when. They also know the decision to buy the Trans Mountain pipeline could be devastating, since the Liberals have no plan in place to clean up a toxic diluted bitumen oil spill on our coast. When will the government protect our wild salmon and abandon its disastrous plan to expand the Trans Mountain pipeline?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized the importance of ensuring environmental sustainability in the context of all of the decisions we have made.

In the context of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, we have made significant investments in spill prevention through the oceans protection plan. This bill responds. We have done an enormous amount in addressing all of the various concerns associated with the pipeline from an environmental perspective. At the end of the day, we understand that the environment and the economy must go together, and they are doing so in this case.

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*[Translation]***NATURAL RESOURCES**

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to pipelines, it is the same old story from both the Liberals and the Conservatives. Quebeckers have lost faith in the Liberal Prime Minister's bungled consultations and discredited assessments.

The Liberals can say what they will to defend themselves, but the Federal Court of Appeal clearly indicated that consulting with first nations and affected communities is not really their strong suit.

Now, the Conservatives are trying to revive energy east, and the Liberals' response is vague and not very reassuring.

Are Quebeckers in for a nasty surprise? Does the Liberal Party plan to revive energy east?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect a government to work hard to get our resources to the global market. We have a condition where 99% of our oil is sold to one customer, the United States. There is a fundamental responsibility that we expand the capacity to go to other markets. Canadians deserve well-paying middle-class jobs. That is what we are focused on. We will move forward on this project in the right way, respecting the environment and at the same time engaging with indigenous peoples in a meaningful two-way dialogue.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, the Prime Minister mocked the idea of legislation to get Trans Mountain built. He said it would not create a “predictable, clear path” for “investors around the world or in Canada”.

However, news flash, in April, he himself told Canadians that the Liberals would bring in a law to “reassert and reinforce” federal jurisdiction to create certainty. Of course, he failed to deliver it, and the courts said he failed on Trans Mountain. It is no wonder no one believes him.

Where is the plan for the Trans Mountain expansion?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the Conservative record for a minute and go to a flashback.

When they took office in 2006, 99% of oil exports went to the United States. Flash forward to 2015, and 99% of oil exports still went to the United States. That is the Conservative record.

We are working hard to ensure that we are expanding our non-U.S. market, but we will move forward on this project in the right way, respecting the environment, and at the same time engaging with indigenous peoples in a meaningful two-way dialogue.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think this minister's constituents, in particular, and all Canadians would like him to show some urgency and actually take action.

Every single day of delay risks thousands of jobs and billions of dollars. The Liberals' failure is damaging Canada's reputation as a place to do business. Five thousand families now do not have jobs they were counting on. Opportunities for 43 indigenous communities are at risk. On Friday, the Liberals really just kicked the can down the road for another six months, and they still do not have a plan.

The Liberals are zero for three on getting pipelines built, and they just keep failing. Why should Canadians trust them now?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives had 10 years to expand our global markets. They failed for 10 years. They did not do anything for 10 years.

We will ensure that we are moving forward on expanding our global market and building pipeline capacity in a way that Canadians expect us to do, which means respecting the environment and, at the same time, consulting and engaging with the indigenous peoples in a meaningful, two-way dialogue.

Oral Questions

We will not take a lesson from the Harper Conservatives who failed Alberta workers for 10 years.

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MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I might remind the minister that when the Conservatives left office, they had three pipelines in the queue. The Liberals now have zero.

Speaking of that, on Friday, the Liberals announced another six-month delay on Trans Mountain. Unfortunately, as the Prime Minister flounders, Ontario manufacturers are fleeing Canada. With no real plan in place, Friday was just one more failure in a summer of failures.

Ontario manufacturers know that every job created in the energy sector results in seven manufacturing jobs in Ontario. When will Ontarians finally see a plan to save our manufacturing jobs?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. That is what we ran on in 2015. That plan is focused on investing in Canadians, and because of that we have seen unprecedented economic growth. Last year, the economy grew by 3%, the fastest growth rate among the G7 countries.

Since we formed government in 2015, over 540,000 good-quality jobs have been created. More Canadians are working. That is a plan that we put forward. That plan is working, and we will continue to remain focused on Canadians.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first nations communities were depending on the Trans Mountain to provide jobs and economic opportunities.

Forty-three first nations have economic benefit agreements. They now have to look at budget cuts to important programs, and at cutting back in terms of many of the things they had hoped to do next year. This is because of the Prime Minister's failure.

Others, indigenous businesses, now have contracts on hold.

How long is the minister willing to deprive these 43 first nations of jobs and economic opportunities? What is the plan?

• (1445)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that we need to expand our global markets, and that is why we are working very hard.

Oral Questions

We have more confidence than the Harper Conservatives did in our energy sector. We believe that supporting our energy sector is the right thing to do, and supporting our workers, in both indigenous communities and non-indigenous communities, is exactly what we are focused on.

The economy is growing in Canada, as in Alberta, and 540,000 more Canadians are working today than were working under Stephen Harper's government.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how can the Liberals claim to be progressive and feminist when they are forcing women to make the difficult choice between paying exorbitant amounts for child care or staying at home? Here in Ottawa, women pay \$65 a day for child care. At that price, child care is not a service; it is a barrier. Quebec knows that, which is why it has an affordable day care system.

It is 2018, so what are the Liberals waiting for? When will they implement a universal child care program?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to say that we are very aware of how important it is to invest in educational child care, not only to support the work of families and reduce poverty, but also to ensure gender equality in the workplace and at home in 2018.

We have put an ambitious plan in place to invest \$7.5 billion over the next 10 years, the first plan of its kind in Canadian history. We are working with the provinces and municipalities, who support us, and we are counting on that broad support from governments and Canadians to do even more—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saskatoon West.

[English]

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Saskatoon and Regina are among the most difficult places in Canada to find licensed child care. In fact, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study says that Saskatoon has only one licensed space for every four children, comparable to rural areas in Nunavut.

In 2015, the Liberals promised a child care framework that meets the needs of Canadian families wherever they live. Families throughout the country are still waiting. Will the so-called feminist government commit to a national child care program to help families now?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am again very pleased to be given this opportunity to tell the House and all Canadians how proud we are to be since 2015 investing in a historically large investment plan to build more quality, affordable and accessible child care services across Canada for all Canadians including indigenous Canadians and families. We announced just last week the first ever distinctions-based investments with our indigenous peoples that will support hundreds of thousands of families across Canada and indigenous communities and they should have more—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members of a founding nation of NATO that is one of its largest financial contributors, Canadians know that our government's commitment to the alliance is strong. Under the Harper Conservatives, the previous government cut its support for the Canadian Forces by \$10 billion and withdrew from the world stage. Unlike them, we are increasing annual defence spending by \$32.7 billion, an increase of more than 70%—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his tireless work on the defence committee. Unlike the Conservatives, who withdrew from NATO and the world, our government is taking leadership roles within the alliance. In July, we announced Canada will assume command of the NATO training mission in Iraq and this will help build a more effective national security structure. The need for any mission builds on the successes we have achieved in the region where we continue to have an impact in the region.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Junkin family owns a small business in Port Perry, Ontario and sells boats for recreation. Both Brandon and his wife, Martina, work at the small business as do both of Martina's parents. Like most businesses in this sector, they buy their inventory in the winter for sale in the summer. They have to pay the GST up front, and now they have to pay the Canadian tariffs up front. This means they will buy fewer boats and they will lose money this year.

Why is the government failing to listen to these small businesses? Will the Liberals exempt these boats from the Canadian tariffs?

● (1450)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to address the question from the member opposite to say that first of all, we have been trying to take into account Canadians across the country who have issues and real challenges in dealing with the tariffs put in place as retaliatory measures against the United States. We are certainly listening to businesses to make sure that we get it right and that we deal with any problems in the implementation of those tariffs. That is an ongoing process, one which we are taking very seriously in order to make sure businesses are not disadvantaged.

Oral Questions

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister needs to recognize small business owners cannot wait a year for relief from the tariffs their government is imposing on them. The government is collecting \$300 million already in tariffs, but studies show most of that will go to large businesses. Small business owners like the Junkins cannot afford armies of lobbyists and lawyers. They need to access tariff support now. Will the government streamline the application process and make support available to small businesses across Canada in the next month, not next year?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that the U.S. section 232 measures have created real challenges and hardship for Canadian workers and Canadian businesses. That is why this government has made up to \$2 billion available to defend and protect the interests of Canadian workers and businesses. These include measures such as extending work-sharing agreements, increased funding for skills training and funding to bolster competitiveness. The teams are working through the night to get these resources out to those who are most affected. We are going to continue to monitor and supervise the situation and respond to protect our Canadian workers.

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

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in July we learned that the government is imposing tariffs on U.S. steel and aluminum. Nearly \$286 million has been collected and that money should be going to Canadian businesses.

According to Global News, so far only \$11,184.35 has been allocated. That is not a lot. Worse yet, most of that money is expected to go to corporations and not the small business owners who need that steel.

Why is the government favouring big business and abandoning small business owners yet again?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that these illegal measures have created real challenges for Canadian businesses and workers. That is why, as my colleague points out, we have already set aside nearly \$2 billion.

Our teams are working very hard to establish the process for directing the funding to those who need it. As we already know, the measures include extending work-sharing agreements, increasing funding for training and improving manufacturer competitiveness. That is precisely what my distinguished colleague was just talking about. We are on the right track.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): That is not exactly true, Mr. Speaker. The Liberals' are thinking of big business, while Canadians would like that money to go to all businesses, especially small and medium-sized ones.

This government is becoming known for protecting the big guys and ignoring the little guys. We saw this last year with the Minister of Finance's tax reform. We saw it this summer with the Liberal carbon tax, which will give large corporations a much lower rate.

Why does the Liberal government insist on protecting the big guys and ignoring small businesses?

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that small business is the backbone of our economy. We have always stood for and supported small businesses. That is why part of that \$2-billion support package includes financing through the Business Development Bank of Canada, BDC, specifically targeting small businesses with cash flow, financing and the support they need. We have stepped up for small business in the past; we will continue to do so going forward as well.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, just this Saturday, Liz Johnston and Denman Islanders pulled a record six tonnes of single-use and industrial plastics from Baynes Sound in my riding. The Liberals say they are prioritizing ocean plastics, but their recent announcement lacks the urgency and funding that coastal communities were counting on. Canadians expected more and the environment cannot wait.

Will the Liberals support my Motion No. 151 and commit to binding targets that properly address single-use and industrial plastics in our oceans?

● (1455)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, plastic pollution is choking our oceans, our lakes and our rivers, damaging the places Canadians love most. That is why the Prime Minister launched the ocean plastics charter at the G7 in June and why reducing global plastic pollution is a top priority for Canada's G7 presidency. We were pleased to see several new supporters of the charter and to announce the government's commitment to diverting 75% of plastic waste from its operation in 2030 and commitment of \$100 million to a marine litter mitigation fund. We all need to be part of the solution. I look forward to continuing to work with our partners to keep plastics in our economy and out of our oceans.

Oral Questions

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, hearings begin on the largest bitumen mine in Canadian history. The Teck Resources mine borders on Wood Buffalo National Park, a world heritage site that UNESCO has declared at risk. Indigenous rights of Dene, Cree and Métis are impacted. They have long called for a buffer area to protect the threatened Ronald bison herd, the caribou and the watershed flowing into the Peace-Athabasca Delta. These are measures the government has the power and duty to deliver on. Will the government today announce these measures?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has committed to addressing and responding to the World Heritage Committee in the requested time as part of the ongoing commitment to protect and care for Canada's heritage places now and for future generations.

Through budget 2018, historic investments are going to protect Canada's nature, parks and wild spaces. Thanks to this commitment to Canada's natural legacy, over \$27.5 million is going to be invested over five years in the development and early implementation of the action plan for the Wood Buffalo National Park world heritage site.

This is an issue we take very seriously and I am pleased the member shares the same commitment that our side does.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund made a difference, allowing community-based environmental groups to undertake projects to remediate Lake Simcoe's health. It worked. The science has shown native species returning and breeding for the first time in decades. Water quality is measurably improved but still more needs to be done.

Despite the past successes, the Liberals cancelled the fund. It makes no sense to reverse the real progress being made on the lake's environment. Will the Liberal government reverse its cancellation of the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the hon. member; I know it is his last day in the House today.

This government is committed to environmental sustainability. We have allocated significant funding to address water quality issues across this country, both fresh water and salt water. We intend to ensure on a go-forward basis that we are substantively addressing all of the various environmental concerns that have been raised in all regions of this country.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has failed to list Iran's IRGC as a terrorist entity, even though three months ago, the Liberals voted in favour of a Conservative motion to do exactly that. Meanwhile, on September 8, the IRGC launched an attack on Kurds in Iraq. The Liberals also failed to condemn this clear attack by Iran on its neighbours.

When the Liberals voted for our motion, the world took notice and yet the Prime Minister has failed to act. How can world leaders take

the Prime Minister seriously when he does not follow through on his clear commitments? When will the Liberals list the IRGC as a terrorist entity, as called for by the motion?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Criminal Code terrorist listing regime is a very important tool to fight against terrorism. The listing of entities counters the financing of terrorism and helps law enforcement to prosecute terrorists and their supporters.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force is already listed as a terrorist entity. The assessment process of other possible listings is ongoing. It is a serious and substantive process. Approved listings are published in the Canada Gazette.

• (1500)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for explaining to us what a listing is. The motion which the Liberals voted for though was very clear. It said to list Iran's IRGC as a terrorist entity and it said to do so immediately. That was in the motion which he stood up in this House and voted for.

Credibility in the councils of the world is not achieved through sparkly logos. It is achieved by doing what one says one will do. Again, when can we expect the Prime Minister and the minister to do what they voted to do in this House on June 12, which is to immediately list the IRGC as a terrorist entity?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. gentleman knows, there is a very specific process by law which the Government of Canada is obliged to follow. If one does not follow the process, one obviates the result.

We are taking the steps that are appropriate in the circumstances and the results will be published in due course in the Canada Gazette and on the Public Safety Canada website.

* * *

ACCESSIBILITY

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, to celebrate the first ever United Nations International Day of Sign Languages, I participated in a rally organized by the Canadian Association for the Deaf about increasing recognition and awareness for American sign language, *langue des signes québécoise* and indigenous sign languages. Every day, 310,000 deaf Canadians and their families contribute greatly to our society and yet, significant barriers still limit their full participation in our society.

Can the minister please inform this House how our government is ensuring a more accessible Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we absolutely recognize the importance of sign language to the deaf and hard of hearing communities here in Canada, both as a means of communication but also of cultural significance. Our government is very committed to ensuring greater accessibility and opportunities for all. That is why our government was proud to table Bill C-81, which will help ensure that all people, regardless of ability or disability, can fully participate in society.

I encourage all members of the House to support this bill and I invite them to join me this evening for a reception with members of the deaf community to celebrate International Day of Sign Languages.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal tradition of failing our troops is back in action. The company picked to build Canada's new fleet of warships has asked the Prime Minister for a hard start date, but he refused. The Prime Minister refused even though Irving faces potential layoffs due to his Liberal mismanagement. He refused even though he committed to continuing on with our national shipbuilding strategy. He refused even though our navy needs new warships now.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing for Canada's ship workers and our navy, finally make a decision and commit to a hard start date to build our new warships?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Harper Conservatives, our government is committed to ensuring that the women and men of the Royal Canadian Navy have the equipment they need to do their work. We committed to purchasing 15 Canadian surface combatants, an investment that is fully funded in our defence policy. That is in contrast to the Conservatives, who only left enough money for nine ships. We are validating bids in order to ensure we select a warship that is best for the navy while growing the economy and creating good middle-class jobs for Canadians.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, supply management is so important to the people of my region that farmers and other residents have sent me over 400 emails this month on that topic alone.

Considering the concessions made in CETA and the TPP, farmers in my riding are telling me that they are nervous and have a hard time believing what the Liberals are saying. I understand, and I support them.

Will the Liberals fully defend supply management?

What they are saying these days is really not enough, and that has everyone worried.

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in this House, we are the party that implemented supply management and we are the government that is going to defend supply management. We understand that supply management is a model for the world. It supplies quality products at a reasonable price to the consumer and stability for the farmer.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the beginning of the inaugural Gender Equality Week, an act that was put forward to provide an annual opportunity to amplify awareness, to continue conversations around gender equality and equity and to inspire future generations of Canadians.

Could the minister please inform us how our government will mark the inaugural Gender Equality Week and how our government will ensure that the challenges Canadian women and gender-diverse Canadians continue to face are addressed in our daily work?

• (1505)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, advancing gender equality is an important part of our government's plan to grow the middle class, because when we do so, we will add \$150 billion to Canada's economy over the next eight years. When women entrepreneurs succeed, they create jobs for our sons and daughters. When we support those entering STEM fields, we address existing labour shortages. When we ensure that our workplaces and homes are free of violence, Canada is stronger.

I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Mississauga—Lakeshore for his leadership and wish all Canadians a happy Gender Equality Week.

* * *

*[Translation]***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, using a very porous type of stone with a high rate of water absorption will not only disfigure the Quebec Citadel, it will compromise its structural integrity. That is the view of Professor Robert Ledoux, a well-known expert in the field. He is not a politician.

What is the defence department waiting for to resume work, consult experts, respect science and ensure that the integrity of the Quebec Citadel takes precedence over Liberal interests?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government values the rich heritage of the Quebec City Citadel. That is why we are taking steps to protect it.

Routine Proceedings

An open and transparent process awarded a Quebec bidder the contract to replace the damaged stone. The bidder is required to adhere to federal guidelines to ensure that the Citadel retains its UNESCO status. The Department of National Defence is doing its due diligence to ensure that the winning stone adheres to the heritage qualification, because we understand the importance of this to Quebec City.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Simon Marciel (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a Toronto newspaper reported last week that Canada is prepared to make significant concessions on supply management, but only after the Quebec election of October 1.

The Prime Minister is afraid to go against the consensus in Quebec because he is abandoning producers. He himself told Americans that he was flexible on supply management.

My question is simple: does Canada have a nasty surprise for Quebecers the day after the election?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated many times in the House, we are the party that implemented supply management, and we are the government that is going to defend supply management. We are fully aware that supply management provides quality product for the consumer and a reasonable return for farmers.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what we just heard, the White House has confirmed that Canada is waiting for the Quebec election to be over to announce important concessions on supply management. In fact, everyone seems to be aware of this except Quebecers.

Who is telling the truth, the Canadian government or the American government?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, being a farmer and a former dairy farmer, I fully understand the quality of agriculture and the dairy farm supply management system we have in this country.

Every member on this side of the House supports supply management. It is vitally important that every member on all sides of the House support the supply management system because it is very important for the country and for the agricultural sector.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

The Government of Nunavut has asked for exemptions from the carbon tax in three areas: transportation fuel, home heating fuel and fuel for power generation. Last spring, the minister recognized the unique circumstances of life in Nunavut and granted an exemption

for aviation fuel, and I thank her for that. However, my constituents are double taxed on the others, once at source and again at point of sale.

Will the minister now do the right thing and grant exemptions on fuel for home heating and power generation in Nunavut?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government understands that Canadian northerners feel the impacts of climate change differently than other Canadians do, and it also understands the unique challenges facing those who live in the Canadian north, such as an enhanced cost of living, an increased cost of transportation, and food security issues that are not present elsewhere.

As we move forward, we will continue to work with the Government of Nunavut and the member opposite to ensure that we do it in a way that will have a practical reduction on emissions, but that also recognizes the unique needs of those living in Canada's north.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1510)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 70th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I would like to move that the 70th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House this day, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting petition e-1557. This petition is for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners state that over 500 million plastic straws are used every day, but most plastic straws are not recycled, nor can they be; that plastic waste poses an enormous threat to wildlife, is a danger to human health and costs millions to the Canadian economy; that every piece of plastic ever produced still exists today; that single-use plastic straws are discarded after an average use of 30 seconds; that straws are a big contributor to the eight million tonnes of plastic entering the sea each year. They say that in this day and age, there are so many alternatives, such as paper, bamboo, or reusable straws made of stainless steel or glass; that the effect that our love affair with plastic has on the environment becomes more and more clear each day; that plastic straws and utensils account for a large percentage of waste—

The Speaker: Order, please. I have to remind the hon. member that presenting petitions is not the time for debate or for making arguments on the petition. It is simply to present the petition.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am here today with a petition that protests Bill C-75, an enormous 302-page omnibus bill that would lighten the sentences on serious crimes, like advocating genocide, polygamy, marriage under 16 years, forced confinement of a minor, etc.

The petitioners ask the Prime Minister to defend the security and safety of all Canadians by withdrawing Bill C-75.

• (1515)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to table a petition on behalf of petitioners from Ucluelet and Tofino on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

The petitioners call on the government to establish a national strategy to combat plastic pollution in aquatic environments and support my Motion No. 151. They are looking for the government to create regulations and legislation aimed at reducing plastic debris discharged from stormwater outfalls; industrial use of microplastics, including and not limited to microbeads, nurdles, fibrous microplastics and fragments; and consumer and industrial use of single-use plastics, including but not limited to plastic bags, bottles, straws, tableware, and polystyrene, which is used in the aquaculture sector, cigarette filters and beverage containers. They are also looking for permanent, dedicated, annual funding for the cleanup of derelict fishing gear, community-led projects to clean up plastics and debris on our shores, banks, beaches and other aquatic peripheries.

STAND-UP COMEDY

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present petition e-1512 on behalf of stand-up comedians.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to designate stand-up comedy as an art form and support Canadian comedians through arts funding. It is about providing proper infrastructure for the development of stand-up comedy across our country.

I thank Sandra Battaglini for all the work she had done to put this petition together, as well as the Canadian Association of Stand-up Comedians.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions today.

The first is from my constituents, expressing their strong opposition to the carbon tax. They note this tax will not help the environment because it will simply force jobs to other jurisdictions. They also note that the tax will be particularly harmful to people who rely on the energy sector for work or transportation; to people in northern, suburban and rural communities; families with children; the disabled; or any other persons who are not easily able to walk, cycle or take public transit.

I commend that to the consideration of the House.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of Bill C-350 in the House and a similar bill, Bill S-240, in the Senate. These bills aim to combat the scourge of forced organ harvesting and would ensure that no Canadians would be involved in this despicable trade.

These bills, although they have been proposed by Conservatives in this Parliament, follow very similar bills proposed by Liberal members in previous Parliaments. We hope to see these bills passed very soon.

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have the immense honour of rising today to present this petition, signed by residents of my riding, on the subject of the poverty crisis in Canada.

The signatories are calling on Parliament to adopt a national poverty elimination strategy.

VENEZUELA

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of my riding, I would like to present petition E-1353, which has 582 signatures.

[*English*]

CANADA POST

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today.

Government Orders

The first is in support of postal banking. We know that two million Canadians desperately need an alternative to payday lenders because of the crippling rates these payday lenders inflict upon poor, marginalized, rural and indigenous communities. Because there are 3,800 Canada Post outlets already in existence in rural areas where there are few banks, or in some cases none at all, Canada Post has the ability to deliver postal banking.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to enact my Motion No. 166 to create a committee to study and propose a plan for postal banking under the Canada Post Corporation.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is in support of protecting the Thames River system.

In a previous Parliament, the Conservative government stripped environmental protection in regard to regulations covered in the Navigable Waters Protection Act, leaving hundreds of rivers vulnerable. The same is true now, despite promises by the current government to reinstate environmental protection.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Government of Canada to support my Bill C-355, which commits the government to prioritizing the protection of the Thames River by amending the Navigation Protection Act.

• (1520)

PHARMACARE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have received literally hundreds of signatures from residents of Winnipeg North regarding the pharmacare program.

The petitioners request that the federal government develop jointly with the provincial and territorial partners a universal, single-payer, evidence-based and sustainable public drug plan with purchasing power to secure best available pricing, beginning with a list of essential medicines, addressing priority health needs and expanding to a comprehensive permanent plan that would promote the health and well-being of all Canadians.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ACCESSIBLE CANADA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Before I call upon the hon. member for York—Simcoe for debate, as I may not be able to be here when he concludes his debate, I want to take the opportunity, on behalf of all members, which I am sure members will allow me to do, in congratulating him on his many years of service. He has been a very forceful member with a great knowledge of the rules of the House, as a former House leader on the government side.

One of the things I have most enjoyed over the years, during the time I have been Speaker, has been the many statements, S.O. 31s, or members statements, on historical matters. He has a tremendous love for Canadian history and for the maintenance and preservation of our history in so many ways, which I have greatly appreciated and admired.

I want to thank him for his service to Canada and to the House of Commons. I wish him and his family the very best in the future.

The hon. member for York—Simcoe.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this will be the last speech I deliver in the House of Commons, in where it has been an honour to represent the people of York—Simcoe for a decade and a half.

Bill C-81 seeks to enhance accessibility in areas of federal jurisdiction. It is a worthy objective. Accessibility is an area where we have seen much change and progress in my lifetime. However, it is progress that has been largely driven not by politicians, but rather by Canadians who saw the need and pressed for changes to the rules.

The success of those changes has been largely due to an incremental approach that has not placed undue burdens on Canadians trying to make a living, allowing progress over time. It is an example of the importance of applying common sense when delivering change for the better. That goal, delivering change for the better, has been my purpose in my time here.

The rationale behind accessibility rules is to create opportunity for people to achieve their potential. The preamble to the bill focuses on that question of ensuring equal opportunity. In this speech I will focus largely on that word that motivates this legislation, that word being “opportunity”.

Canada is all about opportunity. Opportunity is the reason my family and so many others have come here.

My grandparents and mother grew up in Estonia. Their life experience is the reason I am in Canada and in the House of Commons.

My grandfather was an agronomist, an important role in a largely agricultural economy in the first half of the 20th century. My grandmother became a lawyer in the 1920s in Estonia at a time not too many women did that.

Government Orders

With the Second World War came waves of Soviet, Nazi and then again Soviet occupation. Much of my family died at the hands of the Soviets, executed, bludgeoned to death by axes in their beds or suffering the almost inevitable death that came as inmates of the communist concentration camps of the Siberian gulag.

The only alternative for my grandparents and mother was a high-risk escape across a treacherous Baltic sea, where the men kept bailing to keep the vessel from capsizing. They left all their possessions behind. Safety was found initially in a refugee camp in Sweden, but ultimately Canada was the destination chosen. Canada was a land of freedom, hope and opportunity to them.

The agronomist went to work in a paper factory in Riverdale. The lawyer went to work on the order desk at Sears. They found all that they were looking for in this country.

I grew up hearing stories of what happened to my family's homeland and their own many close brushes with fate. I learned as a child that freedom and democracy were valuable, could be easily lost and needed to be defended and nourished.

Inevitably I became highly politicized as a young child. In 1968, we had a Trudeau Liberal sign for Bob Caplan on our front lawn. Trudeau was the champion of freedom and rights we were told. However, soon after that, I saw that prime minister embracing communist leaders like Brezhnev, Kosygin and Castro. Those were the very people responsible for suppressing the freedoms of millions. It had a profound effect on me.

By 1972, as I like to say, I was nine years old and the wisdom of age was upon me. I had become a passionate Conservative. I would start working as a volunteer on campaigns when I was 12 and politics would become my life's passion.

As I was growing up, like all good Estonian emigres, we profoundly yearned for Estonia to regain its freedom, which ultimately did happen in 1991. I would ask my grandmother if Estonia ever achieved regaining its independence would she return. No, she would tell me "Canada is our home now", and she would add "Canada is the best country in the world. It is a land of opportunity. Anybody can achieve their dreams in this country if you just work hard enough." My grandmother believed in that word "opportunity" and she believed in Canada.

I often doubted this assurance that she gave me as I was growing up. I encountered all kinds of invisible social and economic barriers that immigrant families typically face, but time would prove she was right. What better proof that anybody could achieve their wildest dreams in Canada, however unlikely, than someone like me becoming Canada's minister of sport.

That opportunity that Canada offers, what this legislation seeks to ensure, is available to all has been very kind to me.

In politics, I had the opportunity to help rebuild the Ontario PC party in the early 1990s when I was party president, not a member of caucus, but we did help to get Mike Harris elected premier.

I had the opportunity to lead efforts to reunite the Conservative movement into a single party federally, including running the campaign on the PC party side to have our membership ratify the

establishment of the Conservative Party of Canada, an event that restored competitive democracy to our politics.

● (1525)

As a member of the House, I have had the opportunity to serve as public safety minister, working to keep Canadians safe. My time as trade minister was dedicated to expanding our economic opportunities, making a free trade agreement with Europe our top priority, and initiating or advancing many other free trade negotiations.

I had the extraordinary opportunity to work with Prime Minister Harper closely, as Canada's longest-serving Conservative government House leader. For all of these opportunities, his guidance and leadership, I offer my gratitude.

In all these roles I was blessed to work with extraordinary staff in Ottawa and York—Simcoe, a team that was uniformly bright, hard-working, passionately committed to Canada, and fiercely loyal. That was reflected in what I believe was the lowest staff turnover of any minister's officer on the Hill. They made me look good.

Along the way, I was fortunate to acquire other great supporters, my wife Cheryl, and Caroline and John A. They were a constant reminder to me of why we serve, and they are also a reason to look forward to life away from this place.

When it comes to accessibility, I am proud of much of what we delivered for the residents of York—Simcoe, especially during the Harper government. High accessibility standards can be found in significant projects we delivered, like the new Bradford West Gwillimbury public library and new leisure centre, the expansion of the East Gwillimbury Sports Complex, and Georgina's outdoor recreation facility the ROC.

One of the last projects our Conservative government delivered on was accessibility improvements to Georgina's De La Salle Park Beach. It includes a revolutionary beach mat that allows accessibility for those in wheelchairs right into the waters of Lake Simcoe.

Of course, Lake Simcoe enjoys significantly improved water quality thanks to the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund. It was cancelled by the current Liberal government. However, I am confident that the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund will return again in the future. For over 10 years this Conservative initiative saw almost \$60 million from our government harnessed by community-based organizations, who added their financial and incoming contributions to real projects that helped physically remediate the lake environment. This was in addition to other initiatives, like mandatory rules to protect the lake ecosystem from invasive species, a ban on harmful phosphorus in dishwasher detergent, and a ban on dumping waste from water vessels.

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Undoubtedly, what I will miss most leaving this job is the opportunity to serve the extraordinary people of York—Simcoe. I genuinely love them. They work hard and simply want the government to give them the freedom to succeed and build a brighter future for their families. They want the opportunity to share in the Canadian dream. We worked to help them by lowering their taxes, encouraging economic growth, and tackling crime to make their communities safer. It was easy to always do the right thing by simply asking myself one question: what is best for the people of York—Simcoe?

As members of the House are debating and reflecting on what to do on this bill, the accessibility bill, I encourage them to consider what a tremendous honour it is to serve in this place. We are privileged to be able to make a real difference for our country in a way that very few ever enjoyed. Our system of parliamentary democracy and the British North America Act, through which John A. Macdonald and the other Fathers of Confederation built our country, has been remarkably successful. We are among the youngest countries in the world, yet we enjoy one of the most enduring constitutions. It has guided our growth and provided the genius that brings people of diverse backgrounds together into a remarkably united country. John A. and the fathers truly built well. They built the best country in the world. Our Parliament is at the core of that constitution.

As I prepare to retire from this place, I want to reflect for a moment on one question that I believe needs more discussion in this country, that is, the relevance of this place. Academics and the media like to talk about the declining influence of the individual member of Parliament, pointing to a concentration of power in the offices of party leaders or party discipline as the culprits. However, there is another real factor rendering the work of MPs less relevant. Little has been said, at least until recent weeks, about the growing tendency of the courts to strike down the laws that the people's elected representatives enact, including many laws that were explicitly part of the platforms those MPs promised they would enact if elected. I can assure members that, from countless conversations with constituents over the years, many find this difficult to square with their idea of how a democracy should work. I believe that if we want to give meaning to the work that we all do here, the time is overdue for a discussion of the appropriateness of a bit more deference to the decisions of the democratically elected legislature. A proper balance requires a restoration of reasonable deference to the decisions of Parliament.

• (1530)

Another favourite of the critics has been to deride partisanship as causing corrosion of Parliament. None of the members will be surprised to hear me rise to defend the unpopular notion that partisanship strengthens our system.

The bill we are debating today is what many would call “motherhood”. After all, who could oppose greater accessibility and the opportunity that comes with it. Colleagues would say we would be crazy to oppose this bill and to address its flaws in debate, but such a debate should be encouraged. It is through debate between competing perspectives, which our system encourages, that we constantly improve things and find a better way. Through contrasting choices and perspectives, we make democratic choice work.

Partisanship is the fuel that makes our system work. Clear partisan sides also improve accountability. Voters do not go out and research what their individual MP on every vote, on every bill, on every issue. It is enough to know where their party stands.

Now, some say Parliament would work better if only the parties worked together more instead of opposing each other so often. It is at exactly at such a time when there is no debate that citizens should become concerned. That is when the flaws in government become hidden. Therefore, let us celebrate the partisan divides that have made our system of parliamentary democracy so successful for centuries.

Now, returning to the bill, clause 51 addresses the role of the CRTC in the area of information and communication technologies. This provides me the opportunity to thank the media for their always fair treatment over the years. For example, members will recall countless critical articles, and radio and TV news pieces taking me to task for my approach to managing the House, for my using time allocation to schedule our business and votes. Now that my successors in the current Liberal government have shown a similar affection for Standing Order 78, I have been heartened to see them on the receiving end of a similar stream of criticisms, as well as a number of full-throated apologies to me for the fashion in which the media took me to task. Okay, that has not really happened. I am confident it will happen really soon because, after all, I remain hopeful that the media are always fair in this country.

In a more credible fashion, I want to thank the many volunteers on my riding association, executive, and campaigns. They give and have given so generously of their time, simply because they cared about their country and their community and believed in our efforts to make Canada and York—Simcoe a better place.

The bill before us talks about encouraging participation in Canadian society. Participating in our democratic processes is one of the most important types of participation. Everyone has the same kind of people who have helped them. They are true citizens, people who give back, genuinely care and who make our democracy work. They are largely unsung and underappreciated, but all of us and our communities are greatly in their debt.

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As I leave elected politics, I will return once again to being one of those people, a dedicated volunteer working hard for his party. The decision to leave politics is one of the most difficult to make. It is easy to follow the path of least resistance and just keep on going, but I am confident that for me, now is the right time to take my leave from this place. I will miss much. My family, who have been full partners and enjoyed the extraordinary voyage we have travelled together, will miss it too. Already, people have witnessed the sad sight of me and my former colleagues sitting in a corner at the Albany Club sharing stories of the good old days, and we will no doubt go on doing that. They have not just been good old days; they have been great old days. We had the opportunity to serve, to make a difference, to make Canada an even better place.

It has been an honour.

● (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before going to questions and comments, I want to congratulate the hon. member for York—Simcoe.

I want to fill him in that, as an occupant of the chair, there are 337 other members in the House that one looks to. There are often people who get up on a point of order or question of privilege, and we know that they have some idea of what they want to say. However, any time the hon. member for York—Simcoe stood, I knew he would have it well thought out and understood the rules. What was going on in my mind was, “Where the heck is he going to take this and where is he going to come from to make his point?”

We are going to miss you. Your constituents are losing a wonderful MP. Whether I agreed, or anyone else agreed at the time, the hon. member was very effective when he did bring up his points. There will be some large shoes to fill. I wish him all the best.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to address the member for York—Simcoe. I know he did not want a whole lot of intervention at this point because he is kind of a soft guy and did not want to get emotional today. We will try to step back from that.

I very much want to thank him for sharing that history of his family and giving his colleagues in the House that reflection back. That is what shapes all of us parliamentarians and people. I thought it provided tremendous insight into how he came here and grew and came to the light, as he said, although some of us may talk about that on division.

I have had the opportunity to work with him in the House for 14 years, and on a number of different issues in a couple of different committees. When he was House leader, I was the whip of the official opposition, and I can say with great certainty that although his reputation was one of toughness and hardness, without question he was fair as well. When we look at where the tone of the conversation in politics has gone, especially south of the border, but in some cases in this country too, he was never one to get personal. He was smart and tough on the issues and tactics, but he would never get personal. He was always disciplined in that regard, and he will

always carry the respect of anyone who has watched and worked with him.

I know he will be missed by his caucus colleagues and by the people from York—Simcoe whom he has represented. He may not be missed as much by the government members, but this is only because he was effective in his job.

I have no questions on behalf of our side, but I just want to comment that when he and his wife Cheryl ride off into the sunset, I know this will not be the end of it. This a family thing, and when all of us make that decision, it will be based on what our family has been through over the years. We know that the member's family has supported him and continues to support him, and the member should know that he has earned his chops in this place. On behalf of our party, we want to thank the member for his service to this country.

● (1540)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his very kind and generous intervention. Certainly the assessment of being tough but fair is one that I will carry forward with great pride. I thank him for that. Hopefully I will apply that same tough but fair approach in my new life practising municipal law with Aird & Berlis. It is the field I was in before I entered politics, and now I am returning to it. It is as if life is a circle. Thank you very much.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. It was enlightening. I think it was very important that he underscored the significance and pertinence of full and free debate and discussion in the House. However, he also talked about time allocation. Did he intentionally leave his notes on complex, and perhaps less direct, procedural proceedings in his desk for the current government?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, having sat on the other side and heard so many discussions from this side, certainly I was under the impression that we would never see time allocation. Indeed, I am disappointed that on my last day I will not have the opportunity to vote against one of those time allocation motions that the Liberals said they would never introduce.

I am pleased to see that as history has moved forward, perhaps the wisdom of my approach is being validated.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a great pleasure, and often a challenge, but a rewarding one, to work with the member for York—Simcoe over the last 14 years. He is a man of integrity and opinion, and sometimes he likes to share that opinion. He has also been a great student, as was mentioned, of Canadian history. He has a particular passion for our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. Despite his son's name being John A., the member for York—Simcoe swears that he did not name his son after his hero. I do not know anyone in this House who has ever believed that.

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That said, the member has been a very hard worker on behalf of his constituents for many years now. He has also given us something that we rarely hear in this chamber, and that is the gift of oratory. Last year there was a particular speech in which the member had us in the lobby spellbound when he started talking about Canadian history and the roles various leaders had played within that. He did it with such grace, eloquence, knowledge and passion that I could not help but think, “Why do we not hear more of this these days?”

It was a shining example of a great MP, for which I thank him. I was so glad I had that experience. I am really wondering if the member has considered a compilation of his great speeches, whether it be in book form or even on his own YouTube channel, for the rest of us to enjoy in the future.

• (1545)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think the speech that I am best known for is the one where I start, “I wish to advise the House that we have failed to reach an agreement with the members of the other parties regarding a process and henceforth move....” That, of course, is time allocation.

I thank the hon. member for her kind intervention. We have in common a deep history and links to, let us call it, the extra-parliamentary party side, working for our party and helping it to succeed. I know I will be in touch with her in the future as she continues to do that work as I do it from the other side as an ordinary citizen and volunteer once again. I thank the member again for her kind comments.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to take this opportunity to wish my colleague well. We share a riding border. Green Lane is the name of the road, for those not familiar with that part of the world. We tend to see each other from time to time.

It was always a pleasure to be at events with that member. I got to know him a bit over the years, just through our involvement in the riding. I know his father-in-law quite well. I know that he, for one, is looking forward to spending more time with the member for York—Simcoe. I suspect that the feeling is mutual.

As a member from York Region, as the member for York—Simcoe is, there were times not that long ago when the Liberal York Region caucus was quite small. It grew after the last election. The size is in flux once again. This member was always a pleasure to be around at local York Region events. He served his community well.

Like me, the member has a passion for history. I think it is appropriate at this point that someone who is such an advocate for Canadian history and who has such a passion for history will now become part of Canadian history, which is a testament to his role in this House. I wish him well, and I want to congratulate him on a great career of public service.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised that a Liberal would take delight in calling me history.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the last three years, I have had the pleasure of sitting behind Peter Van Loan in this borderline between New Democrats and Conservatives. I can safely say that on most policy issues, there are probably no two people in the House who agree less

than Peter and I. However, we found a sense of camaraderie, and both of us really do believe in the importance of this institution.

There are two things on which we do share agreement. One of those is the importance of Canadian history. I thank Peter for his constant reminders of the importance of Canadian history in this House. The second, strangely enough, is the monarchy. Peter and I share being monarchists. I believe the constitutional monarchy is one of the foundations of our democracy, because when one is from my community, one knows it is hard to upstage a queen.

I wish Peter all the best in the future and want to say, personally, that he will very much be missed in this House.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoyed the time with the hon. member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke. He has similar roots as a party operative in the past, and that often brings people together, even across different parties, because we know what we go through to make this system of democracy work, and he has certainly been part of that in the past.

I appreciate his comments on history and on the monarchy. My wife will be very encouraged to hear him take that position, and as shadow minister for Canadian Heritage, a role I held for the past three years, that was something that was important to me.

Most important of all, it is fair to say that we have become friends, notwithstanding differences on many issues. At the end of the day, while we should always be suspicious of friendships across party lines, I have quite enjoyed his friendship and that of many others on the other perspectives.

When we become committed to this institution, to the way it works, to the way the House works and the way our democracy works, when we can see past the issues to see the importance of that and that in the end, the people who tell us what to do are always right, this democracy works well. There can be no better place for it and no more wonderful place for it than in this august chamber.

• (1550)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is an honour to be sitting in the chair for the closing of this chapter of Canadian parliamentary history. I wish the hon. member all the best.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint-Laurent.

It is an honour and a privilege to rise in this House to discuss the important issue of accessibility and how our government is addressing the systemic barriers in our society through the proposed accessible Canada act.

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As a Liberal, I tend to view public policy through the lens of equality of opportunity. Government policy should level the playing field for individuals and groups in society. For instance, whether one is born of a rich family or one that struggles, one should have every opportunity to succeed. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a role for government. Public health care, public education, and student loans and grants all contribute to ensuring that this basic premise is achieved. However, if we look at the unique challenges faced by Canadians with disabilities, the promise of equality of opportunity has fallen short thus far.

I know first-hand of these challenges and barriers that hinder full inclusion for Canadians with disabilities. On October 3, 1991, my life changed forever. I was a victim of a random act of gun violence and became a C5 quadriplegic. Overnight, things I never thought twice about became significant challenges in my day-to-day life: finding a home that I could physically enter, accessing caregivers simply to get out of bed in the morning, navigating university, accessing technology or even just trying to find employment that would accommodate my unique needs. Clearly, and in no uncertain terms, things I took for granted became more difficult.

My case is not unique. Fourteen per cent of Canadians are living with a disability. That is one in seven. These Canadians face significant and unique challenges solely because they have a disability. A recent study conducted by Statistics Canada found that Canadians with disabilities are significantly less likely to be high school or university graduates and are two times more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force. Canadians with disabilities also face income challenges. Among Canadians with a disability, one in four is low-income compared to one in 10 for the general population.

Our government knows that everyone has something important to contribute to one's community and to Canada, and this includes those in this country with disabilities. They just need the playing field to be levelled. Our government is following through on our mandate promise made by the Prime Minister to develop and introduce new accessibility legislation. We have developed legislation that is ambitious and that would lead to more consistent experiences of accessibility across Canada.

The proposed legislation is founded on six key principles: inherent dignity, equal opportunity, barrier-free government, economy, inclusive design and meaningful involvement. Let me be clear. We are taking a whole-of-government approach to the issue of furthering accessibility in this country. From our national housing strategy to the Elections Act to embracing visitability, we are enacting legislation that brings real change for Canadians with disabilities.

With the tabling of Bill C-81, the accessible Canada act, we are showing Canadians that we are serious about creating an accessible Canada. To inform the development of this new bill, our government conducted the largest and most accessible consultation on disability issues our country has ever seen. The consultation ran from June 2016 to February 2017. I am proud that more than 6,000 Canadians and over 90 organizations participated across the country.

Over and over again, we heard from Canadians that this legislation would need strong measures, with teeth, to make sure that it gets the job done. We listened, and we have a plan to make sure that

accessibility is a priority for all areas under federal jurisdiction. Our government has tabled legislation that will ensure co-operation between the Government of Canada, people with disabilities and other stakeholders to create new accessibility standards and requirements.

• (1555)

As my colleagues have described, these new requirements would apply to all organizations in federal jurisdiction. These new requirements would identify and remove existing barriers and prevent new ones in priority areas, such as the built environment, service delivery, employment, transportation, information and communication technologies, and the procurement of goods and services.

We heard in our accessible Canada consultations that Canadians want legislation with enforcement. That is why our bill proposes measures to ensure meaningful and lasting change when it comes to barriers to accessibility. We want to make sure accessibility is practical, convenient and second nature.

We know that Canadians expect a range of strong compliance and enforcement measures that would be applied progressively. Our bill ensures that these measures would be supported by technical knowledge and progressive enforcement. This includes inspections and audits to verify compliance and a progressive suite of tools, including orders and warnings, compliance audits and monetary penalties of up to \$250,000.

Our government knows that it is impossible to address all barriers to accessibility at once. That is why we would also ensure that there are mechanisms for individuals to have their specific circumstances addressed and barriers to accessibility removed.

In addition to the existing Canadian human rights process that responds to discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act, individuals would have the ability to bring forward cases of non-compliance with regulated standards under this new legislation. They could get redress for harm done to them, which could include reimbursement of expenses and lost wages or compensation for pain and suffering.

This bill represents a real transformation of the Government of Canada's approach to accessibility. Up until this point, the responsibility for fixing accessibility issues has rested on people with disabilities, who had to pursue action through the Canadian Human Right Commission and the courts.

I am happy to say that Bill C-81 is changing that. No longer would Canadians with disabilities be expected to fix the system by themselves. Instead, these new proactive compliance and enforcement measures would help ensure that organizations under federal jurisdiction are held accountable for removing barriers and improving accessibility.

I believe strongly that this initiative, with its combination of encouragement and enforcement, would increase inclusion and fairness in our country. It would set the bar and become a model for organizations all over Canada and across the globe. If passed, this law would also ensure uniformity and fairness in its application.

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This is why this legislation is receiving such widespread support. With this legislation we are continuing the march of progress for people with disabilities. It would lead to a more inclusive Canada and a more fair Canada, a place where equality of opportunity exists for people with disabilities in this country, a Canada where people with disabilities can reach their individual potential and be recognized as valued citizens.

• (1600)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague who certainly speaks from a place of deep knowledge of the subject and, of course, of personal triumph over a horrific and tragic accident. One hates to think of what it meant in his young life to have had that stray bullet.

I want to speak of this bill, and ask for my colleague's opinion of those people across Canada who celebrate that this bill has been brought forward. Does he agree with me that they are almost unanimous in saying this bill needs to be improved at committee? There should be more about it is that is obliging the government to act, rather than encouraging it to act.

Hon. Kent Hehr: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her kind words. I know this legislation would bring many significant steps forward, where government would, at least within federal jurisdiction, be able to address the concerns of people with disabilities, for example through an internal process where people who are seeking employment in government get the accommodations they need to succeed and thrive. The places where we want procurement policies, we need to look at how we reach out to ensure those organizations have accessibility legislation and how they will move forward in trade and commerce.

I can also highlight this bill and its effects on government service. The day and age of people not getting through the door is essentially over with this legislation. It puts a proactive onus on government to move forward and look at things with an accessibility lens that I believe will be very helpful for people with disabilities and those trying to navigate an often complex system.

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Science and Sport and to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility (Accessibility), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that is moving forward with Bill C-81, accessibility legislation. As someone who knows first-hand what it is like to face disabilities, I wonder if the hon. member could tell us what it would mean to others, especially younger Canadians, who may find themselves, like him, disabled overnight, where their lives were changed so much. How would this legislation impact those young Canadians and what would it tell them about what their federal government is doing?

Hon. Kent Hehr: Mr. Speaker, in my view, this legislation is probably the most positive step forward in terms of government legislation since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We have seen much has changed over the years. In fact, things have, generally speaking, gotten better for people with disabilities in this country, and yet in many ways we had to codify how to do things better and move forward.

I mentioned at the start of my speech that there are still very many inequalities in this country. In particular, people with disabilities are more likely to be poor and have difficulties finding employment,

even getting services through government departments. This legislation would put that proactive emphasis on governments and systems within the federal jurisdiction having an accessibility lens to look at how we are not only going to get people through the door but help them come out the other side and succeed, whether it be through employment, accessing technology or getting government services. It is now incumbent upon us as government to follow through with what would be put in place through this legislation to make things better for people with disabilities in this country.

• (1605)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, accessibility is about inclusivity, whether it is a government, a business or any other organization, inclusion means facilitating and promoting the participation of people who may otherwise experience challenges as they seek to fully contribute to society. Of course, that includes the full contribution of people with disabilities.

It is clear we need to change how accessibility barriers have been addressed in this country. We now recognize that implementing a proactive approach to barrier removal would result in positive impacts on the daily lives of people with disabilities. No longer would they have to battle one barrier at a time to make changes, if obligated organizations were held to a recognized set of standards. This in turn would also have the effect of reducing complaints from individuals and organizations.

With the creation of accessibility organizations such as the Canadian accessibility standards development organization, Canada would establish itself as a national and global accessibility leader. The Canadian accessibility standards development organization would put Canadians with disabilities in control of setting the accessibility standards that affect their lives. The creation of this organization would signal the start of a new approach to accessibility by the Government of Canada, a new approach that is proactive and takes the needs of Canadians with disabilities into account from the start.

In 2016 and 2017, the Government of Canada undertook extensive consultations with Canadians, including Canadians with disabilities, and sought their input on the most important areas for improving accessibility. Canadians stated that legislation should lead to more consistent experiences of accessibility across Canada and that it should be built upon the existing standards that are already working well.

Our constituents want new legislation that could lead to the development of accessibility standards that other governments in Canada could adopt. Canadians were also clear on the area that should be considered for standards development including employment, the built environment, transportation, programs and service delivery, information and communications, and procurement of goods and services.

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Canadians with disabilities expressed the need to be involved in many aspects of implementation including the standards development process. More precisely, to develop standards, the new Canadian accessibility standards development organization could form technical committees that include persons with disabilities and representatives from the federally regulated sector.

The government also engaged the federally regulated sector, which provided valuable advice on how the government could assist industry to meet its obligations under established standards. Industry representatives stated that standards under the new legislation should be clear and unambiguous. Industry partners also want the Government of Canada to strive to achieve as much as possible harmonization with similar models in effect across other Canadian jurisdictions such as Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, where members already operate and are familiar with existing requirements.

The federally regulated sector wants the government to provide supports to organizations during the implementation of the legislation. They are looking for the Government of Canada to support organizations through dedicated resources and developmental tools such as websites, background documentation, guidelines, tool kits and videos that can assist them with the implementation process.

Helping supporting organizations to meet their obligations would be one of the roles of the new Canadian accessibility standards development organization. Establishing clear and concise standards that apply to all obligated organizations equally would help them understand and comply with requirements and would ultimately be good for business, which could lead to economic benefits for those organizations.

One of the most important aspects of the proposed legislation is the development and use of standards. Standards are guidelines that establish accepted practices and provide technical requirements. A standards-based approach could articulate the manner in which goals of the legislation are to be achieved including penalties for failures to comply with standards and an enforcement strategy for non-compliance.

Standards can also be either voluntary or mandatory, with those standards that are mandatory being enforced by laws and regulations.

During our extensive engagement with Canadians, they overwhelmingly expressed a desire for mandatory standards. The new legislation proposes the creation of the Canadian accessibility standards development organization. This entity would be the first standards organization in Canada dedicated exclusively to developing accessibility standards. It would also be the first to be led by a board of directors with majority representation by people with disabilities.

● (1610)

The organization would have a board of directors to set its strategic direction, oversee its activities and give advice to the chief executive officer. Director positions would be part time and would be appointed by the Governor in Council for terms of up to four years. To the extent possible, the majority of the directors would be persons with disabilities, which would help fulfill our commitments

to honour a key principle of the disability community: "nothing about us without us".

In addition, standards would be developed by technical committees comprised of persons with disabilities as well as industry experts. As a departmental corporation, the Canadian accessibility standards development organization would be considered part of the federal public service administration but would operate independently from the government department agencies and Crown corporations that eventually would be subject to these standards. This would allow the minister to provide general direction on priority areas and areas of concern for the development of accessibility standards while facilitating the organization's independence in day-to-day operations.

The Canadian accessibility standards development organization would be established following the coming into force of Bill C-81, and would be operational within one year of the date. A transition team would be put in place immediately afterward to operationalize the organization, with some of the early activities to include the appointment of the board of directors, the establishment of a leadership team, including the chief executive officer, the development of bylaws and determining the location of the head office within Canada. Once the Canadian accessibility standards development organization has a developed set of standards, the minister responsible would bring forward enforceable regulations to guide regulated entities.

Regulated entities include the federal government departments, agencies, Crown corporations and other points of the federal public administration, such as the RCMP and Canadian Forces, as well as the federally regulated sector and parliamentary entities. Once the Canadian accessibility standards development organization was established, the first standards would take approximately two years to develop. The length of the development process would depend on the complexity of the standard and the level of consensus on requirements of the particular areas. The priority areas for the standards development would mirror those set out in Bill C-81, which include employment, the built environment, transportation, information and communication technologies and delivery of programs and services and the procurement of goods and services.

Although the main role of this organization would be the development and revision of standards, it would have a very broad mandate. Indeed, the organization would also be responsible for providing information, products and services in relation to the accessibility standards that it has developed or revised. It would also be responsible for the promotion, support and conduct of research into the identification and removal of barriers and the prevention of new barriers. Also, it would be responsible for the dissemination of information, including information about best practices in relation to the identification, removal and prevention of new barriers.

This organization would be required to submit annual reports to the minister responsible for accessibility, who would then table the report in Parliament. Along with ensuring transparency, the annual reporting would communicate organizational priorities to Canadians and the success in achieving them. The report would also lay out future priorities.

Government Orders

Such an arm's-length organization dedicated to the creation of accessibility standards would be new in Canada. It would, however, function in a similar way to other standards development organizations, such as the Canadian Standards Association and the Canadian General Standards Board. As a matter of fact, it is anticipated that the Canadian accessibility standards development organization would seek accreditation from the Standards Council of Canada. The proposed organization would be somewhat similar to the United States Access Board, which is an independent federal agency that develops and maintains accessible design criteria for the built environment, transit vehicles, telecommunications equipment, medical diagnostic equipment and information technology.

Provinces and territories would have opportunities to work with the Canadian accessibility standards development organization and the new organization could be asked to assist with standards making at the provincial and territorial levels.

Along with this organization, others will play a vital role in developing accessibility standards and regulations in the specific areas of responsibility, based on expertise and experience gained over many years.

•(1615)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in looking at Bill C-81, it is very clear there is an expectation and certainly a desire on the part of many members in this place, and I suspect not just opposition members but government members as well, that the bill be improved at committee. I wonder if the member has any insight as to the openness of the government to accept amendments at committee.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately I am not on that committee. I am giving this speech because I am very pro accessibility and I approve of Bill C-81. I like the way that it is written. Of course, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, I am hoping that we can accept some input from other members as well. I am sure the government is open to hearing what improvements people seek to make.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if my colleague, as a member of Parliament, could tell this House what she sees as the greatest benefit of Bill C-81 coming forward in the near future.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, obviously the Government of Canada is limited in what it is able to do at all levels to completely change the way things work in Canada. However, this is a great first step to improving accessibility and removing barriers for people with disabilities.

Having worked as a resource aid in a school myself for several years, I know there are several barriers that exist even at the most basic levels and services that can definitely be improved. Therefore, if the people in this community do not have some input into telling Canadians and the boards what they expect, then we are not going to make the changes that they require.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to hear the comments that you were making—I am not referring to you, Mr. Speaker—particularly with reference to ensuring that end users have some say with respect to

the development of policy. Certainly, that is one of the prime principles.

With respect, one of the issues I found in the development of policy in some of the areas I have worked in is that often legislatively we require over 50% to be from the disability community or be related to it. I noticed that in your comments you left that somewhat vague, so I am interested in your comments on that. A second issue in development of policy is that often having the end users involved in it, there is some disparity between what the end users say and the implementation.

Do you have any notion of how you might have the end users actually involved right through to the implementation to see that the original intent is not lost?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before we go on for an answer, I want to remind hon. members that normally we ask the question not directly to the person but through the chair. I am sure the hon. member did not want my opinion. I will let the hon. member for Saint-Laurent answer.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, once again, it is really important to make sure that they are involved at all levels of the process. It would obviously be somewhat of a conflict of interest if they were involved in actually implementing it. The people who are making the decisions cannot necessarily benefit directly and be responsible for implementation. However, we will be making sure that they are consulted at all levels and that they are the ones making the appropriate recommendations and decisions.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, better known as the accessible Canada act. This is a subject near and dear to my heart. As we have heard from various members, we all want to ensure that those living with disabilities are treated as equals and remove the barriers they face every single day. I said this is near and dear to my heart, so I would like to start by providing some insight into some obstacles that I have encountered first-hand living with disabilities in Canada.

It was in 2006 that I had just been named minister of human resources and social development, with responsibility for the office for disabilities. Ironically, just a few weeks into the job, I was diagnosed with Grave's disease and Grave's eye disease. These are thyroid afflictions that, among other things, in me cause both extreme light sensitivity and extreme stabismus, resulting in my being legally blind for quite a period of time. More recently, I underwent complicated double hip replacement surgery, which unfortunately resulted in my need for mobility assistance tools around this place for many months.

It was during both of these periods that I learned just how inaccessible many things in my life were, including this particular workplace. They were simple things, such as moving between the Hill and my office, more than half a kilometre from the House, being unable to walk that distance, being unable to step up or down from the little white minibus. Challenges were also considerable in actually having to fight to get an accessible parking space here at Centre Block.

Government Orders

Mr. Speaker, as you will recall, even with the eventual direct intervention by the Speaker's office, it literally took months to fix what were supposed to be the accessibility doors at the rear of this building, doors which unfortunately malfunctioned more often than not. One of the main barriers to getting that particular job done was a clear lack of accountability for the issue. I will talk more about accountability later.

I also discovered how narrow certain parts of these buildings are for those who rely on wheelchairs or walkers, walkers that inhibit our ability to get around. With a disability, many of these seemingly small things all of a sudden can become very big obstacles, but it used to be a lot worse. In fact, under the previous Liberal government, the office for people with disabilities was actually two offices and neither one of them was accessible by those who were mobility challenged. That is right. People who use wheelchairs or walkers could not get into the building. They could not work there, could not consult, could not lobby, and they could not advocate for people with disabilities because they were not allowed in. I know this may sound a little farcical but unfortunately it is true.

Happily, the Conservative government fixed that scenario in short order and, in fact, combined the facilities. There was one office and it was billed as a showcase of how businesses and organizations could adapt to people with mobility, visibility, hearing or other challenges. In one place, businesses and other organizations could finally find the technologies, techniques, tips and tools that would help them accommodate people of all abilities so that these organizations could benefit from their skills to make those organizations even stronger. By the end, not only could people with disabilities enter this office to do business but they could actually work there. What a concept.

As the former minister for HRSD responsible for the disabilities file, I have to say that I was very proud to be part of a government that took leadership in removing many barriers for people with disabilities.

• (1620)

We created the registered disability savings plan in 2008, and we signed on to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The RDSP, as members have probably heard, was a breakthrough financial planning tool, the first of its kind anywhere in the world. To date, over 150,000 Canadians and their families have invested in this wonderful tool.

However, we did so much more for people with disabilities. We launched the opportunities fund that, so far, has helped over 20,000 people with disabilities develop the skills they need to actually get a job and, with that, the dignity and self-respect that come with having a job.

We partnered with the Canadian Association for Community Living on the ready, willing and able initiative to connect people with developmental disabilities with a job. We also invested in expanding vocational training programs for people with autism spectrum disorders.

Yes, we did more. We removed the GST-HST from eyewear that is specially designed to electronically enhance the vision of individuals

with vision impairment, and also from special training to help individuals cope with the effects of a disorder or disability.

We invested hundreds of millions of dollars every year in the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, to help the provinces and territories improve the employment of Canadians with disabilities.

We released a landmark third-party report, "Rethinking disability in the private sector." This report spelled out, in very plain language, the many tangible benefits of hiring people with disabilities, including reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, improved morale, and improved profitability.

I am, rightly, very proud that in 2007, our government created the enabling accessibility fund. This program was designed to provide direct funding to help community groups, municipalities and organizations improve accessibility for people with disabilities, where they work, live and play, such as community centres, town halls, churches, arenas, and so many more local spots.

Over 3,700 facilities were made more accessible through this program. In 2013, we recognized both the value and the success of this program, originally billed as a temporary one, by making the funding permanent. I have to say that when we launched that particular program over 10 years ago, I never expected that I would be so appreciative of the results of those investments 10 years later. I am surely glad they were there, as are thousands and thousands of Canadians who use them every day.

Among many other tax aids, we also created the home accessibility tax credit, for both seniors and those living with disabilities, to renovate and make their own homes more accessible, giving them not just a sense of independence but in fact real independence. We did this because we recognized the contributions that people with disabilities can and do make to our nation and our communities. We recognize the value that a person's independence brings to their dignity.

This is not to say that the accomplishments of our government solved every problem, but they were significant steps in the right direction. That said, I am sure that members would agree that we still have a lot of work to do.

Take for example the presentation of petitions right here in the House of Commons. Almost a year ago exactly, a petition from my constituents was rejected by the Clerk of the House because it was on 11 by 17 inch paper. It has been printed big enough to accommodate constituents who had visual challenges. The paper was deemed too big for the House of Commons, by this House of Commons.

Government Orders

●(1625)

Under the current Standing Orders, petitioners can only petition the House of Commons if the petition is printed on paper described as the “usual size”, meaning letter or legal size only. I had to seek unanimous consent from the House to table this particular petition. Thanks to my colleagues on all sides, unanimous consent was granted and I was allowed to table the petition. However, quite frankly, there is so much text required to be included on a petition now that the font used has to be pretty small if it is going to fit on 8 ½" by 11" piece of paper. That is not fair. It is not fair to our constituents. In fact, it is such a backward a policy to limit the size of paper if all of the required information is there. Personally, I believe that every Canadian should be able to submit a petition on larger paper if it means they can read what they are signing. I do not think that is an unreasonable thing to require.

As someone who was once legally blind, and as the former minister responsible for the disabilities office, I regularly encouraged many institutions and organizations to adopt more accessible friendly policies. It is very disappointing to me that the House is not taking the same approach, at least not so far. Not only does this guideline fail to provide accessibility to Canadians who are visually impaired, but it is also a barrier to their being able to access and fully participate in their government with the same level of engagement as those without visibility challenges.

I am grateful to the House for granting me unanimous consent to table the petition. Frankly, I was hopeful that having this issue brought before the procedure and House affairs committee, or as we know it better, PROC, would lead to positive and permanent change. Sadly, I am now hearing that government members of PROC, the same people introducing Bill C-81, for some strange reason are now withholding their support for this change, a change they once seemed to support. Frankly, I do not understand it. If the government were truly serious about addressing the issues facing Canadians with disabilities, it would have addressed the Standing Order by now. Instead, here we are almost a year later, and Standing Order 36(1.1) (c) still has not been updated. Unfortunately, I wish I could say this was just an oversight. Sadly, it does not seem to be.

During the 2015 election, the Liberals campaigned on a promise to make life more accessible for Canadians with disabilities. For each cabinet shuffle, it has been part of the minister's mandate letter to consult and introduce legislation on this subject as quickly as possible. Here we are three years later and are getting a bill from a minister that is said to have been the result of extreme consultations across Canada. I have no doubt the minister and her staff did extensive consultations across the country on this matter. That is what they claim; it must be true. However, one would normally have expected something of deeper value and more tangible change to have been proposed as a result. Instead, all this piece of legislation does is propose the creation of yet another agency, at a cost of \$290 million to taxpayers.

Here is the sad part. None of the money would actually be spent on helping Canadians who face accessibility issues on a day-to-day basis. Instead, it would go to hiring more bureaucrats and paying auditors to audit all government buildings and buildings that fall under federal jurisdiction, such as banks, and for more consultations on what the standard regulations for accessibility should be. In my

humble opinion, this would be a waste of money. We do not need more consultations to develop regulations. We have those already. As a matter of fact, during our time in government, we spent many millions of dollars making hundreds of federal buildings more accessible. When we put that in the budget, the Liberals voted against it. We were able to do all of these updates and set regulations without the need for yet another multi-million dollar agency to develop another report.

●(1630)

The proposed legislation says that the regulations, after being developed over the next six years, would apply to the Parliament buildings, among other places.

I have a few questions for the minister. As members of Parliament, we all have at least two offices: one in Ottawa and one, although often more, in the riding. Would auditors be auditing our constituency offices to ensure that they comply with these new regulations? If our offices do not comply, who would be responsible for paying for the upgrades?

I know from my own experience that it was extremely difficult to find office space that was both accessible and affordable in many small towns. Our member office budgets would not cover the cost to make an office accessible because of the high dollar amount involved. Simply building a ramp and altering the front door of my office would have cost three years' rent. The landlord could not reasonably be expected to pay for that, and house management would not pay for it.

In addition to our constituency offices, our Parliament buildings were not designed to be disability-friendly. While we as a government have made great strides in fixing that, these buildings were not designed with accessibility issues in mind.

With Centre Block shutting down in a few months for a much-needed 10-plus years' renovation, has the minister made plans to ensure that when this building reopens it will be disability-friendly for not only Canadians when they visit the Parliament buildings, but also the MPs, senators and thousands of people who support this institution? For example, will rounded doorknobs be changed over to lever knobs? What about the bathroom sink faucets and the toilet flushers? What about the many ramps that need to be built? Will they be built to the appropriate 1-to-10 ratio? How about a distinguishable baseboard that would allow someone with a visual impairment to see where the wall and floor meet? Will there be visual and audible warnings for people in the event of emergencies? Right now in my Confederation Building office the fire alarm is an audio-only alarm. That works for me and my staff, but what if I have guests or what about cleaners who cannot hear? What is planned for wheelchair access to the hill? Perhaps more importantly, what plans exist for true emergency evacuation by wheelchair or walker?

Government Orders

I know that while I was the Minister of Public Works, I took all of these things into consideration and required that they be incorporated into the Parliament Hill renovation design plans. Are those features still included? I know that many of those plans have been changed.

Will the minister ensure that Centre Block and the other Parliament buildings will be accessibility-friendly after these once-in-a-century renovations?

As I mentioned earlier, I am also concerned about the jurisdiction under which this bill is being placed. As the bill currently stands, the Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities will be responsible for implementing this bill, yet much of the work will require execution by Public Services and Procurement. I am concerned that as a result of this, the minister will be unable to adequately assess and address the issues as they arise.

While I do support sending this legislation to committee and I do support its intended goal, I have some serious concerns about the need to create a new agency, the amount of funding requested, and how the division of responsibility, authority, and accountability for its implementation will be addressed. I am also concerned that all that this legislation does is essentially reiterate the minister's mandate letter. She has already consulted with Canadians, so instead we should be discussing the regulations, not the creation of another agency.

I look forward to hearing what other members have to say, so that together we can develop legislation that will truly address the very real concerns facing very real Canadians with very real disabilities.

• (1635)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, having been a colleague of my hon. colleague in this place during the time when she was struggling with significant health challenges and physical limitations, it is certainly inspiring to see the spirit with which she challenged herself and all of us to live up to what is required for accessibility. Her voice now is much appreciated.

As a former minister, how does my colleague feel about the approach this legislation takes not to set timelines or deadlines? The language used throughout is of progressive realization. The goal for the legislation is through progressive realization. As I see it, it is a vanishing horizon into the future. We understand that we cannot snap our fingers and remove all barriers immediately. However, as she is a former minister, I would be interested in her thoughts of the constant use in the legislation of a goal of “progressive realization” with no end in sight

• (1640)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her very kind remarks. She was a tremendous support to me over those tough times. She has brought up an issue that is very important.

I talked about accountability. If we are going to have accountability, we have to establish what is going to be done, by whom and when. Those things are not in this bill. There is talk about consulting. That was supposed to have been done already. We managed to go ahead and do a whole lot of things as a government that had tangible results. We upgraded several hundred buildings to make them more accessible. We did not sit around and gaze at our navels like the bill

is proposing to do, spending six years to develop standards. Across Canada and around the world those standards already exist.

I would encourage the Liberal government, if it is serious about going ahead and helping people with disabilities, that it try to not reinvent the wheel, that it put some deadlines on this and name one person with the authority, responsibility and the accountability to deliver on this item and get on with it.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I learned a lot from what my hon. colleague shared about her time as minister. I want to pick up on a piece that has been a bit of a theme this afternoon. It is also something from my time when I was a social worker that I felt was important. What I have heard from people in my constituency is about the lack of timelines and the lack of accountability in the bill, advocating for some good amendments to the bill. They want something to happen sooner rather than later.

People have asked me about the need for more and that need to be able to go to one place to have that accountability. The fact that implementation and other things in the bill are sort of spread out over four different agencies seems confusing, overly bureaucratic and not effective or efficient. Would my hon. colleague like to comment on those points?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with the hon. member more. In fact, that is one of the biggest flaws with the bill. There is no one charged with delivering. The minister whose name is on the bill is not the minister who tabled it in the House. It is a third minister who would have to deliver with respect to physical changes to these buildings, as well as the office of the Speaker. The office of the Speaker does have a responsibility for some of the facilities in this building.

It is important to have what is known in the business world as a “locus of control”, someone who is responsible, who is accountable and who has the authority to make things happen. Otherwise, nothing happens and nobody is held accountable for it, especially when there are no timelines.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a couple of things I have noticed in the debate today is that there is all kinds of talk about punishment or penalties for non-compliance.

About two weeks ago I met with a group in my riding, the Independent Living Vernon. It has been helping people with accessibility issues of all sorts, not just physical disabilities. However, what it is focused on is driving incentives within the community so there is an incentive for a business to be more physically accessible, or visually accessible or hearing accessible. It has worked with the city. For example, in Salmon Arm, our city council meetings are now streamed over blue tooth so people with blue tooth hearing aids can hear the meetings. Those are the types of incentives that really make a difference in a community.

Does the member for Haldimand—Norfolk feel that type of approach would be more suitable in the bill rather than heavy penalties for non-compliance?

Government Orders

•(1645)

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, people with disabilities have so much to offer to businesses and to their communities. Some 750,000 Canadians could be at work but they are not. They are people with disabilities who want to work, but they cannot because of artificial barriers that are put in place, including prejudice.

The landmark study that was done a number of years ago to which I referred showed that the average company that adapted its workplace to someone with disabilities spent no more than \$500. That is lot less than the average recruitment cost of \$3,200 per employee. When people with disabilities joined the workforce, the company overall, not just the employee, saw improved absenteeism, improved morale, improved productivity, and therefore improved profitability.

Communities are the same way. When a municipality broadcasts its town hall meetings or its mayoral or town council meetings, the disability community is more engaged. Everybody benefits from that.

The positive side, the carrot in this case works much better than the stick. When those people get engaged, when they can participate, they can contribute and we can all benefit from that for sure.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was here when the minister introduced the legislation. A good amount of consultation was done before the bill was brought forward. Bill C-81 is fairly clear and straightforward in taking barriers away, which is really and truly what Canadians want. Canadians want a federal government that will lead by example.

If the member were to ask if the legislation is perfect, I would have to tell her that I do not think there is such a thing. I do not think Stephen Harper had perfect legislation. Our legislation is not perfect. There is always room for improvement and maybe we will see some improvements once the bill gets to committee.

I believe that all the stakeholders who have been listening to the debate and the discussions that have taken place would surely recognize that the legislation is a significant step forward in taking away barriers. Would the member agree with that?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, the bill has the potential only to be good legislation that would make a difference.

I invite my colleagues to join us at committee to make amendments that would make the bill relevant. That means establishing clear lines of accountability, of responsibility for its execution. It means not spending six years having consultations that the government has taken three years to do already. The government has consulted for three years to make a recommendation to consult for six more. That is not what four million Canadians with disabilities need. It is not what they want. Another six years of consultations is not going to help them. Then, who knows? There may be another recommendation for yet another study.

Canadians need access now. They need to be able to get to work and they need to be able to get around once they get to work. They need to be able to hear and see or use some tool or technology that will substitute for that, so they can contribute to Canadian society, so

they can earn a living for themselves and get the dignity and self-worth that comes with having a job.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): 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 Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, Health.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in this place to speak to Bill C-81.

•(1650)

[*Translation*]

I think this bill is a good first step, but we should do more to make Canada a truly barrier-free nation.

[*English*]

The bill is a good first step. I do not think there is any disability group across Canada or any people concerned with the rights of all Canadians to full access of all the benefits of citizenship that would disagree that no one should be denied access to benefits based on physical limitations. That is clear. Canada has long since signed and ratified in 2006, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but we still need to do much more.

As I said, I do not think any group has seen this legislation and condemned it. No group has said anything other than that this is welcome. Groups welcome the efforts of the current government to bring in legislation that would lead us to a country that is barrier-free.

I particularly want to commend the member for Haldimand—Norfolk for her observations on a situation that occurred to me as well, and that is what it is like to have physical limitations and how it opens our eyes. In both her case and mine, they were temporary.

I waited a long time for a hip replacement on two occasions. I became much more aware of the number of times I went into a building and realized there was no elevator. I did not think I could get myself up those stairs because it hurt too much. The awareness of what it was like to get over curbs, to get up staircases. These moments of awareness need to be carried through by us.

I feel blessed that the hip replacements worked, so my physical limitations were temporary. However, it really woke me up to how many barriers existed in our society that were invisible to those who had full sight, hearing and the physical ability to handle staircases and curbs. The limitations are severe and they need to be removed.

Government Orders

We know a number of provinces have passed legislation to ensure real accessibility, but only Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, so obviously not across the country. We know this federal legislation will apply to places within federal jurisdictions, federal buildings, federal sphere of activities. However, there are criticisms and I want to go over them briefly.

We have heard a number of them through debate since Bill C-81 came to the House. I should make it clear that I will vote for the bill at this stage. I want it to get to committee where I hope we can make significant changes.

This is the first thing that needs to be said, and I raised this already in questions. As I went through the legislation, I was surprised at the language of the goal in the purpose of the act, section 5. It states:

The purpose of this Act is to benefit all persons, especially persons with disabilities, through the progressive realization, within the purview of matters coming within the legislative authority of Parliament, of a Canada without barriers...

We find the same language in the mandate of the Canadian accessibility standards organization, to contribute to the progressive realization of a Canada without barriers. We can go through and find the accessibility commissioners are also working toward progressive realization.

I was so interested in the language. As someone who studied legislative interpretation at law school, I have read every bill that has gone through this place since I became an MP seven years ago. I have never seen any bill where the goal is progressive realization of something. I double-checked by searching the legislative record, which we can now do much more easily than reading every bill. This is the first time any piece of legislation in Canada has set a goal of “progressive realization” of anything.

We usually, in legislation, set goals that are limited by timelines, within x number of years of the bill coming into force, that sort of thing. Progressive realization speaks to the underlying framework of this legislation, which is that it does not demand that Canada achieve a time without barriers by a specific time, even within the federal purview, and that is clearly a weakness.

It is discretionary at many other points. I mentioned earlier today in debate that the Governor in Council, which, for those watching who might not recognize the term, means cabinet, at section 4 of this act “may, by order, designate a member of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada as the Minister for the purposes of this Act.” I cannot imagine, having created an act that is discretionary and says we are going to have a timeline into the future where we are working in progressive realization of our goal, why on earth it is not required that cabinet appoint a minister to be in charge. Other speakers have already noted that the minister who tabled this legislation is not the minister who worked on the legislation, and so on. We really should, in committee, be able to address some of the discretionary elements and ensure that cabinet must appoint a minister from within the existing cabinet to have responsibility for carriage of this legislation. It is nonsensical to leave that part discretionary.

A number of the groups dealing with this issue of accessibility and looking at this legislation have made note of some other things, and certainly the discretionary nature and the lack of timelines has been repeated by many. In looking at the legislation, I thought as well that it is much better, in looking at a goal for all of government, that there

be accountability with one agency. In this legislation, for instance, the rights of accessibility to transport are handled through the Canadian Transportation Agency, whereas the rights to access to telecommunications, radio and TV is left with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

• (1655)

I want to read a quote into the record by disability advocate and lawyer David Lepofsky. I certainly leaned on his advice and will be doing so as I am preparing amendments for Bill C-81. He said, “That kind of splintered approach”, by which I just referred to different agencies having responsibility, “to implementation and enforcement is a formula for confusion, delay, duplication and ineffectiveness. We would rather have it all under one roof.” So would I. It would be much more effective if it were all under one roof, with one agency being accountable.

There is another element that has come up for discussion since the bill was tabled, and that is access to languages, particularly sign languages, the right to recognize that sign languages are languages and, in the national context, must be protected as official languages. Recently, there was a demonstration in Ottawa about the concerns that sign language in English and French as well as indigenous sign languages, be recognized as languages, as part of a national language. This is a concern that was expressed by a nationwide rally that occurred not that long ago and it is one that I share. I want to go on the record as supporting that American sign language, *langue des signes du Québec* and indigenous sign languages be understood to be official languages. One cannot have full accessibility if one cannot read, find and hear the information due to physical limitations.

Our embracing of the United Nations declaration on the rights of people with disabilities must be at least as strong. Of course, there are other United Nations declarations, such as on the rights of indigenous persons, on which we have the same concern. We can endorse these United Nations declarations, but when it comes home to implementation in Canada, we must be serious about ensuring that our goals are not in the far distance. Therefore, progressive realization is not language I want to see in this legislation at royal assent. What I hope we will all see, and we can negotiate it, is that within four years, five years, six years of royal assent given to this legislation a barrier-free Canada must exist and all peoples of Canada must be able to access, as citizens, all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure to listen to my colleague's speech on this bill.

Our government is working to improve accessibility in all areas under federal jurisdiction so that all Canadians, regardless of their abilities and disabilities, can participate in Canadian society.

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I would like to know if my colleague plans to support the bill.

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

I clearly stated that I would vote in favour of sending the bill to committee, where I very much hope improvements can be made to the timelines and discretionary matters that need clarification.

At first reading, this bill seems rather anemic, but I know the government is trying, and I thank it for that.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues we hear is that of the timeline on this piece of legislation. If there is nothing mandated, it effectively pushes the timeline down the road. There is no consistency. There is certainly no time frame within which many of the proposals in the legislation are to be implemented. The hope is that we can get this to committee and work among the committee to try to narrow that down. I wonder if that is a concern of the hon. member as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. There has been a strong degree of non-partisan concern from all members of this place in the debates on Bill C-81, whether Conservative, Liberal, New Democrat or Green. There is a hope that we will see the legislation improved in committee, and it is with that spirit that I will vote for the legislation at second reading and hope that we can see more precision.

As I said, I know the language "progressive realization" is found in some United Nations language, but I submit to this House that progressive realization of a goal is not a terminology that belongs in Canadian law. If they are serious about doing something, they give it timelines, they state goals, and they create accountability. Otherwise, it becomes a legislative effort in empty promises and dreamy hope but without the kind of rigour that brings change through legislation.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot today from members on all sides of the House. I want to concur with my hon. colleague's statement that there appears to be a lot of consensus that this bill is important, but also a lot of consensus that this bill needs to be open to amendments at committee.

There is one thing I want to put forward for my colleague, just to hear her thoughts. I do not pretend to know all the ins and outs of the legislation, but could we not, inside Bill C-81, include some type of timeline for Canada to actually bring in line our laws and policies with the declaration for the rights of persons with disabilities that we signed so many years ago? It has come to my attention that this could be one thing we could put in the bill to work toward.

• (1705)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, clearly, timelines make sense in this legislation, and we do not have them now. To quote again the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, it pointed out that to meet this goal of progressive realization within the purview of matters coming under the legislative authority of Parliament, one new ramp per year somewhere in Canada would entirely fulfill that insufficient goal.

I do not think the government nor the minister who brought this legislation forward would be satisfied with such an insufficient outcome. I can almost imagine in the legislative drafting someone

saying, "It will cost too much if we actually mean what we say; let's make it really fuzzy". I think the minister carrying the file does not want fuzzy hope. She wants to really deliver for people who have physical challenges, as she does. She is a remarkable tribute to overcoming physical limitations to do all that she has done.

The way to ensure the legislation delivers is to put in timelines, such as: all federal buildings must be fully accessible by day x, or as the member for Haldimand—Norfolk brought up, we should ensure that all riding offices of members of Parliament are fully accessible. We can put timelines on these things, and we can break them apart so that one agency does not feel that it is going to be bankrupted by the effort. Surely, we can do better than progressive realization of a goal that could recede into 2150 without breaking a single clause.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in the House last week when the minister responsible for Bill C-81 introduced the legislation. As someone who has spent my career in the federal public service, I was really pleased to see that the legislation called for the federal workforce to become more representative of the Canadian population by including persons with disabilities, and different abilities, within the workforce.

I was also really pleased to hear about the funding that would be available to make improvements for accessibility across federal assets. I know the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has a place within her riding very near and dear to me, the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. Perhaps the member could speak to some of the great benefits we would see at Gulf Islands National Park Reserve arising from Bill C-81, because I think it would help workforce and visitors to that area to have inclusive experiences. I would like to hear the member's thoughts on how this legislation might benefit her own backyard.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate my friend from Cloverdale—Langley City on his election as chair of the environment committee. This is something I hope for, and maybe I am premature. In any case, there will be change in the chairmanship of that committee.

My own backyard is a spectacular backyard. I live in one of the most beautiful parts of Canada. The Gulf Islands National Park is a challenge for accessibility, even for those who are fully physically able, with all our abilities to walk, and yet much of the Gulf Islands National Park requires being on a boat. When we consider physical limitations, we want to make sure every Canadian has access to experiences, such as being able to watch whales from shore. One of the best places for watch whaling, as the hon. member knows, is on Saturna Island, where one does not have to be in a boat, at risk of harassing the whales. They more or less come to us and we can experience them very close up. Fortunately, BC Ferries has accessibility in mind. Many of the ferry routes are accessible. There are many ways in which Gulf Islands National Park and all national parks could improve accessibility, given the goals of Bill C-81.

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I agree with him. There is tremendous potential here. I would love to see it realized with timelines.

● (1710)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-81, or as I call it, another Liberal feel good bill that is short on details, does not note how it will actually help the disabled, and yet somehow manages to detail how it will grow the bureaucracy, but that is just a working title.

This situation with the delay in getting to this bill kind of reminds me of an old *Seinfeld* episode where Newman and Elaine steal someone's dog. It takes the police a while to catch them. When Newman is confronted by the police, he asks, "What took you so long?" That is what I would like to ask the government.

We will support this bill in order to get it to committee, where hopefully we will get the Liberals to actually work on concrete measures to help improve the lives of the disabled. I have heard that the bill may go to the government operations committee, on which I sit. We would welcome that if it does come to us. We are going to suggest and support amendments to ensure that it actually helps the disabled, and is not just a make-work project for bureaucrats.

The establishment of this bill was in the first minister's mandate letter in 2015. Ironically, the current Minister of Public Services was the original Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, tasked with this legislation three years ago. Back then, her mandate read:

Lead an engagement process with provinces, territories, municipalities, and stakeholders that will lead to the passage of a Canadians with Disabilities Act. In this work, you will be supported by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Work with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to deliver on our commitment to support the construction of recreational infrastructure that allows more children access to sport and recreation.

It is a bit ironic that the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities at the time was the MP for Edmonton Mill Woods. In West Edmonton, my riding, we have been looking to build a new recreation centre specifically as outlined in the mandate letter. Unfortunately, our minister, the senior minister for the Liberals in Edmonton, Alberta, has been completely absent on this issue. We have not received a single penny.

Recently, Huffington Post put out this big article and a map showing how the Liberals, in the summer, plastered most of eastern Canada with cheques: \$43 billion. They showed how much was actually delivered to Edmonton: not one penny. Some \$43 billion went to various Liberal ridings and not one penny was delivered by the Liberals to Edmonton. We will get to more on that issue later.

It has taken three years to get to introducing the bill that actually just punts the work down the road over the next six years. From the mandate letter to maybe actually achieving goals is going to be nine years.

The famed Liberal mandate tracker says on this issue that it is under way and on track. Regarding the development of a national disabilities act, it says the result anticipated is for federal accessibility legislation that promotes equality and opportunity, increases inclusion and participation of Canadians who have disabilities, with the outcome being that building on extensive

nine-month in-person and online consultation with Canadians, the government has tabled the bill.

In three years since the mandate letter, the Liberals managed to consult for nine months. That makes me ask what they have done for the other two years and three months. It is funny that the current minister probably thought she could just transfer to another department and escape the mandate, yet here it is back with her at public services to fulfill.

Now, as for being under way and on track, it has taken three years to get to it being under way and on track. It has a bit of funding over six more years, and they say that it is on track.

I want to look at a few other things from the Liberal mandate tracker that are also under way and on track.

There is the review of Canada's environmental assessment project: under way and on track. Another refers to environmental assessment processes that are fair to all parties, rely on scientific evidence, respect the rights of indigenous people and protect the environment for generations to come. Here we have the Liberals failing on Trans Mountain. Their Bill C-68 is also known as the bill to ensure that a pipeline will never be built in Canada again. It says "rely on scientific evidence", but this bill actually puts the final word and the political decision-making with the minister, not basing it on science. However, it is under way and on track.

Another is to establish new performance standards for government services, and measure and report on performance: under way and on track. The result is to be government services that better meet the needs of Canadians.

Every single government has to put out a departmental plan. In that plan, it lists all of its goals and expected results. Fully one-third of the entire departmental plan from every Liberal ministry does not actually have goals set. They all say what they are spending and what they hope to achieve in a roundabout way, but there are no actual goals set. Here we have that it is on track, but fully one-third of their programs do not have any results showing as a goal.

● (1715)

Here is another one that is under way and on track. Sure, committees can introduce effective opioid treatments and programs, but we have an opioid crisis across the country. The much reviled by the Liberals President Trump has actually declared it a national emergency in the United States, but the government cannot do that here, yet it is on track.

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Another one under way and on track is to eliminate all long-term drinking water advisories in public systems on reserves. It is a great goal. The result anticipated is to continue progress in eliminating long-term drinking water advisories. Since this mandate came out, we have had 35 new communities that have been put on the boil water advisory. The Liberals sit there and say that they have done this, this and this, but they have actually added 35 new communities. However, it is under way and on track.

Another one is to help veterans by establishing lifelong pensions ensuring they will have access to financial advice and support. We have seen the current government fail miserably on that, but it is under way and on track.

It says that promoting economic development and creating jobs for indigenous people is under way and on track. The result anticipated is higher employment rates for indigenous people. In the government operations committee we recently studied small business procurement and how we have set-asides for indigenous businesses. We are required to set aside a certain amount of business through the government for indigenous-led businesses. The government had someone come up and say that they are fulfilling every role and succeeding massively. However, every single witness we have had from the indigenous community, Métis, Cree, it does not matter, from Alberta and Quebec, every single witness said that the government is not even following its own laws, yet here it says it is under way and on track.

It says that to implement an infrastructure strategy that improves public transport is under way and on track. The result anticipated is that Canadians spend less time in traffic. We have heard the Parliamentary Budget Officer say that he cannot even find the infrastructure money that has been established in the budget. He has begged the government to produce an infrastructure strategy, which the government has not done, yet somehow the Liberals say it is under way and on track. I will note that the member for Edmonton Mill Woods, when he was the infrastructure minister, managed to get some work done on public transport in Alberta. He got ashtrays for the bus stops in Edmonton and so I thank him.

It says that modernizing the National Energy Board is under way and on track. We have seen the government belittle, bad-mouth and discredit the NEB, yet it says it is on track to modernize it. Bad-mouthing and discrediting it is not modernizing it.

My favourite from the Liberal mandate checker has to be the budget: to balance the budget by 2019-20 is under way with challenges. Now, it is not going to be balanced, and the most recent update we heard from finance was 2050. Here is the funny thing: Every single finance minister from the provinces across Canada has set a date when they will balance their budget. In Alberta, where we have the financially challenged and mathematically challenged NDP spending us into bankruptcy, it has actually set a date for when it will balance the budget. Even with Kathleen Wynne's Liberals, the finance minister had set a date when they would balance the budget. Of course, it turns out it was all incorrect information, but they set a date to balance the budget. Who has not set a date to balance the budget? Well, it is the finance minister from this government. Every single other one but the finance minister has, but I digress.

Ensuring Canadians who are living with disabilities are allowed to live with equal opportunities by eliminating systematic barriers is a great cause. We all support it. My office works with a great many in Edmonton West on this issue. I want to read a letter from one of them. His name is Timothy Parnett. He is a gentleman who was hurt in a car accident years ago and is confined to a wheelchair with limited movement in his arms and legs.

He writes, "I run the advocacy group called Mightywheels.ca. This organization was created to address accessibility within the community. Our mission is simple: Mightywheels.ca wants to bring attention to poor infrastructure and problem areas in the community that you live in. Mightywheels is located in Edmonton, Alberta. Edmonton has grown at a rapid pace within the past few decades, so much so that the city struggles to keep up with the demand of reconstruction of older communities, where the accessibility conditions are severely lacking, even deplorable to a certain extent. I am hoping to raise awareness for the struggles that people with wheels or mobility issues face every day."

He goes on to say that he has a website that is "geared to help people who face social inequality, the main issue we currently address is accessibility for all people: we focus on the barriers that cause inaccessibility: these would be things like parents pushing baby strollers, people with mobility issues or impairments, or people who use walking aids or wheelchairs like myself."

● (1720)

Here is one gentleman confined to a wheelchair with no resources who has put in a simple email better outcomes than what are in Bill C-81. He finished by saying, "My Mightywheels website is to give hope to everyone who has an issue with accessibility. I am very passionate with my website and I am hoping that people will be enlightened and educate. Most of all, I am hoping people will see and hear my advocacy. This is not just for me, but for all the people who have issues with mobility. I am a firm believer that together we can do it one step at a time."

I had a coffee with Tim at West Edmonton Mall. We chatted about his accident and his difficulties in life and what he wanted to achieve. He wants to inspire people to succeed. I am going to consider it a failure if the next time I see him I have to say it is a great idea but to hold on for the next six years because this legislation is going to take that long.

It reminds me of an interview when the Prime Minister told a desperate unemployed oil sands worker in Alberta to just hang in there. That was over two years ago. Since then the Liberals have killed energy east and northern gateway, and have botched Trans Mountain. I guess we are going to have to tell those workers to just hang in there a bit more.

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It also reminds me of the injured veteran at the Edmonton town hall who had lost a leg. Pleading for help, he was told by the Prime Minister that veterans are asking for more than the government could give. Ten million dollars for an ice rink on Parliament Hill is not too much to ask for and \$10 million for Omar Khadr is not too much to ask for, but it is for a veteran.

I want to go back to the mandate letters. The next minister for disabilities was the member for Calgary Centre. His mandate letter stated, “Develop and introduce new federal accessibility legislation. You will build on the significant consultations that have already taken place involving provinces, territories”, etc. By then, the consultations were going to have to be done.

Did the minister get it done? Of course he did not. Part of his mandate letter also read that he was expected to live up to the highest ethical standards. Instead, he is under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner for using House of Commons resources for a family member's election.

We are now over to our third minister for the file. She too will build on the significant consultations that have already taken place. Hers too should be an ambitious legislation. Six years is not ambitious unless it is the Minister of Finance balancing the budget when 20 years would be ambitious, but in his case apparently it is going to be 30.

What I am getting at is that we do not need six years of added bureaucracy. We need a truly ambitious plan to help the disabled. Provinces have plans. Ontario has the Ontarians With Disabilities Act. This is not new ground that we are breaking here. It has been done before.

The previous Conservative government took the disabilities file seriously. We did not pass off the issues from minister to minister. We actually got stuff done, like introducing the landmark registered disability savings plan, which helps parents and grandparents with children with severe disabilities to contribute to the children's financial security. From mandate letter to actually getting it done, it was three months, not three years to get to a program where six years down the road we might have something done, three years from mandate letter to actually getting to legislation and getting the program done.

We invested \$30 million into the opportunities fund to help persons with disabilities gain employment. We supported caregivers and recognized their enormous contribution through tax incentives. There was over \$200 million for labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to assist provinces in approving the employment situation of Canadians with disabilities, and millions of dollars for the ready, willing and able initiative of the Canadian Association for Community Living to connect persons with developmental disabilities with jobs, and millions to support the expansion of vocational training programs for persons with autism spectrum disorder, and on and on.

I want to swing back to the registered disability savings plan. Since we introduced the plan, it has helped 105,000 Canadians save for the future. This is the outcomes-based work that we need from the current government. Conservatives are not in power anymore, but the members on this side are continuing to work for the disabled.

My seatmate, the member for Calgary Shepard, has introduced Bill C-399, the fairness for persons with disabilities act. It aims to reduce the threshold for the number of hours needed for an activity to be eligible for a tax credit. Medical food and medical formula would also qualify under the disability tax credit.

Our member for Carleton has introduced Bill C-395, the opportunity for workers with disabilities act, which is an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act.

• (1725)

His legislation would amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act to ensure that persons with disabilities do not lose more through taxation and the reduction in benefits than they would gain as a result of working. His bill would enforce Ottawa to measure the impact of every thousand dollars a disabled person earns in wages against the value of their lost benefits. It would force the federal government to adjust its tax and benefits program so a disabled person would always be financially better off working than not working.

What has the Liberal government done besides passing this file from minister to minister to minister? It sicced the CRA on disabled people. It targeted people living with type 1 diabetes. As a diabetes sufferer stated, “It's not like I can snap a finger and this disease turns off.” The government was quick to go after people who suffered from diabetes, but slow to work on its mandate.

Who else did the Liberals target in their tax grab? They targeted people suffering from autism and severe mental health disorders. Autism Canada says it is hearing too many stories of people who have had the disability tax credit, sometimes for decades, for their children with autism taken away.

It is funny to note that I did not see in any of the Liberal mandate letters ministers being told to harass people with disabilities and to do a tax grab on them. They seem to have acted quickly on it, though. It is too bad they did not have it in their mandate letters, because this would be one issue they could actually mark as completed instead of marking it as “under way with challenges”.

We have a lot of questions on this legislation. We do support it like our colleagues in the NDP and other parties. We want it to get to committee so that we can get some teeth into the measures currently in it and help disabled people.

Government Orders

We do have some questions for the minister, though. When will the new regulations come into effect? The six-year time frame would suggest that the entire process is going to take six years to get done between now and the time help will be given to the disabled. How much is it going to cost federal workplaces and private businesses? What will the new standard be? Why will we be voting on legislation when we do not know the regulations that will come out of it? Is it going to be properly defined to avoid a flood of human rights complaints?

I want to go back to the comment about voting on legislation when we do not even know what the regulations will be. We saw the government do this recently with the estimates, in what we called vote 40, the slush fund. The government asked us to give it \$7.4 billion and that it would tell us later what it would be spent on. When we asked further, we were told that it was presumptuous to expect opposition members to understand what the money would be used for until it was given to it.

We have another situation here. What is the \$290 million going to be used for? Can the Liberals give us a breakdown of how it is going to be spent? Is it going to be spent on changing our buildings and updating them, or is it all going to be spent on bureaucracy? Have estimates been done on the cost to the private sector across the country? If the bill were passed today, what would the changes be, besides from spending lots of money on bureaucrats? Is it going toward hiring more public servants to examine which regulations we should have?

I note that in the 10-page slide deck or briefing document the government sent out, it provided more information on the bureaucracy going after people and penalizing them, etc., than it did on how the bill would help the average disabled person. We are worried about that.

Is the government going to build a bureaucracy that will create paperwork and go after people? It has not put anything in the bill specifying how it is going to physically and pragmatically help the disabled. What will the outcome be? We do not know. We do know that there will be a lot more bureaucrats going after people.

The \$290 million will not even scratch the surface of what it is going to cost the federal government and the federally regulated private sectors to catch up to the new standards.

We have a lot of issues with this legislation, but we do support it. We support the work that we have done in the past toward helping disabled individuals. We continue to do so with our private members' bills, such as the one put forward by the member for Calgary Shepard and the member for Carleton. Both have produced bills that would show tangible results for the disabled without the resources the government has, whether it be easier access to the disability credit for those who are suffering from autism, diabetes, or mental health disorders, or as my friend from Carleton has put in his bill, that would encourage the disabled to get back to work. His bill would not punish someone by taking away benefits because they had a job. Nothing is better for the dignity of Canadians than having a job.

We support getting the bill to committee. We want to improve the lives of those living with disabilities, but we are worried about the lack of government ambition toward getting it done.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to everything my colleague said.

I found some of the topics he covered a little curious. Bill C-81 is about accessibility. Its purpose is to make sure that accessibility is possible in all areas under federal jurisdiction so that all Canadians, regardless of their level of ability or disability, can participate in our society.

I would like to ask my friend whether the Conservatives will be supporting Bill C-81.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I think I mentioned about eight times that we are going to support it. We want to help people with disabilities. We are going to support it and get it to committee.

I heard that it might come to the government operations committee, which I would welcome. I understand that responsibility for it is kind of split between the Minister of Accessibility and the Minister of Public Services. We would welcome it, because we want to get into it and produce tangible results.

We heard that members of the NDP and the Green Party are supporting it. The party opposite supports it. We all support it. Our concern is why it took the government so long. Why are the disabled so low among its priorities that it has taken three years? The mandate letter was in 2015. For three years the government has done minimal consultation, and then nothing.

Therefore, yes, we support getting it to committee. However, we want to get tangible work done to help the disabled.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech.

We are talking about Bill C-81, which aims to improve accessibility for people with reduced mobility and people with other kinds of limitations.

When people are integrated into the workplace, they are occasionally subjected to discrimination. They are also often excluded from their communities. I would like to hear the member's thoughts. What could be done to improve Bill C-81? How could we intervene directly with people with disabilities to give them a better quality of life?

We know that having a job and actively participating in the workforce, whether in our own ridings or anywhere else, also promotes inclusion and well-being.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

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[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, my colleague made a lot of great points. We want to see people living with disabilities have full access to everything that Canadians enjoy, whether with respect to work, access to public buildings, or access to anything that regular Canadians enjoy. We very much want to see a plan that helps the disabled get to work.

My colleague from Carleton has put forward a private member's bill to ensure that those returning to work are not penalized by having their benefits taken away. We would like to see the government act on that. I hope that the NDP and the Liberals will support that bill, and the private member's bill of my colleague from Calgary Shepard, both of whom have tangible, pragmatic options to help people living with disabilities.

The member has mentioned a lot of great items. However, Bill C-81 is so vague about what it is going to do that it has disappointed us. We want to get it to committee where we can study it and get some firm, outcome-based teeth to the legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was a bit surprised by how my colleague across the way seemed to exaggerate a few points that are not really related to Bill C-81. One of the interesting things he talked about was the deficits of this particular administration. I would be interested in hearing his most up-to-date thinking. When we think of deficits, the Conservative Party has been in control of the Prime Minister's Office for 38% of the time that Canada has been a federation, some 151 years. For 38% of that time, that office was under the Conservatives. During that time, the Conservatives incurred 74% of Canada's overall debt. That is an interesting comparison.

I am a little off base. I apologize. I was just following up on a comment that the member across the way made.

Here we have legislation that sets a framework and demonstrates strong national leadership on an important issue that many Canadians who are following the debate have an understanding of, because of the comprehensive consultations that were done by this particular minister.

We know that the Conservative Party will be supporting the legislation. They have made that very clear. However, they have been critical as to why it has taken us two and a half years to get it through this far. Let us forego the arguments about the consultations.

My question for the member is this. Why did Stephen Harper not bring forward any form of legislation like what we are debating here today?

• (1735)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, where to begin? Let us start with the deficit. He asked why? It is because Conservative governments came in to clean up the massive messes left by Liberal governments. Whether it was by Trudeau Sr. or Chrétien and the others, we inherited horrible financial situations, just like we are going to inherit in 2019. That answers that question.

The member talks about the strong framework, the federal leadership that the Liberal government is taking. That strong

framework across the country has been carried by the provinces and people like my constituent Timothy Parnett, who are doing the hard lifting right now while the government fiddles away and plays around with useless legislation instead of getting this into law.

We see again and again that the Liberals do not bring up anything about the legislation. Because this legislation is so vague and weak, the member is not asking a question about it. He asked why Harper did not implement such legislation. I have to ask him why he will not address the issue we are facing today, that it took three years for the Liberal government to bring this vague legislation to the table. We are not talking about past governments; we are debating the current government. Why does the government continue to avoid accountability instead of taking responsibility for its lack of action?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is because this is a government that bases everything it does on symbolism and plays to Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram as part of its governing. That is the answer to the member's question. It is purely symbolic.

However, I do have a specific question for the member, and it is with respect to the \$290 million. The concern with this particular legislation is that Liberals have allocated that money without providing a breakdown of where will go. There is also a concern—and I know that the member spoke about this in his speech—about the bureaucracy that will be created by this legislation. It is very much a top-down approach, a government-knows-best approach.

Could the hon. member speak to that? I ask because I know he does a lot of work addressing the issues of bureaucracy within government. Would he speak to those concerns specifically?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Barrie—Innisfil for his hard work on the file.

We are blessed in West Edmonton with a large number of non-for-profit groups caring for the disabled. There is the Elves Special Needs Society, Easter Seals and others. They tell me that we need work on issues such as impassable sidewalks. There are people in wheelchairs going onto the streets because the sidewalks are broken. This is where we need the money. The money should be dedicated to infrastructure to help cities with this, not for building bureaucracies. This is a problem with this legislation because the money is not dedicated to actually helping the disabled. It seems to be set up to help a new class of bureaucracy, which Liberals always seem to make a priority and not average Canadians.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I was wondering about the complaints process in this bill. My colleague has talked about many of its shortfalls, and one of them is what looks like another form of a complaints process, which is the main thing in this bill. Could he elaborate on that? I know he has expounded on many of the areas of concern that are not in the bill, and a number of things that could be. One of the reasons he wants it to pass at second reading is so that we can see if the government will come forward with amendments, or if it will allow others. Could he elaborate on that?

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● (1740)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, that is a concern. As I mentioned, in the slide deck the government gave us introducing the legislation, there is one page on implementing accessibility requirements, one page on helping the disabled, but two full pages on how it is going to set up a bureaucratic regime to go after people. The way the government is going at it is backward. It needs to focus on actually helping the disabled rather than creating a new bureaucratic nightmare to go after people. We need to focus on pragmatic results and helping the disabled, and not spending money and resources on the bureaucracy. It needs to be spent on Canadians suffering with disabilities.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-81, the accessible Canada act. This bill is, for lack of a better description, a horribly missed opportunity. I think all of us in the House would agree that any opportunity we have to enact legislation that would help Canadians with disabilities, or all Canadians, access employment opportunities so they could help their families and their communities would be a benefit and something we should all be focused on doing. Unfortunately, the Liberal bill, the accessible Canada act, does none of those things. It is very thin, it lacks any details, and it certainly lacks any tangible results or aspirational goals we are trying to meet. I think the four million Canadians who have disabilities would be extremely disappointed, because this is certainly not what they were promised by the Prime Minister in the 2015 campaign.

There are already three provinces in Canada that have implemented accessibility legislation. Ontario passed the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2005, Manitoba passed the Accessibility for Manitobans Act in 2013, and Nova Scotia passed the Accessibility Act in 2017. Additionally, British Columbia has, as recently as this past July, pledged to establish a provincial disabilities act later this fall. Therefore, there are lots of templates already in place the Liberal government could have used as a measuring stick when it tried to develop its own legislation.

In the 2015 Liberal platform, the Prime Minister promised he would “eliminate systemic barriers and deliver equality of opportunity to all Canadians living with disabilities”. He would introduce a national disabilities act. In fact, the first mandate letter in November 2015, and every mandate letter since, and I think there have been two or three, has called on the minister responsible for this file to continue the consultation process and introduce legislation. There have been three years of consultation, and the culmination of that consultation is a very weak piece of legislation that really does nothing other than put forward another \$290 million for additional consultation and study. It is extremely disappointing that it has taken three years to develop this piece of legislation that really does not do anything that was promised in the 2015 election campaign. It must be extremely disappointing for those stakeholders who are looking for something with some breadth, content, tangibility and real results.

Bill C-81 is extremely weak. It does not outline any regulations or details. It only calls for more consultation and another regulatory process to begin, but the price tag is \$290 million. I cannot go back to my constituents and explain to them what the \$290 million is going to be used for and what the results are going to be. Certainly

stakeholders in my riding who are looking for this type of legislation are going to be asking me what this would do. I cannot give them a definitive answer, because there really are no answers in the bill, which is extremely disappointing, considering the track record of the previous Conservative government in supporting Canadians with disabilities. It has been and always will be a priority for the Conservative Party.

I want to look back at the strong legacy left by the former Conservative finance minister, Jim Flaherty, and some of the tangible tools we were able to bring forward that had real results. They delivered real results for Canadians with disabilities. There was the home disability tax credit that allowed people with disabilities to renovate their homes to ensure that they had healthy living spaces that were accessible. They could stay in their homes, in their communities, close to friends, family and social networks, where they were most comfortable. We created a working group that was tasked with developing a national autism strategy. We completed the groundbreaking study “Rethinking DisAbility in the Private Sector”, which was completed in 2006. This was a template for the private sector to address accessibility and disability issues in private businesses across Canada. It was an industry standard and is still used today.

● (1745)

The previous Conservative government also invested \$218 million a year, in partnership with the provinces, in labour market agreements, which ensured that we were improving employment opportunities for Canadians with disabilities across the country.

One of the hallmark pieces of legislation we were able to bring in was certainly the registered disability savings plan. This helped parents and grandparents of children with disabilities to contribute to their child's financial future and the financial security that every parent, and certainly every grandparent, feels is so important. Last week, during the debate on Bill C-81, I recall that the Minister of Public Services and Procurement said that the disability tax credit was a game changer for Canadians with disabilities. I credit her for pointing that out.

Those were tangible pieces of legislation that had tangible goals and tangible results. That is what Canadians are looking for from this House of Commons. That is what they elected their representatives to come here to do.

Unfortunately, I look at Bill C-81 as merely a rushed piece of legislation that is really all about meeting an election promise and not meeting the needs of Canadians with disabilities.

Government Orders

If we look at the Conservative record again, that record has continued even as we are opposition. As my colleague mentioned, the member for Calgary Shepard tabled the fairness for persons with disabilities act. My colleague, the member for Carleton, tabled Bill C-395, the opportunity bill, which would have imposed a simple rule on governments that they would have to respect that workers with disabilities would always be able to gain more from wages than they lost in clawbacks and taxes. It would have simply required governments to ensure that people with disabilities would always get ahead through their own hard work and would not be punished financially when they were successful. Like any working Canadian, that is what they want. When they are working hard, becoming successful, and earning a living, they do not want to be punished by different levels of government.

We heard from Canadians across the country that they want to work. That is their ultimate goal. They want to have financial stability, not just for themselves but for their families. However, we know that under the current rules, although some Canadians work hard, they come home with less. That was the situation the opportunity bill was trying to address. It would have addressed it successfully. Again, it was tangible legislation with tangible results that would have helped Canadians with disabilities.

However, rather than supporting common sense legislation, the Liberal government turned down the member for Carleton's Bill C-395. Instead of supporting definitive action that would have supported Canadians with disabilities, the Liberals voted down this bill and have instead tabled Bill C-81, which, in essence, does nothing to address the fundamental issues facing Canadians with disabilities.

In fact, not only did the Liberals turn down Bill C-395, they also went after Canadians with disabilities, specifically Canadians with type 1 diabetes. Liberals went after their health tax credit. While we are trying to find real solutions to real problems, the Liberals are chasing the opportunity for a tax grab on the backs of Canadians who are the most vulnerable. That is what makes this extremely disappointing.

On this side of the House, we recognize the strong contributions persons with different abilities can make to our country, our economy and certainly our workplaces. Disabilities come in all different sizes, shapes and forms. Unfortunately, one in seven Canadians aged 15 or older has reported some kind of disability, and three out of four adults with disabilities have reported more than one type of disability. These are not necessarily visible disabilities. They are not something we see on the street every single day. Many Canadians have disabilities that cannot necessarily be identified when seen, but they struggle each and every day to find a job and to make ends meet.

Almost 80% of Canadians 25 to 64 years old with a disability have at least a high school diploma, but compared to almost 90% of those without a disability, that is still a stark gap we need to try to address.

These Canadians represent a large and talented employment pool, yet too many are denied the opportunity to work and earn a living and their own self-esteem and self-respect. Persons with disabilities often face more challenges in the labour force than, obviously,

persons without disabilities. Inequities for persons with disabilities that currently exist in the workplace must be properly addressed in this legislation. Unfortunately, Bill C-81 does not do that.

Half of working age adults with disabilities are employed, and two-thirds with mild disabilities are employed. We can definitely do better.

• (1750)

Unfortunately, as I said, this legislation is a poor attempt to keep an election promise. Throughout the debates, the Liberals have touted this legislation as a historic bill, but they are simply using flowery language to cover up legislation that does not have the teeth Canadians are expecting. This document is really nothing more than another funding announcement that the Liberals will have \$290 million and will be doing yet another study on Canadians with disabilities.

All this bill would do is create another level of bureaucracy, but it has no details on what the cost would be to the Canadian taxpayer, what the impact would be on the private sector or what this program would entail. The cost-benefit analysis is not there. There is no specific data on what this bill would intend to do.

My colleague from the Liberal side said earlier that this bill would provide a framework. Canadians with disabilities are not looking for a framework. They are looking for results. They are looking for a clear path that is going to remove the barriers keeping them from accessing the workplace. This bill would not do that.

Also, it will frustrate a lot of Canadians that this bill would take more than six years to implement. My first question would be, "to implement what?" That information is not in there. It was a promise made in the 2015 campaign that there would be a national plan to address disabilities. It did not say that it would be nine years, and it certainly did not say that it would be six years. The Liberals have had more than three years to try to come up with a plan, and they have failed to do that. That is extremely disappointing. As I said, if there were a tangible piece of legislation, all of us in this House would be willing to support it. It is something we could all work on together.

We will support this getting to the next stage, but I am hoping that there is an opportunity to improve this bill, because it is certainly lacking. This is a hollow document that would not address any of the promises made by the Prime Minister in 2015. Canadians have had enough of Liberal broken promises. Canadians, certainly Canadians with disabilities, want a government that will deliver.

Government Orders

There are vital details missing from this piece of legislation. How would private sector businesses be impacted by this legislation? I am talking about community airports, postal workers and those types of private sector businesses under federal jurisdiction. How would Parliament or constituency offices be impacted by this legislation? How much would this legislation cost to finally implement? What would be the cost of the bureaucracy that would be constructed as part of this bill? Who would have the authority to make the decisions? That is also not in this bill. How would compliance be measured? The bill says that there would be 5,000 new public sector workers hired. How would they be employed? Where would they be employed? Would they be given tangible and meaningful work, or would they be simply token hires?

As I said at the beginning of my speech, this bill had incredible potential, but the bill needs to establish clear and definitive lines of accountability and recommendations for the private sector and certainly for the public sector. This is not what the four million Canadians with disabilities asked for. They did not ask for more consultation or more studies. Those have been done before.

The Liberals had more than three years to update those studies and add to that information if they truly wanted to make this a priority. What is clear with Bill C-81 is that it was not a priority. This is something that has been rushed and thrown on the table to try to fit in by the end of this mandate.

As a society, the barrier we need to overcome is inclusion. We must remove the barriers, whatever they may be, to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity to earn a living and be successful. We cannot judge people's abilities based on their disabilities. It is not about finding someone with a disability to suit our structure or our business model. It is about changing the workplace to suit the person with that disability. A disability is not a disability until that person is put in an environment or a context in which it disables them. For example, someone in a wheelchair can engage in debates and conversations, read and write, but it is not until that person is put in a situation without an accessible wheelchair ramp that it becomes a disability. The context of the situation has disabled them. It is this barrier that needs to be broken down.

• (1755)

Preventing and removing barriers means people with disabilities can participate in the workplace through inclusion and accommodation. People living with a disability can gain persistence and meet the challenges of any workplace, but someone has to give them that chance.

Bill C-81 needs to be more than a feel-good Liberal bill. We need concrete action to break down barriers and open up inclusivity to those living with disabilities. All of us in the House have an important role to play in achieving that goal. It is a chance to empower and mobilize. We are called upon to break down barriers and open doors for Canadians with disabilities. When we are an inclusive society, we all benefit.

I took a look at a couple of the organizations in my riding of Foothills, groups like Foothills SNAPS and the Foothills AIMS Society. They have done the heavy lifting. They are going to businesses across my riding to find work placement opportunities for Canadian adults and children with disabilities. They are breaking

down those barriers on their own, working with the small business owners in southern Alberta.

I know they would embrace some help. If there were an opportunity to partner with the federal government to break down those barriers, providing additional opportunities to their clients, it would be welcomed. However, I know, when discussing Bill C-81 with them over the weekend, they were extremely disappointed by the lack of clarity and structure in the legislation.

I would like to finish off with a bit of a story about someone who I think many of us in the House know: Dr. Temple Grandin. She is an inspirational individual.

Dr. Grandin is a world renowned scientist, an American professor and one of the first individuals on the autism spectrum to share a personal experience. She did not speak until she was three and a half years old. When she was 15 years old, she visited her aunt's ranch, something that inspired her future career. She is world renowned in teaching techniques of animal handling in the agriculture sector and her methods are used on ranches and meat processing facilities across the world, including those in my riding of Foothills.

Dr. Grandin developed a centre track double rail conveyor restrainer system for holding cattle during stunning in beef plants. In addition, she developed an objective numerical scoring system for assessing animal welfare at slaughter plants. The use of her system has resulted in significant improvements in animal handling, which are now the industry standard.

She has lectured around the world about her experiences and the anxiety of feeling threatened by everything in her surroundings. She uses that fear and anxiety to motivate herself in her work with humane livestock practices. She has designed and adapted these corrals, which have reduced stress, panic and injury in animals. They have certainly been a game-changer in the agriculture sector. What some may have seen as a disability was certainly a workplace ability.

Recently in Vancouver, she spoke at the Pacific National Exhibition about developing individuals with different minds. She said, "There are different kinds of minds. Some people are visual thinkers. Another kid is going to be a pattern thinker and another one a word thinker. We have to start figuring out what a person can do. And this is true for all things involving disability."

Under the previous Conservative government, we introduced the registered disabilities savings plan, which quickly gave Canadians with disabilities increased financial security. We introduced a new home accessibility tax credit and developed a working group tasked with developing a national autism strategy.

Government Orders

The best direction forward is toward workplace ability. Canadians with disabilities want tangible action and tangible and achievable goals. I will support getting the bill to committee in the hopes of improving it. However, this is a disappointing effort and is clearly another piece of rushed legislation trying to meet an election promise. This does not address the barriers Canadians with disabilities are facing when they are trying to enter the workforce, and that is where Bill C-81 falls disappointingly short.

● (1800)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a gap that the member is describing that I am thinking would be filled by looking at what this legislation is. It is an act to deal with accessibility within federal jurisdiction and it looks at four key areas: under the CRTC, looking at complaints around accessibility barriers relating to broadcasting and telecommunications falling under its jurisdiction; under the Canadian Transportation Agency, looking at federal transportation agencies, ensuring they are accessible; looking at the federal public servants and parliamentary employees being dealt with under the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board; and finally, looking at any complaints being handled by a new accessibility commissioner.

This is not to replace provincial jurisdiction. It is not to replace private business jurisdiction. It is to enhance and give an overall scope to ensure that all of Canada, whether provincial or federal jurisdiction, falls within the guidelines of accessibility legislation and that it can be enforced.

Is the gap the fact that the previous government did not talk with provinces and territories?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my speech, that is quite the opposite. There was an agreement between the previous Conservative government and the provinces where there was a sharing of funds to develop an accessibility plan with the provinces to address barriers and obstacles for people with disabilities to enter the workforce. That was already there. We had that discussion and an agreement with the provinces.

I appreciate my colleague's aspirational goals, which are certainly a part of Bill C-81. However, aspirational goals are not legislation. Legislation should outline rules and regulations and pass forward to reach those aspirational goals. The problem with Bill C-81 is that it does not include any of those things that we should want within legislation.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague claimed that we took far too long to introduce the legislation and therefore it was not a priority. Then he said that we rushed it and therefore it was not a priority. He cannot have it both ways and he is wrong on both counts. This is very much a priority for this government and part of our plan to support middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join it.

That is why there was such extensive consultation with groups and stakeholders across the country, including the leadership of the Canadian Association for Community Living, executive vice-president Krista Carr, her right hand Kurt Goddard and board member Joy Bacon, who live in Fredericton and who I have the honour of working with closely on a day-to-day basis.

The legislation presents a great opportunity for many in Canada. One thing it does in addition is that it has the potential to enhance economic growth for the country. We know that if we give persons living disabilities an opportunity to work at an equal rate in the workforce, we can grow our economy by anywhere up to \$38.5 billion.

I know the Conservatives have voted against other legislation coming from the government that supports economic growth, but will they stand with us on this important economic growth measure that would also provide many Canadians with an opportunity to claim their rights?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I think I was clear in my speech that I would be supporting this when it came to a vote. My speech outlined some of the concerns I and many of my colleagues in the opposition had raised with the legislation.

The member talked about the economic growth opportunities, but that is what is missing in the legislation. There is no cost-benefit analysis on the impact on private sector of businesses that are federally regulated. What is going to be the impact on them?

I think all of us in the House want to ensure there are opportunities for all Canadians to enter the workforce, but there also has to be some definitive analysis on what the costs of this program will be. If the Liberals could have some of those details within the bill, it would make us more comfortable understanding what we would be approving and supporting.

● (1805)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to sit through most of the debate today. We have heard from the Liberal side that this is somehow historic legislation. I want to echo the comments of the member for Red Deer—Mountain View. He said historic in the sense that it had sat on somebody's desk for three years. Now as we get close to an election, all of a sudden it is being introduced.

In the context of historic and monumental, we heard the member speak about the legislation being vague, with no timelines, no mandated outcomes and no measurables. Would the member classify the legislation as historic or historically vague?

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has given me some good direction on what my answer will be.

I would go a long way from describing the legislation as historic. What was historic was the registered disability savings plan that the previous Conservative government came up with, which the Liberal minister of procurement called a game changer. I do not think anybody would call Bill C-81 a game changer.

The potential absolutely is there, but it lacks any sort of clarity, no tangible regulations and no tangible results. It is merely another funding announcement of \$290 million for yet another study and additional consultation.

Government Orders

In a mandate letter, three different times it was laid out by the Prime Minister to be a priority. However, more than two-thirds of the way through the Liberals' mandate, we finally get legislation that lacks any depth or lends any clarity.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague and I am concerned to hear him say that this bill lacks teeth and does not have any measures to reduce barriers faced by people with disabilities.

In reading the bill, I clearly see concrete measures to transform our organizations. There is, for example, the creation of accessibility standards for our organizations by the Canadian accessibility standards development organization.

Why would creating these new standards not help eliminate the barriers he mentioned in his presentation?

[*English*]

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, what are the standards? We can have all these aspirational points as part of the bill, saying that we want to do this and achieve that, but there are no clear standards in there that say this is what is going to happen step by step, and with timelines. If we speak to those stakeholders and, with all honesty, say that we will have these standards, we do not know what they are, but they will be sometime in the next six years or so, is that really what those stakeholders have asked for? Is that really what they are supporting? I would question whether that was the bill of goods they were sold.

Again, I think all of us support the essence of Bill C-81. This is the direction we want to go. We want to ensure we are removing barriers for Canadians with disabilities, but we want a clear path and clear rules on how we get there.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for Foothills for highlighting some of the concerns of Bill C-81 and the fact that the Conservative Party supports it.

One of the issues the member mentioned was why it was such a low priority of the government. I was looking at old speeches and I asked the same question. We were debating Bill C-24 in December 2017, but the biggest thing out of that bill was to change the name of the minister of public works to the minister of public services and procurement. I remember asking why we were taking up all this time when there were so many other more important items that we were not addressing.

I would like to put that forward to my colleague. Why does the government always seem to be looking at things with zero consequence rather than things of much more importance, whether it is Bill C-71, the bill we were discussing Friday regarding justice and military, or this bill? Why does the government have such poorly laid out priorities for Canadians?

• (1810)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, it is frustrating when we have these pieces of legislation where no due diligence is done as part of them. There is no cost-benefit analysis, no economic analysis or what the true impacts of the legislation could be. It is kind of like saying we are going to put this fancy picture in the store window, but

there is going to be nothing behind it. We are seeing this with the legislation before us. It is a great sales pitch, great advertisement, but there is nothing tangible behind it.

If addressing Canadians with disabilities were truly a priority, why would the Liberals not have supported the proposed opportunities act that my colleague for Carleton raised earlier this year? Why would they not have supported the proposed fairness in disabilities act that my colleague for Calgary Shepard brought up earlier year? These were real solutions to real problems and they would have had a definitive impact on Canadians with disabilities.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to speak on this piece of legislation, Bill C-81, an act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

Since this Parliament began just under three years ago, there have been a number of private members' bills put forward to this House with the aim of improving the lives of Canadians living with disabilities. Unfortunately, not all of these have passed. Most of these bills have contained meaningful, tangible outcomes and results for disabled Canadians, which is something that all parties in this House should have been able to support. However, as we look at Bill C-81, it is unclear how it will actually benefit those it sets out to help.

According to this piece of legislation, the intent of this bill is to benefit all Canadians, especially Canadians with disabilities, through the progressive realization of a barrier-free Canada. This is a sentiment that I believe we can all get behind. Accessibility is an important issue that can drastically affect the quality of people's lives, including their day-to-day routines. Anything that can be done at a government level to address this should absolutely be done.

As someone who has had to live 44 years of his life with a hearing disability, I was expecting a lot more from this legislation. It becomes problematic when legislation that is introduced by the government has no obvious effective results. In my view, this has been the case for Bill C-81. While it seems that the intention behind this bill is good, its actual components and the effects it would have are unclear. Aside from making it easier to access federal services, I fail to see how this legislation would help Canadians living with disabilities in the way that this government champions it as being historic.

Furthermore, there is the issue of the length of time it has taken to get this bill introduced to the House of Commons. The Liberals have been in power for three years now and are almost at the end of their mandate. It is only recently that they have begun to fulfill the promises they made to Canadians living with a disability when they were elected in 2015. All three ministers who have held this portfolio were instructed, in their mandate letters from the Prime Minister, to get this legislation moving. However, for some reason, the bill was only introduced in June of this year, right as the House recessed and all members returned to work in their constituencies.

I would like to acknowledge the present minister responsible for accessibility, as I truly believe that she means well with this legislation. She initiated this legislation, and she is here at its completion.

Government Orders

There has been absolutely no sense of urgency on this. To me it feels as though the Liberals were just kicking the can down the road until they finally had to do something or risk being criticized for their inaction. Canadians, disabled or not, deserve better than that.

In contrast, during the 2008 election, the Conservative Party committed to introducing the registered disability savings plan, RDSP. That election took place in October. By December of the same year the RDSP was introduced and was available for Canadians to take advantage of. All of that took place in under three months, yet by the time Bill C-81 passes, it will have taken almost three years.

Let us also consider that Canadians may need to wait another six years before any new regulations take effect, as there are no regulations contained within this legislation. There are so many things the government can do to help Canadians living with a disability, yet it chooses to introduce this legislation that has zero immediate effects and will not change a thing once it becomes law.

The previous Conservative government understood and recognized the contributions that persons with disabilities can and do make to our society and our economy. As I mentioned, the RDSP was implemented quickly and gave Canadians with disabilities greater financial security. Since 2008, 1,005 of these accounts have been set up, and over \$1 billion has been added to their savings.

The previous Conservative government also introduced the new home accessibility tax credit to facilitate healthy, happy homes for persons with disabilities, and invested hundreds of millions of dollars toward improving employment and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This is the type of action that the Canadian public is expecting. We know that this can be done in a timely and efficient manner if the will is there. The previous government proved it was possible. However, the Liberals seem to bungle this portfolio time and time again.

• (1815)

One of the main components of this bill is that it says it will create accessibility standards for regulated parties to achieve and maintain. This would happen through the creation of the Canadian accessibility standards development organization, or CASDO. The bill would also create the position of a chief accessibility officer who would oversee the implementation of the legislation, as well as the creation of an accessibility commissioner, whose role would be to ensure compliance.

The provision of the bill that creates CASDO leaves many questions unanswered and ultimately creates yet another level of study and consultation without any actual impact on those it is meant to help. We know the government loves to study and consult on an issue rather than taking meaningful, timely action on it. What it is essentially doing with Bill C-81 is creating yet another committee, CASDO, that would set standards. If that statement leaves members with some questions, they are not alone.

What are these new standards going to look like, how would they be implemented, what is the timeline for this creation, what is the timeline for the consultation, what is the timeline for the implementation, what is the timeline for these standards, who is considered to be qualified to establish these standards, and so on and

so forth. There are so many unanswered questions. I would appreciate if the minister could provide the framework and mandate for this new accessibility standards organization, as well as the cost and other necessary facts and figures, as soon as possible.

Another component of Bill C-81 is a \$290-million fund over six years, amounting to \$48 million per year to upgrade federal workplaces and websites. Is this all administrative costs? Setting up an office is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars. If 5,000 new employees are paid \$40,000 a year, that amounts to \$200 million. Establishing a new CEO and commissioner is going to cost well over \$200,000. There is the money spent right there in one year.

This is a wonderful idea in theory, but I am skeptical as to how many Canadians living with disabilities would actually benefit from this. We do not know how this envelope of money would be allocated, which is problematic in itself, but we can assume that it would be used, at least in part, for more consultation. I fail to see how constant and never-ending consultation helps people, not to mention the fact that taxpayer dollars are being spent on something with no tangible results and no actual timeline for when it would be implemented.

The minister says that the government would be hiring more public servants, 5,000 people with disabilities to be specific. Again this leaves many questions. Are these public servants all new hires, are they filling in places left open by attrition, what is the cost of hiring these 5,000 new public servants, would their work be wider in scope, would it be in different departments? These questions need to be answered, but it seems the Liberals have a hard time saying one single thing that this bill would actually do.

Canadians living with disabilities deserve meaningful and effective action from their government to help them improve their quality of life where possible. There are good things about this bill. It would hopefully make it easier for some Canadians with disabilities to deal with the federal government. However it is unclear as to how this helps with the rest of their lives.

Something I also support in this legislation, the clearest and most repeated point, is that it spells out the complaints process. This, however, is just a tiny aspect of a much greater piece of legislation that should provide common-sense regulations and standards, which I believe is what disabled Canadians were hoping for.

I cannot comprehend why the government would put out this legislation unless it was simply to say it was doing something. It had two and a half years to consult and this is what it came up with. I believe it does a disservice to those involved. To put it casually, there is no meat in this meal.

Before I can support this bill, I and all Canadians need to know these facts. In my view, this bill is putting the cart before the horse. I think that every person sitting in the House today would say that they support initiatives that benefit Canadians living with disabilities, but this piece of legislation fails to have any meaningful impact and sets out to spend a lot of money to do nothing.

Government Orders

●(1820)

I have a friend, a constituent, a young man who was born with spina bifida, a meningocele. All his life as a youth, he had surgery after surgery and he is wheelchair-bound, yet he is an amazing young man. He has managed to get a job, he works hard, he has moved, he is able to drive. In fact, he was involved in the Queen City Marathon just three or four weeks ago in Regina. This young man is going to sit there and ask those very same questions: What is this doing for him, and how is it going to help him?

In conclusion, I would like to say that politicians of all stripes recognize the challenges that face individuals with disabilities as well as their families. What these people are asking for is action from the current Liberal government rather than empty words, more consultations and endless platitudes.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague said that this piece of legislation would have no impact and no tangible results. I wonder how an able-bodied individual can speak for those who require legislation and leadership to have equity in this country. This piece of legislation would provide that. If the member looks at the charter statement related to this piece of legislation and if he reads it through comprehensively, he would understand that.

There is the length of time, and the member said this had no sense of urgency. I would say that over the course of these last couple of years, I have had the opportunity to talk to many of my constituents at town halls and listen to what they said. They said that with this piece of legislation we need to take the appropriate time to ensure we get it right. We have seen it fail in other jurisdictions. They wanted to make sure that they were not just cared for, but able to work. They wanted to make sure that their complaints were adequately taken care of and that there were compliance measures to ensure that compliance to the legislation was in effect.

In my opinion, the Conservatives need to pick better battles and this is not one that they need to battle on. I would hope that they would support this piece of legislation and do right by the member's constituent in his riding.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, I am assuming the member was not referring to me as being that individual who was speaking on behalf of disabled people. However, as I mentioned, I do have a disability. The unfortunate part is a lot of Canadians do not understand that people out there have visible and invisible disabilities. An example of visible disabilities is the gentleman I just talked about because we can see it. It is visible and we see those people every day. We respond to them and we see the challenges that they have in their lives when they try to navigate around a city, when they try to go over a curb that does not have access to getting onto the road, and when they try to go into buildings when there is not access for them. There are regulations that people expect. However, there are also people who have invisible disabilities. I have an invisible disability. Those invisibly disabled people deserve to have the same access and abilities as the rest whom we talk about. That is the main point we need to look at: How do we address all of them?

The committee that is being structured does set up an opportunity and they say that there will be disabled people on it. My question is for the committee to explain that a bit more. This is not saying we do

not support the legislation. We are looking forward to seeing it go to committee. We are looking forward to hearing a lot of these questions answered, and I appreciate this as we move forward to committee.

●(1825)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in his intervention my colleague told a story about a friend of his who has been successful in navigating sometimes challenging physical and intangible environments that persons living with different disabilities face. This piece of legislation is there to provide more opportunities for people like the friend of my colleague opposite in order for them to become fully included and contributing members of society, in order for them to be able to take part in an equal way in the economy and in order for them to claim their equal rights and share the same equal human dignity that all other persons in Canada can.

Once again, I will reiterate, if we can find ways to help include more people working in our economy, people who are living with different ability challenges, we can add up to \$38.5 billion to our GDP. I hope the Conservatives, in addition to supporting this bill on its human rights merits, will support this bill because it is tremendously important for Canada's economy and for middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join the middle class.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the member for Fredericton, for his question and all the good work that he has had to do in Fredericton over the past year. I know he has been hard at that.

I agree with a lot of what he said about working together. That is part of what this legislation should be doing. I had a conversation with the minister a couple of days ago on this issue. One of the things we discussed was maybe taking two Liberals, two Conservatives, two NDP, and putting them in a room to sit around and hash out all of the little details so that we could get all of the fine lines. It is important to do that, and I expect we will see a lot of that at committee. I hope to see that help us move forward, and to help those with disabilities so we can advance our country to the benefit he suggested.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the conversation earlier in the speech was about boutique tax credits and the equivalency between writing a cheque for someone and saying, "Here's a cheque, and I hope things work out for you", versus including people with disabilities in developing proper legislation and then making sure that the legislation is enacted. Would the hon. member not agree that having people involved in "nothing about me without me" is a better approach than writing a cheque?

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, the legislation does talk about getting involved and how we structure things. The thing the legislation does not talk about is what those standards and regulations would be. That is what Canadians asked for. When the average Canadian with a disability heard about this legislation, they asked, "What's in it for me?" This legislation basically identifies how we set up a CEO, a commissioner, a committee to study this, but it does not say what that would do to help improve their lives.

● (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain will be pleased with the fact that he has three minutes left for questions and comments when the House next gets back to debate on the question that is before the House.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed from September 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-71, an act to amend certain acts and regulations in relation to firearms be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, September 20, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-71.

Call in the members.

● (1850)

[English]

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

(Division No. 886)

YEAS

Members

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Aldag | Alghabra |
| Amos | Anandasangaree |
| Ayoub | Bains |
| Baylis | Beaulieu |
| Beech | Bennett |
| Benson | Bittle |
| Blaikie | Blair |
| Blaney (North Island—Powell River) | Boissonnault |
| Bossio | Boutin-Sweet |
| Bratina | Breton |
| Brisson | Brosseau |
| Caesar-Chavannes | Cannings |
| Caron | Casey (Cumberland—Colchester) |
| Casey (Charlottetown) | Chagger |
| Champagne | Cullen |
| Cuzner | Dabrusin |
| Damoff | Davies |
| DeCoursey | Dhaliwal |
| Dhillon | Donnelly |
| Drouin | Dubé |
| Dubourg | Duclos |
| Duguid | Duncan (Etobicoke North) |
| Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona) | Dusseault |
| Duvall | Dzerowicz |
| Easter | El-Khoury |
| Ellis | Erskine-Smith |
| Eyking | Eyolfson |
| Fergus | Fillmore |
| Finnigan | Fisher |
| Fortier | Fragiskatos |
| Fraser (West Nova) | Fraser (Central Nova) |
| Fuhr | Garneau |
| Garrison | Gerretsen |
| Goldsmith-Jones | Goodale |
| Gould | Graham |
| Grewal | Hajdu |
| Hardcastle | Hébert |
| Hehr | Hogg |
| Holland | Housefather |
| Hughes | Hutchings |
| Johns | Jolibois |
| Jordan | Jowhari |
| Julian | Khalid |

Khera
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Laverdière
Lefebvre
Levitt
Lockhart
Ludwig
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen
May (Saaneich—Gulf Islands)
McDonald
McKay
Mendicino
Monsef
Morneau
Murray
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peterson
Philpott
Plamondon
Quach
Ramsey
Ratansi
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
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Lightbound
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MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
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Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mihychuk
Moore
Morrissey
Nantel
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Picard
Poissant
Qualtrough
Rankin
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Sajjan
Sansoucy
Schiefke
Serré
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Stetski
Tan
Thériault
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wilson-Raybould
Young

NAYS

Members

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Aboultarif | Albas |
| Albrecht | Alleslev |
| Allison | Anderson |
| Arnold | Barlow |
| Benzen | Bergen |
| Berthold | Bezan |
| Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis) | Brassard |
| Calkins | Chong |
| Clement | Cooper |
| Deltell | Diotte |
| Doherty | Dreeschen |
| Eglinski | Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster) |
| Falk (Provencher) | Finley |
| Gallant | Généreux |
| Genius | Gladu |
| Godin | Gourde |
| Harder | Hoback |
| Kelly | Kent |
| Kitchen | Kusie |
| Leitch | Lloyd |
| Lobb | Lukiwski |
| MacKenzie | Maguire |
| Martel | McCauley (Edmonton West) |
| McColeman | McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) |
| Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) | Motz |
| Nater | Nicholson |
| O'Toole | Poillievre |
| Rayes | Reid |
| Rempel | Richards |

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Viersen
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Yurdiga

PAIRED

Members

Fortin

Freeland— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES

The House resumed from May 30 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking in today's debate in my new role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources.

I am honoured by the trust that the Prime Minister has put in me. I am well aware that I have been entrusted with a critical portfolio. The member for Northumberland—Peterborough South set the bar very high.

I have learned some valuable lessons in my years representing the people of Sudbury. Thanks to them, I have a better understanding of the importance of natural resource development, the importance of doing things right, and the importance of making sure that everyone wins, including proponents, local communities and indigenous peoples, in the spirit of creating jobs while protecting the environment. The House committee came to the same conclusion two years ago in its report entitled “The Future of Canada's Oil and Gas Sector: Innovation, Sustainable Solutions and Economic Opportunities”.

I have always suspected that some people were a bit slow to grasp the importance of harmonizing environmental protection and economic prosperity. All the same, it is astonishing that we are only now debating a report that was released by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources a full two years ago.

I want to take a moment to refresh the memories of those who may have forgotten what that report said and remind them of what our government has achieved.

The committee explored the future of Canada's oil and gas sectors by focusing on innovation, sustainable solutions and economic opportunities. After holding seven days of meetings and hearing from 33 witnesses, the committee produced its report, which

contained a number of recommendations. Among other things, the report recommended that our government continue to support the viability and competitiveness of Canada's oil and gas sectors, foster investment and trade opportunities, promote a new era of indigenous engagement and public trust, establish a carbon pricing system, invest in technological innovation and establish the right policy framework.

Our government approved that report and we are responding to each of its recommendations.

• (1900)

[*English*]

Through Natural Resources Canada, we are investing in research and the demonstration of innovative technologies, including those aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Two specific initiatives are worth noting: first, the \$50-million oil and gas clean tech program, which is helping to reduce the sector's greenhouse gas emissions; and second, the \$25-million clean energy innovation program, which seeks to reduce emissions in a number of areas, including methane and volatile organic compounds in the oil and gas industry. Future work will focus on enhancing the environmental and economic performance by significantly reducing methane emissions.

Through mission innovation, our government has committed to doubling our investment in energy technology research and development. More broadly, NRCan is working with Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance and other partners to maximize the innovative potential for the oil and gas sector.

As I mentioned, the committee report also calls on the government to rebuild public trust in resource development. Our government has done just that, including by restoring many lost environmental protections and introducing modern safeguards to the Fisheries Act and the Navigation Protection Act.

We announced a \$1.5-billion oceans protection plan, the largest investment in Canada's coasts and oceans in our history.

We have introduced Bill C-69, the most comprehensive overhaul of the environmental review process in a generation.

The Prime Minister has said many times that no relationship is more important to our government than the one with indigenous peoples. In particular, we recognize that consultation with indigenous communities affected by resource projects is critical to renewing a nation-to-nation relationship. That is why, with respect to the Trans Mountain expansion project, we extended the timeline to allow for deeper, more meaningful engagement.

When concerns were expressed, we responded by committing nearly \$65 million to establish an indigenous advisory and monitoring committee that would oversee environmental aspects through the entire life of that project. This was unprecedented. As Chief Ernie Crey of the Cheam First Nation said, “Indigenous people won't be on the outside looking in. We'll be at the table and on site to protect our lands and water.”

Routine Proceedings

That said, we know that when it comes to indigenous engagement, a higher bar must still be met. Our government will be announcing how we intend to meet that bar in the coming days.

Finally, the committee recommended that we establish the right policy framework to ensure a competitive oil and gas industry. We agree, which is why we are continuing to work towards a Canadian energy strategy together with our indigenous, provincial and territorial colleagues. It is why, through the Vancouver declaration, Canada's first ministers committed to working on carbon sinks and other measures under the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change.

That is why we have done what 42 other countries and 25 subnational jurisdictions have done: put a price on pollution. It is something the United Nations has called a necessary and effective measure to tackle the climate change challenge.

Taken together, our actions constitute an unprecedented level of support for the oil and gas industry, all while demonstrating that economic development and environmental prosperity can indeed go hand in hand.

The opposition issued a dissenting report and I will address it directly.

The report calls, among other things, for clear timelines for assessments. I suggest that members opposite read Bill C-69, which provides predictable timelines and clear expectations. This would allow proponents to better plan and engage earlier, leading to stronger proposals and greater certainty. The opposition's report also recommends that we encourage our national regulators to "make evidence-based decisions independent of government politicization".

[*Translation*]

This concern for evidence-based decision-making is a welcome change of pace in Canada.

I can guarantee my opposition colleagues that we truly value science, facts and evidence. I am also pleased to mention that the dissenting report calls on the government "to publicly and unequivocally support strategic energy infrastructure approved by the national regulators". Of course, that is exactly what we did by approving the Line 3 replacement project.

Finally, the report calls on the government to promote Canada's regulatory framework by instilling "public confidence in our national regulators". We agree, which is why we built on the work of the National Energy Board to create a modern, world-class regulatory body for the 21st century, an organization that has the independence and accountability needed to oversee a solid, safe and viable energy sector, an organization that includes new public engagement and indigenous reconciliation processes, all while ensuring that good projects get the green light.

I will conclude by saying that I am always happy to talk about everything our government is doing for the oil and gas industry. We know that it is a vital contributor to our economy and an important part of our future. The fact is that the recommendations in this report are already being implemented. Our government will continue to look forward, towards a very bright future for our oil and gas

industry and towards the prosperity it will help ensure for all Canadians.

● (1905)

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary really dove in off the deep end with this new file and he is working hard, which is good to see.

I want to go back to when this report was tabled a couple of years ago just before the ministerial panel went out to talk about Trans Mountain in British Columbia and Alberta and before this added consultation was carried out. I point out recommendation 3 of the report, which says:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work to encourage the early engagement of indigenous peoples in resource development decisions, in full compliance with existing treaty and indigenous rights to land and resources. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that the government ensure that consultation processes consider the multidimensional impacts of resource development projects on indigenous peoples, including issues concerning education, health, economic development, infrastructure and the environment.

After this report was written in the spring of 2016, and then tabled as soon as we came back in September, the government sent out bureaucrats to consult with indigenous people, and they did none of this. They simply took down notes of the concerns of indigenous communities and claimed that they had no power to change the National Energy Board's recommendations regarding the conditions on the pipeline.

I wonder if the member could comment on that and, of course, since this was found by the Federal Court of Appeal to be completely inadequate consultations, why the government did not listen to this, why it did not do adequate consultation and whether it will in the future.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to consulting with our first nations across the country with respect to important projects, it is clear that the Federal Court of Appeal decision has indicated that, on the one hand, we have done more consulting with first nations than ever before, but at the same time more can be done with respect to making sure that when accommodations can be made, they should be made.

I can tell my colleague that as we review the Federal Court of Appeal decision, we know that we cannot use the same process that has been used in the past by the Conservative government, and that we need to do better. That is what the Federal Court of Appeal has told us. That is why we are now in discussions with the first nations communities that would be affected by this pipeline as to how we can really move forward on a nation-to-nation basis. Rather than tell them that these are the rules of engagement, we want to hear from them on how we can have that dialogue together on a nation-to-nation basis, not just a direct basis. That is new. That has never really happened before in Canada. This is what we are embarking upon. That is basically what the Federal Court of Appeal has told us.

We respect the court's decisions, as opposed to other parties in this House. We will make sure that we get it right. We will take the time to get it right to make sure that we are going in the right direction.

Routine Proceedings

● (1910)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people in my riding and the people who live in Alberta do not have time for this guy to say that he has got it right. The Liberals got it wrong, so wrong, and there is evidence everywhere we look in the energy sector in Alberta. There are more socio-economic crises in Alberta than I have ever seen. I have never seen so many problems, whether it is in downtown Red Deer, Calgary or Edmonton. There is rural crime. Our entire economy is in shambles. Of Alberta's workforce, 11% work directly in the oil and gas sector. Direct foreign investment in this country since 2015 has plummeted to half of what it was prior to the last election. Virtually all of it is in the oil and gas or energy sectors. These are critical numbers that need to be paid attention to.

While we in this House would all agree that we want the buy-in and support of first nations, nobody in this House would argue that we want to rape, pillage and plunder our environment. Coming from a province that has built tens if not hundreds of thousands of kilometres of pipelines, I know that this is the smartest and most sensible way to diversify our market access for a product that generates more wealth than any other sector of our Canadian economy.

This report unfortunately is simply a whitewash of the philosophy of the current government and does not accurately reflect it. Why on earth would the Liberals kill the goose that is laying the golden egg like they are doing right now?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, we are making sure that we proceed in the right way, as the Federal Court of Appeal has instructed us to do.

What the Conservatives have proposed today is to ignore the Federal Court of Appeal decision, to basically legislate around it, ignore the consultations with first nations, ignore the environmental concerns that were raised by the Federal Court of Appeal, and do what they had done in the past, which was to dictate with a heavy hand how we can bring our resources to new markets. The Conservatives did not build one pipeline to new markets in 10 years. They never got it right. They ignored the environment. They ignored the first nations.

We are going to follow the decision of the Federal Court of Appeal. We respect the courts. We will make sure we engage meaningfully with first nations and that we are protecting the environment at the same time.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the discussions that were just presented, just reading through the footnotes we recognize that it was in early 2016 that these discussions took place. Recognizing that this report is two years old, there is a lot that has changed in the last two years. We thought we would be working with the U.S. and that carbon taxes would be in place. Keystone had not been approved. These are the kinds of things that are taking place. It is as though the member believes that this is a snapshot of today. What we are talking about is what set the stage for all of the discussions and the concerns, and especially the disastrous Bill C-69 that is being presented. I wonder if the member can bring us back to the mindset there was two years ago, and why some of these thoughts need to be updated.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, the member talked about what has changed in the past years. Actually, in Canada there are over 500,000 new full-time jobs that have been created, however, I recognize that in Alberta the sector is not as active as it was in the past. At the same time, the price of oil went from \$100 a barrel to \$30 a barrel. I know the Conservatives would like us to be the ones that changed this because we are Liberals, but that is not how the economy works. That is not how the markets work.

We need to have new markets. We need to diversify where our resources are being sold. Under the Conservatives, we had one client and that was the United States and 99% of the oil produced in this country was being sent to the United States and then sold back to us. At the end of the day, we were losing billions of dollars. Both parties agree that we need to do something. The opposition members just want to ram it through. We want to get it right because on future projects we want to make sure that there is a reliable system, that we can be respectful of our indigenous communities and at the same time respect the environment and make sure that we get it right.

● (1915)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. I would first like to congratulate him on his appointment.

I would like my colleague to correct the record with respect to the Trans Mountain pipeline. At this time, 99% of our resources are exported to the United States. That is a little-known fact. We definitely need to open up new markets. I wonder if my colleague could explain this to the people in my riding.

It is also important to emphasize that the environment and the economy go together. I would like him to talk about how we are delivering on the promises made to first nations. Lastly, I wonder if he could talk about the jobs that will be created here in Canada thanks to the pipeline project.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, and would also like to congratulate her on her new appointment.

Clearly, our natural resources are an extremely important economic engine for Canada. Canadians must know that, with respect to our energy resources, 99% of oil is sold directly to the United States. They dictate the price.

At the same time, it is a very important economic issue that impacts middle-class jobs. Moreover, it is a sector that employs many of this region's indigenous people. It is an economic issue for first nations and for the general population. There will be major economic benefits.

The Conservatives' approach consists of issuing gag orders and forcing the issue. The New Democrats' approach is to do nothing and to leave natural resources in the ground starting with oil and gas, and then lumber and minerals. We do not know what their plan is because they do not have one.

Routine Proceedings

We want to ensure that we strike a balance between the economy and environmental protection. We want Canada to regain its position and to become one of the world's leading energy producers once again.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise this evening to speak to the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, a report on the future of and innovation in Canada's oil and gas sector. I will not comment on the arcane procedures and strategies in this place that see us debating a committee report a full two years after it was tabled in the House, but I am pleased to be able to take it off the shelf, dust it off and see what is in there, especially in light of more recent events.

The New Democrats submitted a supplementary opinion on the report when it was tabled, so I will be referencing that when I discuss some of our concerns. Our first concern was with the scope of the study and the subsequent report. We had hoped that there would have been a good discussion on the opportunities in other parts of the energy sector, a discussion about innovation, job opportunities, investments and particularly the emerging renewable energy industry. Renewable energy offers significant opportunities for the creation of good jobs in every community across Canada and much of what is happening there is the very definition of “innovation”, but, unfortunately, that topic was not included in the study.

During the study, committee members heard a lot about innovation in the oil and gas industry and some of it was truly encouraging. We heard from Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance, COSIA. In the model that COSIA put forward, a group of private companies put aside the usual proprietary nature of research and information to create a true alliance in which all members have access to successful innovations that could result in oil extraction methods that are both more economical and better for the environment. That is really exciting to witness. Unfortunately, we heard that many of these innovations would only be implemented in new projects, projects that are waiting for higher oil prices before they will proceed. I truly hope that the COSIA model will be extended to other industry sectors because of the way it amplifies innovation through quick adoption throughout the sector.

I would also like to echo the sentiments of Gil McGowan, the president of the Alberta Federation of Labour, in that we have to be more than hewers of wood and drawers of water, that we need to develop value-added industries within the oil and gas and other resource sectors. He testified, “we should prioritize value-added development, because these kinds of investments not only create jobs directly in upgrading, refining, and petrochemicals but also create other jobs.” I would add that these investments create jobs that are not as subject to the volatility of global oil prices and create products that will be needed during our transition to a low-carbon economy.

We not only need to be innovative in how we extract and use resources, we need to be innovative in how we regulate the extraction of those resources. I think everyone here would agree that we now have a complete lack of public confidence in our energy regulation process. Nanos Research has published data showing that only 2% of Canadians think we are doing a good job in that regard.

Professor Monica Gattinger of the University of Ottawa testified before committee about her positive energy program, a research group dedicated to studying ways to depolarize the public debate around the oil and gas sector, particularly with regard to pipelines. The supplementary report states:

We believe it is essential that the lack of public confidence in the current environmental assessment process be addressed by permanent, meaningful changes to the National Energy Board process as soon as possible. New Democrats believe that the proposed interim measures introduced by the government are inadequate to address the results of a decade of Conservative dismantling of our environmental protection regime. We share the concern expressed by witness Professor Monica Gattinger that if the process goes ahead without the existing gaps being meaningfully addressed, the end result will further erode public confidence in the entire assessment regime.

The supplementary report goes on to say:

We are disappointed that the majority report fails to recommend a speedy review of the NEB process as this had been a clear electoral commitment of the new government. We are disappointed that the newly announced review panel process contains no timeline for actual legislative changes leaving the Conservatives inadequate process in place and creating uncertainty for all stakeholders. We recommend that the government move faster to make the necessary permanent changes to the NEB assessment process to restore public confidence and ensure that it is fair, neutral, science based and designed to meaningfully engage communities.

● (1920)

Where are we now? Shortly after this report was tabled in the House, the government granted permission for the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline to proceed, and a few weeks ago, the Federal Court of Appeal quashed those approvals. The court cited two significant failures: the government failed to consider the environmental impact of the project on coastal marine environment, and the consultations with first nations were completely inadequate. The government officials who met with first nations groups were mere note-takers who mistakenly believed that neither they nor cabinet had the authority to change the findings of the National Energy Board in the consultation process.

What did they think consultation was about? If they thought it was about noting the concerns of first nations and telling the first nations they had no power to change anything with regard to the pipeline, that is not consultation. Consultation is listening and then acting on concerns, trying to make accommodations.

Here is what our first supplementary report had to say about first nations consultation:

The Government must also act quickly to honour its obligations to a Nation to Nation relationship with Indigenous peoples including proper consultation and accommodation on all energy projects and the protection of Indigenous rights. During testimony, industry representatives were clear about the importance of fixing the consultation process sooner rather than later. The Government of Canada, as representative of the Crown, is responsible for these duties and while proponents of projects should be a part of this process, we believe these responsibilities should not be devolved to proponents to fulfill, as was too often the case under the former Conservative government. The Government must take a much larger, hands-on role in creating the environment in which meaningful consultation can take place.

Routine Proceedings

The supplementary report goes on to support Bill C-262, which would ensure that federal legislation is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This bill was brought forward by our colleague in the NDP caucus, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou. While we are happy to report that Bill C-262 has passed through the House of Commons, we were disappointed to see that its spirit was not included in Bill C-69, legislation that would implement changes to environmental assessment and energy regulation in Canada.

Here we are two years after this report was tabled. The NDP was criticized back then for its call to redo the Trans Mountain expansion process under a proper system. Critics said it would take too long, maybe another year or two. Here we are two years later back at square one. The decision of the Federal Court of Appeal is a reminder that we have to put in the effort at the start. There are no shortcuts.

I mentioned Nanos Research earlier that noted the pitifully poor state of Canadians' confidence in our energy regulation system, but it did point out there was a way forward. The polling data demonstrated that if the Canadian government could show it was consulting properly with indigenous communities by asking local communities about these decisions and developing a meaningful consultation process, Canadians would have more confidence in the procedure. There is a way forward.

I just want to read out some of the testimony from a witness representing the Indigenous Health Alliance who criticized the National Energy Board in particular for not engaging indigenous peoples early enough in its regulatory approval processes. He recommended the following measures to improve indigenous community engagement, which come right out of the main body of the report we are discussing tonight:

Early engagement of indigenous communities in the NEB process—by involving indigenous communities in “the problems, solutions and implementation strategies of any resource development project at the earliest reasonable opportunity”;

● (1925)

Acknowledging the multidimensional nature of resource development issues—by recognizing that resource development projects involve broader considerations related to education, health, economic development, the environment, etc. He stated that a consultation process that does not acknowledge and address these issues clearly will ultimately fail to address the real problems;

Including community leadership, namely elders, in the decisionmaking process—by recognizing elders as a stakeholder group that should be directly involved in setting the project agenda;

Acknowledging that indigenous peoples are reasonable and pragmatic about resource development—they are likely to support approval processes that respect their community-based needs;

Involving communication and consultation experts—ones that could accurately interpret and convey community concerns to governments and project developers; and

Recognizing indigenous peoples as a “third level of government” in Canada—which is how they are functionally recognized by the court system.

We have significant natural resources in Canada and they have always been central to our country's wealth. However, we must ensure that these shared resources are managed in the best interests of all Canadians, with a focus on protecting the environment, ensuring meaningful consultation with affected communities and indigenous peoples and maximizing economic benefits.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things mentioned, and I know this is a concern for the NDP, had to do with Kinder Morgan and the issues associated with that. The fact is that both he and I are now shareholders in this project. The \$4.5 billion that was spent on a \$2.5 billion project and the fact that the extra \$2 billion are now available for Kinder Morgan to build pipelines that are now competition to us has raised some of the concerns.

My concern as a Conservative and as someone from Alberta is how we will get our natural resources to tidewater. That is a critical part of it. Perhaps some people in the NDP do not see it exactly the same way, but nevertheless that is an opportunity for us to ensure our citizens have the things they need.

Could the member talk about the issue of the competition we have created in the U.S., with our own money?

● (1930)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, this is another one of those things that brings Conservatives and the NDP together, the sale of Trans Mountain by Kinder Morgan to the people of Canada. Who knew we wanted to be shareholders in a pipeline.

I could talk all night about this, but I will try to be brief.

First, what has this accomplished? What did we get for our \$4.5 billion? We got past the May 31 deadline. However, with the factors that Kinder Morgan was concerned about, it was ready to walk away from this project, or so we were led to believe. However, none of those were fixed by spending \$4.5 billion. We ended up with an old leaky pipeline.

With respect to the competition, now we have the government owning a pipeline and trying to get permission for the pipeline. There is a big conflict of interest there. How can the government assure the first nations groups that have concerns about this that they will get a fair hearing? The government says that it owns the pipeline, that it will get the project done and, by the way, that it will consult with first nations groups. There are real conflict of interest issues there.

From my point of view, the other issues are around subsidies to fossil fuel industries. Canada signed on, through the G7 and G20, with a promise to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies over the next few years. Now we have bought a pipeline.

I was in Argentina with the then-minister of natural resources at a G20 meeting. The whole theme of the meeting was the grand transition to a low-carbon future. The minister had to get up and, in his little three-minute spiel on where Canada was, say that we bought a pipeline and try to explain why this was not a subsidy to the oil and gas industry, especially when we paid \$4.5 billion, as the member pointed out, for a project that was worth, at best, \$2 billion.

Routine Proceedings

There is a lot of very problematic parts to this purchase of the pipeline. A lot of people who talk to me about it want to know what we could have done better with \$4.5 billion that would have made Canada ready for the future of the energy industry and a low-carbon future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague.

When we have natural resources such as oil and natural gas, we have to work very hard at being innovative when it comes to the environment. What does my colleague suggest we do to open other markets and sell our natural resources elsewhere at a better price? Currently 99% of these resources go directly to the United States because we have no other solutions.

My colleague says that pipelines are not safe. Does he believe that it would be better to use trucks or the railways? In Quebec, everyone remembers the train accident in Lac-Mégantic. We are going to double the pipeline and it will be safe. It will be a new pipeline.

I would like my colleague's thoughts on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the issue of getting a better price for our resources, we hear this all the time from the government, from the Conservatives and from industry that we need this pipeline to tidewater to get a better price. That pipeline has been at tidewater since before I was born, in 1953. Very little beyond a token test amount has ever been shipped to any other place than the United States. Why is that? Because we get the best price from the United States.

There was a great article in an Alberta oil magazine, which might be called "Alberta oil", on why California was the place we should be selling our oil. That is where the refineries are built for our type of oil. It is where refineries are getting short of oil from other sources such as Mexico, Alaska and California. We would get a very good price there compared with any price we might get in Asia.

We only have to look at the price Mexico gets for its oil. It is the same heavy, somewhat dirty oil we have, and it sells its oil at a discount because people around the world, the markets, do not really want that kind of oil. Therefore, it is sold to California.

We have to regard that argument as somewhat specious and realize that selling oil to the United States is not a bad thing. We are required to sell oil to the United States through our NAFTA agreement and the proportionality clause. That is something which should be taken away from this discussion.

• (1935)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, who is also from British Columbia, for his work within our party as the natural resources critic. We already have a pipeline to tidewater, and 99% of the exports from the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline go to California. I have yet to see credible evidence of all these buyers who are lining up to buy our oil when it is all going to California at this moment. I do not think a threefold increase is going to change that.

Climate change is arguably the issue of the 21st century. How we react to it, how we chart a course is going to define how life on this earth is going to follow through. We can either be reactive and have the force changed upon us or we can chart a course forward that is bold and visionary. I have yet to see a credible argument from the government side or from the Conservatives on how building this pipeline and its ensuing emission increases is going to help us meet our goal.

Ultimately, what this argument is about is the production of energy. I would like to hear what we can do to help the workers in Alberta take advantage of where the 21st century economy is going to be, use those skills like pipefitting, welding and heavy duty construction, and ensure they are well prepared for where Canada needs to be in the latter half of the 21st century.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Mr. Speaker, again, I would like to mention something I heard at the G20 energy meetings in Argentina from the U.K. minister who pointed out, in three great points, what the U.K. had been doing to make this transition.

The first one was around legislated targets, legislated climate action targets. The Liberals have chosen targets that are the same as the Conservatives. We think they are inadequate and they will not even meet them because they did not legislate those targets.

The second one was putting money where its mouth was and really making bold investments in the new energy technology. We just spent \$4.5 billion buying a pipeline. We could have spent \$4.5 billion in clean energy. We could have put \$2 billion into electric vehicle infrastructure and in incentives across the country to change the way we would do transportation and invest in building retrofits. However, we chose not to. All of those would create great jobs.

I get lobbied all the time by the Canadian Home Builders Association, saying it could have great high-paying jobs if building retrofits were brought back.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak this evening. I will be speaking in English so please forgive me if I make a few mistakes.

• (1940)

[*English*]

The great philosopher Yogi Berra once said, "It's like déjà vu all over again." He could have been talking about this debate, because it seems we are just going around in circles here, with many of us saying the same thing in different ways.

Our government has already endorsed the House committee's report on the future of Canada's oil and gas sector. Why? It is because the committee was right when it concluded that the future of the industry is tied to innovation, sustainable solutions and new economic opportunities. Who would disagree with that?

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However, the critics in the House say, “Yes, but what about the upstream greenhouse gas emissions? Why are we including them in the review of oil and gas projects? What about the uncertainty facing the industry with respect to environmental assessments? What about recognizing that Canada has a world-leading regulatory regime and an internationally renowned track record? What about the United States' transformation from being our main customer to our biggest competitor?”

On each count we say, that is what we have been addressing over the course of our mandate. We have been addressing existing problems and tackling the challenges that continue to emerge. One key way we have been doing that is by bringing forward legislation, Bill C-69, to make environmental assessments and regulatory reviews timelier, more transparent and more predictable. We get it. Investment certainty is critical to the energy sector's future, and Bill C-69 would provide that, with better rules for a better Canada.

However, again, the critics argue, “Yes, but why are you singling out the oil and gas industry by including upstream greenhouse gas emissions for pipeline projects?” We are not. It is just the opposite. Everything we have been doing, from Bill C-69 to the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change, is aimed at strengthening Canada's economy and creating jobs for the low-carbon future. That includes our oil and gas industry and all the other resource sectors that are the backbone of the Canadian economy.

Here is a fact that is not widely known. Natural resources account for 47% of Canada's merchandise exports. That is almost half our total merchandise exports. There is no getting around it. Our natural resource industries are not just the historic foundation of our economy, they are helping to drive our future prosperity, and in a world increasingly looking for sustainably produced products, Canada is unmatched. We have a huge natural advantage, and our government is determined to build on that competitive edge by making sure that Canada can take on the world in this clean-growth century and win.

However, again, the critics argue, “That is all well and good, but you have to realize that our oil and gas industry is now competing with the United States. You have to do something about that.” Again, we say that they are right, and we are doing something about it. It is right there in the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Natural Resources. The Prime Minister asked the minister to identify opportunities to support workers and businesses in the natural resource sectors that are seeking to export their goods to global markets.

The Trans Mountain expansion project is part of that, part of our plan to diversify markets, improve environmental safety and create thousands of good middle-class jobs, including jobs in indigenous communities. That is why the Minister of Natural Resources just announced the first step in our efforts to make sure that any expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline proceeds in the right way. When 99% of Canada's oil exports are destined for the United States, it just makes sense for us to seek other buyers for our resources. The problem is that there was not a single pipeline built to tidewater in the decade before we formed government. We have to address that, and we are.

Before anyone watching thinks we are doing all of this alone, let me make this clear. Canada's oil and gas industry is working hard investing in innovation, improving its environmental performance, building new partnerships and creating new opportunities. The oil sands are a great example. They are one huge innovation project. Nobody figured out how to get oil out of sand until Canadians created the technology, and that ingenuity continues today through Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance. It is a partnership of Canada's thirteen largest producers, all of them working together to ensure the industry's sensible growth and to accelerate its environmental performance. To date, those 13 companies have invested more than \$1.3 billion to develop more than a thousand distinct new technologies and innovations, such as using the latest in artificial intelligence to pinpoint where to inject steam, and how much, to maximize the return of oil, or developing technology that could reduce CO₂ emissions from the steam generation process to almost zero within five years.

Our government is working with them, supporting their efforts through our CanmetEnergy lab in Devon, Alberta, through our oil and gas clean-tech program and through our clean energy innovation program. We do that because our job is to make sure that Canada is developing its resources in the most environmentally responsible ways possible and using them in the most sustainable ways possible. That is exactly what we are doing. We are investing, for example, in the latest carbon capture technologies and are supporting centres of excellence in Alberta and B.C. and coming up with innovative ways to turn carbon dioxide into commercial products, everything from concrete and plastic to fish food and even toothpaste. Members may have recently read about the promising pilot project just north of Vancouver, where they are actually grabbing carbon dioxide out of the air and turning it into a replacement for gasoline.

The bottom line is that the low-carbon economy is not just the challenge of our generation, it is the opportunity of a lifetime. We are seizing this opportunity and making Canada a global leader.

• (1945)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to comment briefly on one of the recommendations of this report. I would like to bring this back to the report, because that is what we are talking about here. Recommendation number four is that:

the Government of Canada address the broader issue of public trust in the energy sector, by fostering more transparency and public engagement in resource development decisions, and recognizing Canada's strong environmental regulations and the work of the national regulators.

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After this report was written, in the spring of 2016, the government, when it was assessing the Trans Mountain expansion project, sent out a ministerial panel on a whirlwind tour through British Columbia. There was very little lead time to let people know where the panel was going to be and when. The members did not write anything down at all at these meetings. There was no record kept of what was said. However, at the end of the day, the minister and the panel put out a report, and one of the questions it asked was just that, on climate action. The report said that the government must answer this question before making its decision on the Trans Mountain expansion: how does the government square building this pipeline and expanding oil sands production in Canada with our Paris commitments to lower our carbon emissions across Canada?

All the experts across this country would say that we are not going to meet those inadequate targets the way things are, let alone if production expands. I just wondered if the member could comment on that.

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight. For my constituents from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles watching me this evening, I can say that currently 99% of the oil and gas that we produce goes to the United States and they buy our products at a discount. We absolutely must open other markets and that will happen by doubling the capacity of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

My colleague said that we have to be innovative. We are finding innovative ways to make oil sands development even greener. We are working with 13 companies that are the largest producers. We will get there because the economy and the environment go hand in hand.

[*English*]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Liberals always have to suggest that no pipelines were built. However, right in the report, in section 3, it talks about export capacity. It talks about the number of proposed pipelines from the Alberta oil sands to export markets that have sought approval in the past years. Witnesses indicated Line 9 and the initial Keystone pipeline. These went through. A number were built over the last 10 years. I doubt if my saying so is going to change the talking points for the rest of the evening.

One pipeline I would like to talk about is the Kinder Morgan pipeline and the fact that both the member and I are now shareholders in that pipeline. It was purchased for \$4.5 billion. Kinder Morgan took the extra \$2 billion, or whatever it was, and is now going to be building pipelines in Texas that are going to be in competition with us. It will get its oil to markets around the world, and we cannot get our oil to markets around the world.

Does the member feel that this investment was that good a deal?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He and I worked together at the Standing Committee on International Trade, where we met with a number of stakeholders from Alberta and elsewhere. It was always a pleasure to work together.

With respect to the member's remarks, I will again refer to the Prime Minister's mandate letter about exploring other markets, which will help workers and all of the businesses in the natural resources sector. Everything must be done in consideration of the fact that the environment and economic development go together. That is very important. Canada needs to develop other markets.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I like to point out often when we are discussing energy projects is the fact that when the Liberal government came to power, there were several major energy projects on the table. Energy east was on the table. We had northern gateway on the table. We had Trans Mountain and Petronas LNG. We had a big Shell heavy oil project on the Peace River.

All of these projects were sitting on the docket waiting for approval, or in some cases, had been approved. Since the Liberal government has come to power, all these projects, except for the Trans Mountain project, have been abandoned.

I wonder what the member opposite has to say about the fact that her government continues to say that Trans Mountain is at the top of its list, but the list has nothing else left. The list has only one project.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, it is kind of tempting to point out that the previous government was in power for 10 years but did not build a single one. It did not develop other markets. We are developing one. It is important to open up other sectors and get better prices for our natural resources so we can create middle-class jobs. As I said, the economy and the environment go hand in hand.

● (1955)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I became an MP, I was a municipal councillor and chaired an environmental advisory committee for six years. In Saint-Hyacinthe, we gave serious consideration to the possibility of allowing shale gas development on our land. I realized then that the people I represented were very concerned about the environment, and the same is true in my role as member of Parliament. My constituents believe that we must look at renewable energy if we want to open new markets.

In Saint-Hyacinthe we decided on biomethanation, which involves turning organic matter into biogas. We are talking about new markets, but the pipeline will transport this resource only to California. There are no other buyers. This is what my colleagues from British Columbia told me.

Here is what I do not understand. We do not hear enough about transitioning to renewable energy in our talks on new markets. Gas and oil are not renewable. These resources will run out in several decades. We need to start preparing now.

I do not understand why we are talking about new markets, but we do not hear more about renewable energy. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question.

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Indeed, we must invest in research and development. Earlier, I mentioned an innovation alliance that is working on almost completely eliminating the CO₂ emissions produced by oil and gas development in Alberta.

My colleague comes from Quebec, like me, and every Quebecker remembers what happened in Lac-Mégantic. We must find safe ways to transport our natural resources and open new markets, and now is the time to do it. We must also continue to invest in research and development to find green energy solutions, but for the time being, we need these resources.

[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to give a brief background as to how Bill C-69 would make environmental assessment more transparent? That is where everyone's questions are coming from and everyone worries about these things. Could she give a little highlight on that?

[Translation]

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

Bill C-69 will make environmental and energy rules more transparent. This will allow us to make projections. We will accomplish all of this, and this bill will allow us to go further.

I will repeat, because I want my colleagues opposite to understand. The environment and the economy go hand in hand. We must create jobs for the middle class. By working with first nations in Alberta, we will be able to keep the economy going.

[English]

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Red Deer—Mountain View.

I rise in the House to speak to the natural resources committee's report on the future of Canada's oil and gas sector.

Oil and gas is very important to my riding of Yellowhead, a large region west of Edmonton that goes into the Rocky Mountains. Within my riding, there have been many discussions and comments regarding the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline, because it is of great importance to us. Most people do not realize that over one-third of the Trans Mountain pipeline, more than 300 kilometres of pipe, runs through the heart of Yellowhead. It plays a significant role in the economy of our region.

The constituents in my riding and Alberta rarely complain. We are hard-working people, and we have a diversified economy throughout the province. Beside oil and gas, Yellowhead has coal mining, agriculture, forestry and tourism. As I said, people do not complain much, and we are hard-working people, but we saw a lot of large protests dealing with the carbon tax, and I have heard from many constituents who have concerns about recent things that are happening with the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Just on the outskirts of my town of Edson, we have a massive area covered with pipe that is waiting to go into the ground. I know that I cannot use props here, but I would like my colleagues to imagine taking all of the property from the green lawn in front of the Supreme Court and justice department buildings to the Confederation building, the West Block, the building we are in, and the East

Block all the way over to the Chateau Laurier, and imagine all of that land stacked with 24-inch pipe, four high. That is what we have on the outskirts of Edson. There are thousands of kilometres of pipe just waiting to be put into the ground. Then imagine on the side a line of picker trucks just sitting there waiting to load the pipe to take it to its destination. All of this has been sitting for quite a while corroding, wasting money, space and jobs.

Members can also imagine that when an announcement was made this summer when 290 kilometres of preliminary work was beginning, with the ground being flagged and cleared in preparation to lay pipeline, that people in my community celebrated. They had tailgate parties and barbecues. They were so happy to see themselves going back to work. People were excited to move into the area, buy new homes or vehicles and finally get back to a good, solid work base. Then we were absolutely devastated to learn that the Federal Court of Appeal had overturned the federal government's approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, including because the Liberals had failed to engage in meaningful consultations with first nations. After all the rule changes the Liberals had made and everything else, they had failed.

I heard from realtors who lost house sales and an automobile dealership who lost vehicle sales. Investment in the region immediately halted. Oil and gas development in Yellowhead is important, and I cannot stress enough the significant impact that the Liberal government's failure has had on our region.

Why have the Liberals failed? I think this report defines a pretty good outline as to why.

In February 2016, the Standing Committee on Natural Resources undertook a study on the future of Canada's oil and gas, mining and nuclear sectors. Since the Liberal government dominates committees, the resulting report failed to adequately represent the testimony presented by the witnesses unless it favoured the government's strategies or ideas. In other words, the government cherry-picked the information that would back up its own agenda instead of representing the full testimony of witnesses.

The Liberals refused to realize the reality of the situation we are facing. For example, the report as presented included testimony in favour of the carbon tax, but failed to provide the testimony that spoke about the adverse effects a carbon tax would have on industry and consumers across Canada.

● (2000)

One witness stated:

...unless it's aligned with trading partners, the price of carbon can cause a lack of competitiveness. This should be of concern to people concerned about the climate as well as people concerned about the economy, because if you're simply moving business to other jurisdictions, you're not actually reducing overall carbon emissions.

The ideal would be carbon pricing that's North American or even worldwide, which would prevent those kinds of....

We need everybody to buy into the scheme if we are doing it or not encourage anybody because people will just buy the oil and gas in third world countries, which are clearly a lot worse than we are here in Alberta or Canada.

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Recommendation 5 of the report completely disregards this reality and encourages the carbon tax program in Canada, which will make us uncompetitive and continue to chase investment out of Canada.

By the way, under the Liberal government, foreign investment has plunged to the lowest it has been in eight years. Other witnesses' testimony conveniently left out of the report stated, "Canada contributes less than 2% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions." If we refer to China, it is about 28% and the United States is about 15% of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Liberal government's narrative against Canada's natural resource development has been predicated on the assumption that the current regulatory framework is broken and it needs to be changed to restore public confidence and the trust of Canadians, yet the government refuses to recognize that we contribute less than 2% of global emissions and that Canada's standards are the best in the world. That is not just a talking point. That is backed up by reports from many of the witnesses that gave testimony which was left out of the report.

As one witness stated, "Canada also has world-leading environmental regulations. Of the top oil reserve holders, only Canada is covered by world-class, stringent environmental regulations and oversight."

Companies have worked under our environment framework for years with success. As stated by another witness:

...over the past 10 years, under NEB auspices, several pipelines have been built. Certainly the Line 9 pipeline was approved under the NEB process. The Access pipeline and the initial Keystone pipeline were built. There is a list of pipelines that went through the regulatory process under the NEB, that went through consultation, that went through environmental review, and that were built.

My point is that we had a strong process in place that was reliable, effective, and held the trust of Canadians, so why is investment declining? It is declining because the Liberal government has created regulatory uncertainty in its new assessment process for natural resources infrastructure projects.

For comparison, the original Trans Mountain pipeline was proposed in March 1951. Construction began in February 1952 and it was flowing oil in 1953. That is less than a year to move through that process. In 2004, Kinder Morgan began the process to add a second pipeline running parallel to the first. In 2008, the project was approved and completed. That is only four years to move through the process. Then in 2013, Kinder Morgan began the application process for the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and now, five years later, we are back to the consultation phase, thanks to the Liberals' mismanagement of the energy file.

Why would other companies want to invest in a country where it takes five-plus years to go through the process, and even then there is no guarantee that the pipeline will be built?

It is unfortunate that the Liberals have cancelled and held up Canadian pipelines. Stopping pipelines in Canada does not speed up the development of alternatives to oil and it does not slow down the growing oil demand in emerging economies.

As stated by another witness in the study, "Transportation infrastructure is required to meet these growing energy needs, and pipelines remain the safest and most efficient and the lowest

greenhouse gas-intensive way of moving energy over long distances."

• (2005)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague, who is my neighbour in Yellowhead, about the other impacts of our lack of pipeline access, namely, the knock-on impacts on other industries. For example, my family are grain farmers and a lot of grain farmers in my riding have been unable to move product because CN and CP are moving so much crude by rail that our other industries are really suffering.

I would also ask my colleague about when we look over a list of all the different oil prices across the world, it is only Canadian oil, western Canada select oil, which is half the price of all the other oil products in the world. How much money is Canada leaving on the table? I hope he can shed some light on that.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. friend, my neighbour to the east, I would like to deal with the first part of his question, regarding railways.

The CN and CP rails go through my riding of Yellowhead and through his riding of Sturgeon River—Parkland. Both of these rails come from the west coast and go all the way through to eastern Canada. They are our major railroad hubs in Canada. They haul coal from the coal mines to our west. They haul grain from our region. They haul gravel from the sides of the mountains. They haul timber products from the forest companies. They haul newsprint.

I am constantly getting calls from different companies throughout our area that they are not getting trains from the railroad companies because the railroad companies are tied up moving crude oil in railcars. We cannot get vital products to the west coast of Canada and to eastern Canada, products going from west to east, because the tracks are tied up by oil cars. Coming through, it is a single-lane track and it doubles in my area. Constantly, we are seeing railroad crossings blocked anywhere from 15 minutes to two to three hours with trains waiting for other trains to go by just because of the heavy traffic use.

I cannot quite remember what the second part of the question was but I have run out of time anyway.

• (2010)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the very end of his speech, the member touched on the fact that the Trans Mountain pipeline was first built in the early 1950s, before I was even born.

One thing I have heard is that the route that was chosen preferentially went through Indian reserves because it was easy to get permission. In fact, first nations people in this country did not even get the vote until 1960.

Routine Proceedings

I am just wondering if the member would comment on that, on how the world has changed in the intervening years that both he and I have been alive, and how different the world is now. Perhaps he could comment on why people in Canada demand that we look at the impacts these projects have on the environment, look to the future for our grandchildren and their grandchildren, and respect the rights of indigenous peoples. It has been shown in case after case before the Supreme Court that they have these rights and that we have to respect them. That is the world today. It is not the world of 1951 or 1953.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Mr. Speaker, when we built this particular pipeline that was proposed in 1951, constructed in 1952, and running in 1953, there was consultation with the aboriginal groups, the Treaty Six group from Alberta. I know there was consultation throughout Alberta. Maybe there was not as much as we do today, because we know a lot more today than we did in 1951.

However, in 1951, Canada had a national energy board or regulatory board. The Province of Alberta also had one. It went through the standards that were applicable for those days and met those standards. Today we have different standards. Maybe 20 years from today we will have different standards than what we have today.

The company building the pipeline in those days met the guidelines of the government of the day, provincially and federally, and they met with aboriginal people, because I have spoken to elders on numerous occasions and they remember the discussions.

Mr. Earl Dreesen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak this evening and to add my voice in support of Canada's oil and gas sector.

The report that we are discussing covered economic drivers, such as oil and gas prices, production costs, export capacity, future demand, investment and competition. The arguments that various witnesses presented dealt with the ways in which we could foster investment and trade opportunities, promote a new era of indigenous engagement and public trust, deal with a price on carbon, invest in technological innovation and establish the right policy framework. The concern that I have about this report, as was agreed upon by the majority on committee, was that on so many fronts, the conclusions did not address the true realities that exist in the industry today.

The unanimous motion to undertake the study on the future of Canada's oil and gas sector, with a focus on innovation, sustainable solutions and economic opportunities, presented an excellent forum to showcase to the world our first-class oil and gas sector. As I read through the report, what became obvious was that it seemed to be an apology piece for a natural resource sector rather than a chance to explain why Canada's resource development should be encouraged and promoted throughout the world.

At the time of the project, energy east, as well as Kinder Morgan, were being recognized as the final pipeline opportunities to have oil exports added to the four major pipelines that the Conservative government had previously overseen. These pipelines have become even more significant after the arbitrary cancellation of the previously approved northern gateway project.

The report also looked at pricing and production costs, which, of course, are indeed considerations that any company must keep in

mind when determining where their investment dollars would go. It is too simplistic to say that investors are shying away from Alberta because of those economic factors, unless, of course, one factors in the uncertainty caused by the ever-burdensome red tape for the industry; the assault on all Canadian small businesses, particularly those that supply the oil and gas sector; a bizarre approach to international trade, which makes investors nervous; and the made-in-Canada disaster program that forces a non-competitive carbon tax on all Canadians that has no equal with our global competitors. The Liberal mistruths about Conservative pipeline management were at least exposed during the study, but once that was on the table, the report reverted back to an anti-oil spin to justify the foot-dragging that has been the hallmark of the Liberal government.

There was an acknowledgement that we needed to get moving on LNG pipeline projects, but the reality is that the same global investors that are agitating against our oil pipelines will use their network to stop LNG projects as well. After all, if Canadian resources produced under the strongest environmental standards in the world could ever get to market, who would need or want products from other countries?

In the report, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce warned that certain environmental policies, namely, carbon pricing, could undermine Canada's competitiveness unless it is aligned with trading partners. Its conclusion was that a price on carbon would cause a lack of competitiveness. There was an expression of concern regarding the greenhouse gas emissions levels of oil sands operations and how that might hinder Canada's ability to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions as addressed in the report. The irony associated with that discussion has always been the degree to which those calculations and the actual contribution to overall global emissions are portrayed.

In a November 27, 2014, Financial Post report, an energy adviser to some of the world's most developed economies, Fatih Birol, presented his concerns not only about the security of world energy sources but also the impact of fossil fuels on the climate.

● (2015)

What he said was that of all the issues that exist, he would never spend any time worrying about the level of carbon emissions from Canada's oil sands. He was frank about saying that oil sands CO₂ emission from the oil sands is extremely low.

Routine Proceedings

When speaking of the expected global requirement, Mr. Birol, chief economist of the Paris-based International Energy Agency, said that the IEA forecasts that in the next 25 years oil sands production in Canada will increase by more than three million barrels per day, “but the emissions of this additional production is equal to only 23 hours of emissions of China—not even one day.” Now, Mr. Birol also did not think a carbon tax was a particularly useful way of managing emissions. However, the sad part is that this carbon pricing scheme remains a major talking point in the report and is punishing one of our most important drivers of Canada's economy.

One cannot help but comment on the frustration industry has had with respect to the pipeline fiasco. The Prime Minister falsely claimed that the energy east project had been cancelled because of market and volume considerations. The major nail in the coffin was the government's intrusion into the pipeline approval process. It would seem as though the Liberals have used the cover of this report as a rationale to launch its disastrous Bill C-69.

In a recent Bloomberg report, former TransCanada CEO Hal Kvisle stated that in assessing the environmental impact in Canada's energy regulations this was “an absolutely devastating piece of legislation.” Mr. Kvisle also said that he did not think any competent pipeline company would submit an application if Bill C-69 came into force.

The key point is that any government needs to review projects early on and quickly send a signal to both the community and the pipeline proponent as to whether or not the Government of Canada supports the project. If pipeline companies are worried about Canadian projects going forward, then one should not be surprised that other investors around the world are no longer looking to Canada as a reliable investment. The sad part of this is that it does not mean oil and gas will not be sold around the world. It will be supplied from countries that truly have much less concern about the environment than we do. This carbon “slippage”, as it is called, will not help the global environment but it will continue to hamstring our economy.

The dissenting opinion presented by Conservative committee members addressed many of the points I have spoken about this evening, so let me put into the record the recommendations we presented.

● (2020)

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada to establish and make publically available strict, clear criteria and a fixed timeline for their assessment and consultation processes for major projects. The timely approval of new energy infrastructure projects would not only reduce Canada's reliance on foreign oil, but would also allow responsible, world-renowned and respected Canadian oil and gas to reach broader international markets.

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada to show confidence in our national regulators by allowing them to make evidence-based decisions independent of government politicization and unnecessary, duplicative interim principles.

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada to publicly and unequivocally support strategic energy infrastructure approved by the national regulators after extensive and thorough evidence-based processes to ensure Canada's competitiveness in the global energy market.

We strongly encourage the Government of Canada to recognize and to promote Canada's world-leading regulatory framework and environmental standards and stewardship by instilling rather than eroding public confidence in our national regulators and Canada's energy developers.

We strongly encourage the government not to impose any additional tax or regulation on the oil and gas sector or the Canadian consumer that our continental

trading partners and competitors do not have. This includes measuring the upstream greenhouse emissions from pipelines, as laid out in the five interim principles, given pipelines do not contribute to these emissions in any material way and upstream emissions fall under provincial jurisdiction. Any national carbon pricing initiatives should undergo a thorough economic assessment to ensure balance between economic growth and environmental stewardship and responsibility.

● (2025)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend and I have the privilege of representing the third largest city in Alberta, the city of Red Deer and the surrounding rural areas, otherwise affectionately known as “central Alberta”. It is the hub in Alberta of oil and gas support services, including pipeline companies and rig companies that drill precision wells right there. There is an EVRAZ plant there making steel tubing for the industry, the Blindman Industrial Park and the Edgar Industrial Park. Everything is all set up there to be a service sector for the oil and gas industry.

The policies that have been implemented since the election in 2015 have caused such a chill in the investment environment in the oil and gas sector that employment has plummeted in central Alberta to levels we have not seen since Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the prime minister of Canada.

Could my colleague validate what I have been saying but has been falling on deaf ears, that the energy policies of the government are every bit as bad as the former national energy program?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to work with my colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe. I know how committed he is to making sure that those involved in the oil and gas industry in central Alberta have an opportunity to get back to work and do the things they are experts at.

To one of the points the member mentioned, I had an opportunity when I was on the international trade committee to speak to some investors in Singapore and Malaysia. They knew of investment opportunities in Canada and Alberta, but had looked at what was taking place in the country at the time, just a year or so ago, and said they could not tell their investors this was where they should be putting their dollars. That is the major concern we have.

We are at the stage where people say that they can put their money into Kazakhstan or other areas, because there is no certainty with any kind of a project here. That is the critical part. That is what the people in our municipalities are saying. That is why they are so frustrated, because they have work to do, as well as our provincial counterparts, to try to get projects up and running and allow things to happen. It is extremely frustrating to know that because of the actions taken in the last few years, we have lost the competitive advantage that we were so proud of as Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague keeps referring to investment uncertainty in Canada when it comes to natural resources, especially the oil sector. If there is that much uncertainty, why has offshore oil in Newfoundland and Labrador seen unprecedented bids by companies that have never before been involved in exploration there, but are now investing millions and millions of dollars in bidding on parcels of land to do exploration. How does he square that circle?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Mr. Speaker, basically the member should be aware that he does not have to run a pipeline through British Columbia to get oil and gas to tidewater. The other aspect is that we do have refining opportunities in the Maritimes. This is a great opportunity for them. They do not see us being handcuffed in the same manner.

It does not seem that many people are giving western Canada much of a break, but I can assure the member that the next time I talk to some investors, I would make sure that those people in the Maritimes have an opportunity to advance and supply the world with their oil.

● (2030)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spent a number of years on the natural resources committee in the previous parliament and parliaments before that. I will go back to a 2014 report published by this committee that talked about the cross-Canada benefits of the oil and gas sectors and contrast that with the 2016 report issued by the Liberal-dominated committee.

What have we seen since 2015? The Financial Post states that “The shrinking investment underscores how the energy slump is lingering in a Canadian economy that last year also began to face the additional headwind of growing U.S. protectionism,” and that foreign direct investment in Canada is plummeting to its lowest level in eight years. This is from the Financial Post, published here in Canada. Most of that foreign direct investment is fleeing the energy sector. Are a couple of projects here and there going ahead? Yes. However, I note that over \$90 billion worth in projects has fled the capital market in Alberta and western Canada alone.

Why is this so important? When Alberta's economy is strong, Canada's economy is strong. Right now Alberta is suffering under the misguided policies of an NDP premier who has just recently understood, after reality collided with ideology, the anti-energy sentiment the NDP usually fosters in the House. The federal and provincial NDP are actually exactly the same party, such that members of one are members of the other. That said, this collision of reality and ideology had led the premier of Alberta to walk away from the Prime Minister's climate change plan. An NDP premier who was in lockstep with the carbon tax and the entire plan the current government has in place is walking away.

As a matter of fact, the people of Ontario recently voted largely in favour of the ideas put forward by the now-premier Doug Ford, who campaigned against the carbon tax. The Liberals would say that this is because Canadians do not understand the carbon tax. However, Doug Ford won in Ontario because Canadians do understand the carbon tax. They understand exactly what it is going to cost them and their families. They understand what it is going to cost with respect to everything in their lives.

Why is this so? If we look at any of the reports released by the natural resources committee, a number of expert witnesses therein have noted that oil and gas is as important in our daily lives as everything that we may take for granted, such as food and shelter. Members today walk to the House of Commons without knowing the number of underground gas, oil and energy pipelines they may have walked over. Every one of the 338 members of Parliament came here on a plane or train, or in an automobile. How would they have gotten here otherwise, unless they were riding wooden bicycles whittled with a bone knife? They are using fossil fuels. Everything good in our lives and that sets our economy apart from economies that struggle rests on our ability to use fossil fuels in our lives for the cause of good.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, is there something funny about what I am saying? I do not know why this is so funny. People in my province are desperate. They are looking for jobs and opportunities. We have so many problems right now in central Alberta as a result of the current energy policies, which I guess is a source of humour to my colleagues across the way, one of whom is from Newfoundland and ought to understand the value of the energy sector. However, I will not digress.

Fossil fuels are so ingrained in every aspect of our lives, and when we say that a carbon tax is a tax on everything, it is absolutely true. Take a look around this room. Nothing in this room could be brought to us today without the use of fossil fuels. The wood would have to be harvested by fossil-fuel-powered equipment in the forestry sector. It would be cut in a sawmill and then refined and finished in a shop that relied heavily on electricity or other fossil fuels. The stone would not be quarried by hand. This would be done by heavy equipment. The food on the table out there came from a farm or was shipped here from another country. I am pretty sure that the pineapple on the plate in the government's lobby did not come from Newfoundland and Labrador or Alberta. It likely came from Hawaii.

● (2035)

How did it get here? It got here on an airplane. It was not a solar-powered one. It got here on an airplane or a ship that was powered by fossil fuels. Everything we have, the medical advancements and all the technology we have, is because we have cheap, reliable, affordable fossil fuels. It is absolutely critical that we do not get disconnected from that.

Should we be as energy efficient as possible? Absolutely. If the government was proposing energy efficient ideas, I would support them on a one-off basis if they had merit and were sustainable.

Routine Proceedings

I do not know why in this country we have to hate oil and gas in order to like solar power and wind power and all these other things. Energy, and the taxes and the benefits it provides to our economy, pays for schools, infrastructure, health care and medicine. If our economy was doing so well, it would not be nearly impossible to balance a budget. However, the government seems to be either ideologically opposed to, or is actually misleading Canadians about, the economic success it has. It should be very easy to balance a budget in a good economy.

Notwithstanding that, let us have a short history lesson, because the government likes to basically blame everyone before it for everything it is failing at right now.

The Prime Minister inherited a balanced budget and three tidewater applications from one mandate of a Conservative government that had a majority in this House. I chaired the subcommittee on finance for Bill C-38. The industry had asked us to streamline and harmonize all the environmental regulations, which resulted in the pipeline applications the government across the way has botched so badly. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that a balanced budget is gone until 2045, 2050, or 2055.

We had three tidewater pipeline projects in the hopper. We did not inherit any of those from a previous Liberal government. None of those were applied for during the five years we were a minority parliament, because, of course, the Liberal Party, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois would block basically any legislative attempts we had in the House to harmonize or streamline the regulatory process and bring certainty so that the investment sector would actually want to do this. We had four and a half years. Bill C-38 was passed, and the three pipelines were applied for.

The government of the day inherited three tidewater pipeline applications. Each one of them, if we look at the total kilometres, would add up to about 7,000 kilometres of tidewater pipelines. The Prime Minister of today has presided over the demise of energy east, which was over 4,000 kilometres of pipeline to tidewater, and northern gateway, which was 1,100 kilometres of pipeline to tidewater. Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain is hanging on by a thread. It is not because Kinder Morgan wants to build it. It would like to flee this marketplace as well. Therefore, the government of the day now has to use taxpayer dollars to rescue the only project, for political reasons. It has nothing to do with science. It has nothing to do with technology or the capabilities and competencies of the energy sector. The energy sector knows how to build pipelines. It is the only one that actually does. I have a lot more faith in Kinder Morgan building the pipeline than the Government of Canada building the pipeline, because it knows how to do it. It has been doing it for 60 or 70 years through British Columbia without major incident.

Here is where we are today. We are sitting at a crossroads in this country, where we have the third-largest reserves of oil in the world and we cannot get our pipelines to tidewater. Some members over there are saying that the oil that goes through the Kinder Morgan pipeline already ends up in the United States. That is actually quite true. All the gas exported from Canada, 100%, goes to the United States. According to this report, 97% of the oil in the export market from Canada goes to the United States. That is because Vancouver is a shallow port, and large tankers will not come in to the port, which

is why northern gateway was so important. It went to a deepwater port a little further north on the coast of British Columbia, where a supertanker or any large vessel could actually go in and fill up the ship. That was the one that was going to diversify the market. Saudi, Nigerian and Venezuelan oil comes in by the boatload along the Atlantic coast, which I guess does not deserve the same protection with a tanker ban as the west coast.

● (2040)

Why? Why would our friends in Newfoundland and Labrador and Atlantic Canada not want to use oil that was sourced in Canada?

I have been here for a long time. I noticed who was on the plane going back and forth to Alberta when times were good, when there was certainty in the industry. It was people from Quebec. The planes that stopped in Ottawa to pick me up and take me back to Alberta came from Halifax, came from St. John's, Newfoundland. They were full of people wearing Shell Albian jackets, Pearl oil sands project jackets, Firebag project jackets. These people were providing for their families. They could have just stayed home if they wanted to and worked at thousands of jobs that would have been created at the other end of the pipeline.

It is not just the pipeline. It is not just the jobs in the creation of the pipeline. It is jobs at each end. It is jobs in Alberta, Saskatchewan, northern B.C. It is jobs for western Canadians. It is jobs in Atlantic Canada, processing, refining, upgrading, shipping and exporting Canadian products rather than watching the ships roll in from kingdoms like Saudi Arabia. The current Liberal government does not even have a relationship with Saudi Arabia anymore, even though we are still buying its oil, as well as oil from other despots and dictators who do not have anywhere close to the same environmental and human rights standards that Canada has.

The NDP, the Bloc, the Green Party and the Liberals all want to argue about how important environmental regulations are, and I would agree. I am an outdoorsman. I want clean water. I want clean air. I want clean land. I want to fish in a clean river. I want to hunt for moose where it is nice and I can trust that there is no environmental pollution.

I live in Alberta. I am not worried about any of those things. The air that I breathe is clean. The rivers that flow through my community are clear and blue. The land and resources in Alberta are wonderful.

I do not understand. Who are we comparing ourselves to when it comes to our environmental regulations? What is the problem? Could somebody point out to me the last major oil spill that we were not able to handle or clean up? Where is the problem, or is it actually a problem?

It is all about money. It is not about the environment. The carbon tax is not about the environment either. It is just about money. It is all a wealth transfer. It is all about people who want to be part of the process because they want the money, and that is fine. Let us just call it what it is.

Routine Proceedings

Here is where we are. We are at the crossroads right now. We cannot say that Canada is a laggard when it comes to environmental stewardship or human rights, because no other oil-producing and exporting country in the world is better than we are. We are probably on par with Norway and the United States. There might be a few pluses and minuses in a few categories but we are on par with those guys. We are well ahead of Saudi Arabia.

The Liberal government cannot even keep our borders secure. There is no line-up of people from Canada fleeing to Iran or Iraq, both oil-producing countries in the Middle East. Could it be because Canada actually has it right and that all of the problems that we have here are manufactured political problems?

I have been to downtown Vancouver, where I have seen people driving cars. I have been to downtown Montreal, where I have seen people driving cars. I have been to downtown Toronto, where I have seen people driving cars. Why do we want to make that more expensive? Why do we want to make the cost of shipping goods to and from these people more expensive? Why do we want to make travel for Canadians to a warm climate in the wintertime more expensive?

Energy is the lifeblood of everything that is good in this country. I will go back to that point one more time.

All of the things that we have in our life that are good right now are brought to us by the advancement of fossil fuels. Until we refined kerosene several hundred years ago, we were burning wood and coal, which was messy and dirty. We were using basically 80% to 90% of all of the crops that we grew just to feed our horses and our cows. Now 3% of the population can grow the world's food, because of fossil fuels.

Now we have opportunities to be researchers, lawyers, musicians, artists. We do not have to worry about where our next meal is coming from. We do not have to worry about subsistence living here in Canada, because we have fossil fuels.

• (2045)

Today, the leader of my party, the Conservative Party of Canada, said that after the next election, when he became the prime minister of Canada, he would exercise the powers available to the government to do nation-building projects. That does not mean we will run roughshod over everyone. It just means we cannot have these stalemates go on for ever, because it drives investment out of our economy.

Should first nations be involved? Absolutely. Should we do everything we can to ensure, from an environmental perspective, that we can mitigate almost all the risks? Of course. No one will argue about that.

Why can the government not get this pipeline built? Let us take a look.

The Northern gateway project was approved. It had 209 conditions. Enbridge was moving ahead with it. It had spent about \$1.5 billion of shareholders' money on that project to get it built. Over 30 of the 42 first nations along the route publicly supported it. Two were publicly opposed. The remaining 10 or so would not declare publicly whether they would support it or not.

Enbridge had the task then, through the National Energy Board, to go and resolve those 209 conditions set out by the board. It was on its way to do it. As a private sector company, it needed to get the buy-in from the first nations along the route. It had already been tested through our Constitution, through our courts. All of that process could be played out. The government did not need to get involved in that. That was Enbridge's job, and it was doing it.

Then the election happened and the pipeline was killed. It was a political decision, because the science and technical expertise at the National Energy Board said that pipeline was perfectly valid to go ahead. With 30 of 42 first nations publicly supporting it, or 75% of the first nations publicly supporting it along the route, I guess that was not enough. I am not sure we will ever get consensus on anything, which I think suits the Liberal Party just fine.

Anyway, the project is killed, the tanker ban is in place and there is no new investment coming for northern British Columbia at all, zero. The folks in northern British Columbia want the pipeline built. They want those jobs.

Energy east was another pipeline. One of the first things that happened after the government was elected in 2015 was it changed the regulatory review process by adding a six month and a three month process on to energy east and Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipelines, kicking the can down the road. According to the government of the day, it needed to do this because it would ensure these projects would have the social license, whatever that is, to get the pipeline built.

Then when it looked like Trans Canada was actually going to proceed and get Energy east built, the mayor of Montreal at the time, Denis Coderre, who was a former Liberal cabinet minister and member of Parliament in the House, said that he did not want the pipeline there. I did not realize that mayors of towns were responsible for telling the National Energy Board what to do, but apparently the Prime Minister of Canada today listens to them, rather than the technical experts at the National Energy Board.

It does not matter that pipelines are already going all the way through the community. People who have natural gas in their houses have a pipeline right to their houses. However, I digress.

Trans Canada was trying to get that pipeline built and what happened? The government said "It looks like we're going to have a success here. Let's put some more regulatory obstacles in by putting upstream and downstream emission standards on a pipeline". Guess what. Trans Canada shelved the project. Why would it not? Why would it expose more of its shareholders' money to that risk? Just like Enbridge had to walk away from, I am guessing, over a billion dollars worth of investment, Trans Canada did the same thing. It shelved the project.

That was two out of three gone. Now we have one pipeline left and it stands alone. All the social justice warriors, all the environmental activists and everyone could focus on this one pipeline. Guess what. All they did was get in front of the right judge and they got the ruling. The government could not even follow its own rules to build a pipeline that it had to buy from the private sector. That money is now going to projects elsewhere to compete against us. It now wants to sell this pipeline that it cannot build to a future investor. The Liberals are in charge. There is no doubt about it.

• (2050)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member said it was all about the money, and of course it always has been. That is why Saudi Arabia is building all its new electric power plants using solar instead of burning oil, because it is cheaper. It is why a lot of people want to buy electric cars, because they are cheaper to run and cheaper to fuel.

The member talked about all the jobs that would be created at the other end of the energy east pipeline. During this study when we had Irving in front of us to talk about the possibility of building refineries in New Brunswick at the end of that pipeline, the question was asked as to when that would be built. The witness said maybe in 10 years, maybe never, that it was all about the money, it is all about their investment and right now they are doing very fine, thanks, putting oil the other way.

The other thing is that in NAFTA we have a proportionality clause that requires us to send oil to the United States.

I wonder if the member could comment on those complications.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing complicated about understanding that Saudi Arabia is sunny and very warm—we might even call it a hot desert climate—in which case the peak time of use for electricity is during the day for air conditioning. Guess when the sun is shining: during the day. If my hon. colleague wants to only heat his home in Canada with the power of a solar panel on his roof, during the winter at night when the furnace cuts in, I wish him the best of luck with that.

Saudi Arabia's reality is not our reality, so the comparisons do not matter. The Saudis do not hate their own oil in order to promote solar panels. They are going to use the investments that they have from their oil to help them use solar panels. This is the conundrum that we have here in Canada. For some reason, we are self-loathing in this country about one of the wealthiest resources that we could possibly have that pays for a quality of life that is second to none in the world. It is just ridiculous.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

Adjournment Proceedings

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on April 24, I rose in the House to once again remind the government of its commitments regarding EI sickness benefits, which are currently limited to 15 weeks. Nine years have already passed since Marie-Hélène Dubé brought this to the attention of members of the House with her petition entitled “15 weeks to heal is not enough!”. I want to commend her for her courage and determination.

Just like the one million Canadians who supported this petition, I believe that 15 weeks is not nearly enough, especially for people with serious illnesses. That is why the NDP is proposing to extend the benefit period to 50 weeks. The employment insurance system as it exists today creates real injustice.

People do not choose to become ill. Can we accept the fact that we are letting some Canadians live in precarious circumstances because they are ill? Statistics show that one in two Canadians is at risk for cancer. How can this government be insensitive to the fate of half the population?

Marie-Hélène Dubé, who has had cancer three times, lost her job while fighting for her life. Hers is not an isolated case. Some people have lost everything, including their home and life savings. On top of struggling to get better, they have to cope with losing everything, but what is this government doing to support them? Nothing.

One of my constituents, Mélanie Pelletier, exhausted her 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits. Mélanie has told me how hard things are getting. She said she is no longer living, she is just surviving. Stress, anxiety and pain are the reality that Mélanie and many people like her are facing, with no support or attention from this government. Speaking for myself, I cannot remain unmoved by the plight of people like Marie-Hélène and Mélanie. I want concrete action. I want results. I want this government to show some compassion. I want this government to keep its promises and improve EI sickness benefits.

The government's figures clearly show that more than one-third of people applying for EI sickness benefits need more than 15 weeks to recover. These figures come from the ministry of families, children and social development. In 2015, the Liberal Party based its campaign on EI reform. In 2016, it promised to improve sickness benefits, but to date it has done nothing.

To make matters worse, the Minister of Social Development was there when I moved the motion asking that the issue be examined and that experts and groups representing unemployed and sick workers be called upon to make recommendations to the government. The Liberal members of the committee refused to vote on the study and dismissed out of hand the opportunity to finally move forward. Extending the benefit period to 50 weeks would give Canadians a chance to heal.

Adjournment Proceedings

Will the government finally keep its promises and accept its responsibilities or does it intend to continue to turn its back on the most fragile among us, those who are suffering, those who are asking for just a few more weeks so that they can heal?

• (2055)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her very important question about the program reform.

[*English*]

I want to thank the hon. member for her concern about this matter. I certainly understand that there are difficult and very sensitive cases among the thousands of people who receive assistance under employment insurance sickness benefits.

EI sickness benefits are an important support measure for Canadians who have to leave their job due to injury or sickness.

[*Translation*]

Employment insurance sickness benefits are an important support for Canadians who have to leave their jobs because of illness or injury.

[*English*]

EI sickness benefits provide 15 weeks of income replacement for Canadians who leave work due to short-term illness or injury. In 2016-17, almost 379,000 new sickness claims were made, with approximately \$1.6 billion being paid to beneficiaries. Sickness benefit claimants collect, on average, 10 weeks of the maximum entitlement of 15 weeks. This shows that the available coverage is sufficient in the majority of cases.

However, we are fully aware that some claimants do exhaust all 15 weeks of benefits before they are able to return to work. That said, EI sickness benefits complement a range of other support measures in the case of long-term sickness or disability, including employer and private insurance programs, Canada pension plan long-term disability benefits, as well as numerous other supports provided by provinces and territories.

[*Translation*]

I want to assure my colleague that we take this issue very seriously.

[*English*]

I want to remind the House that we have already implemented several measures to ensure the EI program is more flexible, inclusive and easier to access.

For instance, in the past few months we have created an employment insurance family caregiver benefit for adults, which provides up to 50 weeks of benefits to eligible caregivers to offer support to an adult family member who is critically ill or injured. Immediate and extended family members with critically ill children now have access to a new benefit that was only available to parents in the past. This replaces and enhances the benefits for parents with critically ill children and continues to offer a maximum of 35 weeks of benefits. In addition, medical doctors and nurse practitioners can now sign documents attesting that the child or adult is critically ill or

injured. This change also applies to compassionate care benefits for providing end-of-life care to family members.

Budget 2018 announced that the government would extend the working-while-on-claim provisions to sickness and maternity benefits. This provision came into force in August. It will allow Canadians recovering from illness or injury to have much greater flexibility to stage their return to work and also keep more of their EI benefits.

As the member can see, we have already taken real action to support Canadians. I want to assure her that will continue to do our utmost to ensure the EI program is better aligned to today's labour market realities and is responsive to the needs of Canadian workers and employees.

• (2100)

[*Translation*]

As hon. members can see, we have taken tangible measures to support Canadians. I can assure the House that we will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that the employment insurance program is better aligned with the realities of today's labour market and can meet the needs of Canadian workers and employers.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that 15 weeks is just not enough. Mélanie told me that 15 weeks barely gave her enough time to undergo testing to confirm her diagnosis. Her treatments had not even begun yet. It has gotten to the point where doctors in my riding are contacting me to say that the patients under their care have to go back to work in the middle of their treatment and that is unacceptable.

The parliamentary secretary talked about benefits that are given to others, such as family caregivers. It is ridiculous to think that the family caregivers are entitled to more weeks of benefits than the person who is sick.

If the government is serious about addressing the needs of the sick, when will it put its money where its mouth is? These people are suffering and facing losses as I said earlier. Last week, during question period, I talked about Johanne and her family, who lost everything: their home and their life savings.

What is the government waiting for to do something?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate that our government is resolved to provide support for all those who are in need to get the support they need. There has not yet been a budget with this government that has not addressed or reformed critical parts of the EI program to sustain and invest in the health and well-being of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind the House of our government's commitment to provide support to everyone who needs it in Canada.

[*English*]

That priority is reflected in our commitment to improve the employment insurance program so it responds to the needs of Canadian workers and employers.

Adjournment Proceedings

I want to reassure the hon. member that we are fully committed to ensuring the employment insurance program, including EI sickness benefits, continues to serve Canadians in an effective and timely manner. We are reviewing it as we speak.

HEALTH

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today because Canadians simply cannot wait for pharmacare. Last spring, I asked the Prime Minister in the House about the urgent need for pharmacare in the face of so many people in the country not filling their prescriptions and with the Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly stating that over \$4 billion a year would be saved by having a national pharmacare program. The Prime Minister's response was, "it is not surprising to see the NDP trying to implement something without a clear plan."

I am not sure how many studies or consultations the government needs before it takes action. I would assume that the many exhaustive studies done in this place, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report and the many Canadians who cannot afford their medications might be enough to engage the government to actually move forward and take some action. In fact, the consultation process the government has put forward is to consult on whether to do this. It is not a group that is set up on actively putting together a strategy for implementation.

Canada pays the second highest medication costs in the world. In my riding of North Island—Powell River, too many people are making terrible choices, which include choices between medication and food, or medication and heat or medication and a place to live. I often feel like I am a broken record, but I will keep speaking in this place until the government finally hears.

Seniors in my riding and across Canada are taking half of their medication to extend how long it lasts. Families are going into serious credit card debt to afford their children's medication costs. Doctors come to see me to talk about how hard it is to try to treat people who cannot afford their medication. It is more expensive to pay for a hospital stay than it is to pay for that medication.

Consultations are overdone and it seems to me that the government has this theme song of we are going to talk about it, we are going to consult about it and we are going to talk about it some more.

I really hope the government will hear really clearly from Canadians that pharmacare needs to happen now. There are too many high-risk people who are making terrible choices. I think of a constituent in my riding who recently had some severe challenges with his income. He is a senior, he is struggling every single day and has said that he just needs a little help because he cannot afford his medication. That is terrible.

I am asking the government to take some responsibility, to look at the reports that are coming out of this place, to look at the years and years of promises made that this would actually happen, that we would finally fulfill our medicare system with a pharmacare system, which every other country that has a medicare system has, and actually take action so people in our country are not going without their medication simply because they cannot afford it.

● (2105)

Mr. John Oliver (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to strengthening health care systems across the country and supporting the health of Canadians. We know Canadians are proud of their publicly funded health care system. It is based on need and not ability to pay. We also recognize almost a million Canadians have to choose between food or heat or the prescription medications they need. In many cases they do not take prescribed drugs due to the high prices. That is why our government is taking steps to make prescription drugs more affordable and accessible, but we recognize there is even more we can do.

As part of budget 2018, we have created an advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare. This council, chaired by Dr. Eric Hoskins, will build on the valuable work done by the Standing Committee on Health. The council will work closely with experts and provincial, territorial and indigenous leaders as well as exploring domestic and international models. The final report, expected by spring 2019, will recommend actions on how best to move forward together on this important issue.

As we await the findings of the council, our government will continue working collaboratively with the provinces and territories and with leading pan-Canadian health organizations to lower drug prices, provide more timely access to the new medicines Canadians need, and support appropriate prescribing. For example, our government is modernizing the way the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board works through amendments to the patented medicines regulations. These changes will better protect Canadian consumers, governments and private insurers from excessive drug prices.

Our government is also working closely with the provinces and territories through the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance to lower drug costs. By combining governments' collective bargaining power, the pan-Canadian Pharmaceutical Alliance has completed more than 170 joint brand drug negotiations and achieved price reductions on 18 generic drugs, resulting in combined savings of almost \$1.3 billion annually.

In addition, our government is working to provide Canadians with more timely access to important new medicines. Health Canada is making changes to better align its drug review process with health partners and to expand its priority review process to more effectively meet health care system needs. It is doing this while continuing to ensure that approved drugs are safe, effective and of good quality. This will include establishing new regulatory pathways for drugs and working more closely with organizations that assess the cost-effectiveness of drugs.

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Finally, our government recognizes that the overuse, underuse and misuse of prescription drugs creates risks for patients and unnecessary waste in the health care system. To address this, we will work with our partners to build evidence and promote best practices in the appropriate prescribing and use of drugs. These actions are moving Canada towards a more sustainable and responsive pharmaceuticals management system. Our government recognizes there is an opportunity to do even more.

We welcome the results of the extensive study the health committee conducted on pharmacare. The advisory council has begun an important national dialogue on how to move forward on this important topic.

• (2110)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, the main point that I think needs to be said really clearly is that Canadians simply cannot wait. I talk to people across Canada about their health challenges and the expense of their health challenges. Families have loved ones who need a certain amount of medical care or medication that is very expensive. They are having to make choices about selling their home to pay for that medication so that that loved one can live. I do not know how much more time so many Canadians can take and can wait for a report that is going to come up next year in the spring.

I appreciate that there are actions being taken but there are not enough actions for those people who are making destitute decisions, for seniors who are taking half of their medication, for doctors who

are trying to find the cheapest way to prescribe to the patients but still finding absolutely no way to give them something that is affordable. I hope that out of all this, the government will hear that Canadians cannot wait.

Mr. John Oliver: Mr. Speaker, implementing national pharmacare is not something that can be achieved overnight. It will require working closely with experts from all relevant areas, as well as with provincial, territorial, indigenous and national leaders. That is a key part of the role of the advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare led by Dr. Hoskins. We have to get the details right. While the council does its work, we are continuing to improve Canada's pharmaceuticals management system.

Unfortunately, even as public and private payers wrestle with growing costs, Canadians are not experiencing all of the benefits that this level of spending should provide. Some Canadians face real barriers to access. The Government of Canada is firmly committed to working with its partners to address these challenges and, as outlined here today, our government is taking action.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 9:12 p.m.)

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